



weekly worker



**The left and the dead end
politics of Anti-Capitalist
Initiative's liquidationism**

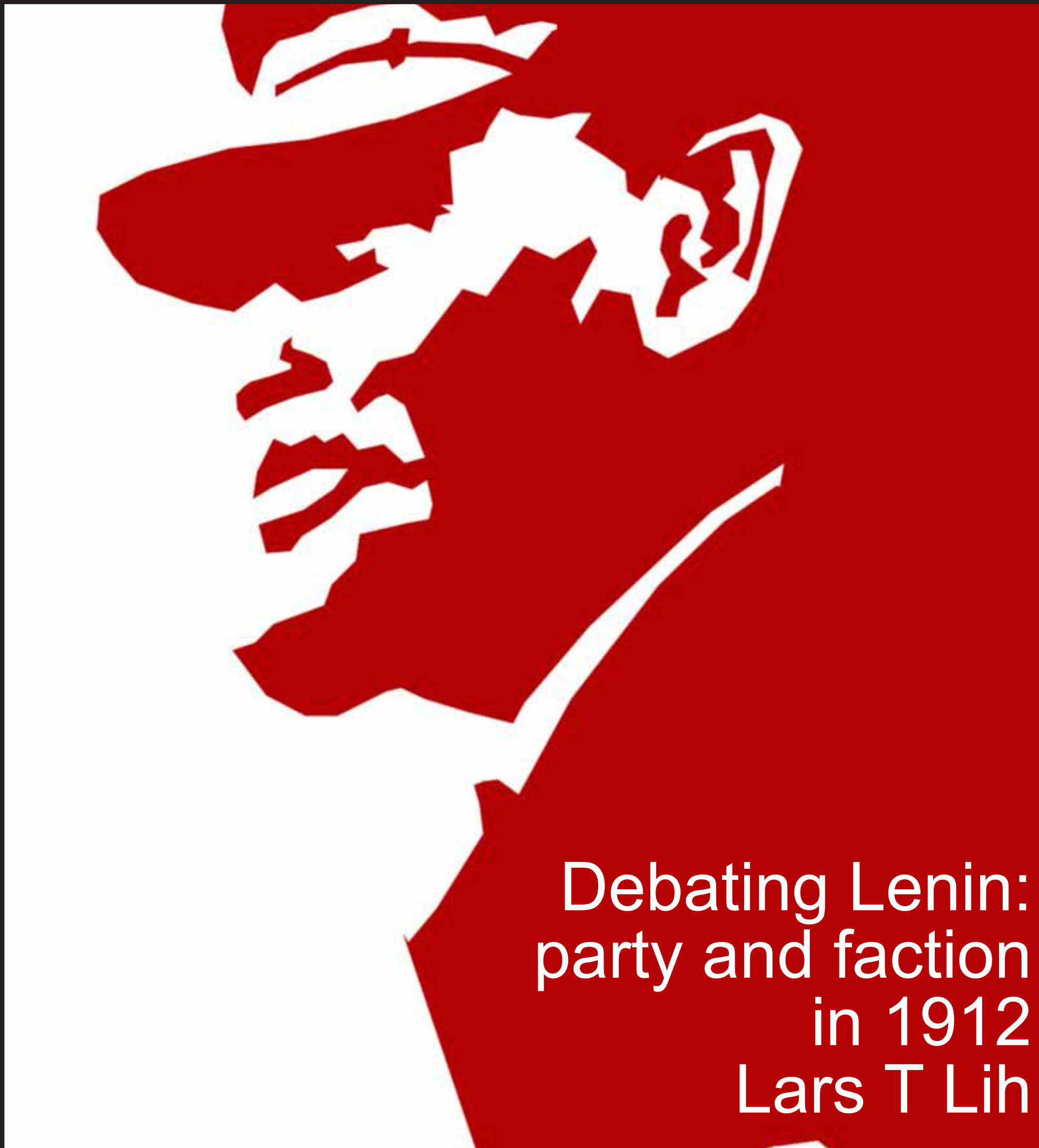
- Irish United Left Alliance
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Debating Lenin:
party and faction
in 1912
Lars T Lih

LETTERS



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

Illusion

My response ('One fight, inside and out', April 12) to Dave Vincent on the Labour Party (Letters, April 5) has called forth two letters on the other extreme of the argument (April 19), arguing for - at a minimum - *more* emphasis on socialists working in the Labour Party than my article proposed. Kevin Hind's and Arthur Bough's arguments are, however, very different. I don't have time to write a full article this week, so I respond by letter to comrade Hind this week and will respond to comrade Bough next week.

A small factual point is that Kevin Hind mentions the Independent Working Class Association as having "built solid working class support from the bottom up". In reality, the website of the IWCA in Oxford, where the organisation has had elected councillors, has not been updated since 2010 and no IWCA candidates are standing in this week's local elections. The IWCA's 'non-socialist' and 'bottom-up' model proves to have produced *ephemeral* results. The organisation's national website (www.iwca.info) has been sporadically updated since 2010, but in essence with the sort of grand-theoretical commentary and argument small left groups commonly do. We in the *Weekly Worker* do this sort of work, too, and I do not mean to denigrate it: it is just that it provides more evidence of the failure of the IWCA project to produce something beyond the usual sort of left group.

Comrade Hind argues for two critical traditional claims of the Labour left. The first is that "To gain these concessions from the bourgeoisie, Labour must actually be in power either at local or national level - and preferably the latter. Therefore, any action which undermines the ability of Labour to gain power can also be seen legitimately as a shot in the foot for the working class and the left as a whole."

The second is that "It should also be remembered that MPs' voting records do not necessarily reveal an MP's true views on legislation. Some Labour MPs are better described as 'pragmatic Blairites' - as opposed to 'ideological Blairites' - in the sense that they may not support the New Labour neoliberal agenda wholeheartedly, but are willing to go along with it for political purposes. Would it not be better for Labour left and left-of-Labour activists to simply pile pressure on vulnerable MPs rather than reject them as being lost causes?"

The first point is the fundamental one. It is simply not true that concessions can only be won if you form a government. Take, for a single example, the legalisation of trade unions: delivered initially in 1871 by a *Liberal* government. The 1871 act was overturned by an "ardent Tory" (his own words) judge, J Brett; then reinstated by a *Tory* government in 1875. There are numerous others more recently.

The converse of this is that if, in opposition, you adapt yourself to the currently dominant ideas in order to achieve office, in office you will have to implement the dominant ideas, and any concessions will be both timid and secretive: the character of Gordon Brown's very limited improvements to welfare under New Labour. In contrast, Tory oppositions seek to *shift the political agenda in their favour from opposition*. The result is a 'ratchet effect' in which politics can only move to the right: the post-1975 Wilson-Callaghan government leads to Thatcherism, the Blair-Brown

government to the Con-Dems' plans to reverse 1945 by privatising or 'charityfying' education and health.

Hence, what is needed and is missing in the labour movement is an active intervention to attempt to *shift the political agenda* in the interests of the working class - conducted from opposition.

It follows that the second point is almost the reverse of what is needed. 'Ideological Blairites' *might* be persuaded by the course of events that they are wrong. But 'pragmatic Blairites' censor themselves (and seek to censor everyone else) for reasons that are at bottom careerist. No doubt some 'ideological Blairites' ought to be in the Tory Party and will in due course find their way there. But the 'pragmatic Blairites' (and their equivalents in the far left) are the real poison which blocks any attempt to shift the agenda to the left and hence allows the Tories and their backers to say to the working class: 'What's mine is mine, and what's yours is also mine.'

This, in turn, is also part of why what is right now needed is a minority *communist* party which has a serious attitude to the Labour Party and left-right fights in it - not merely Marxists working as individuals in the Labour Party. Labour has always been prone to equivalents of 'pragmatic Blairism' (Lib-Labism, and so on), but always used to have outriders to its left working to shift the political agenda. Unfortunately, the *Morning Star* is too subservient to the trade union bureaucracy to do so, and the groups of Trotskyist origin are currently both too fragmented and too much committed either to the illusion of creating a 'new old Labour Party,' or to 'direct actionism' without much politics.

Mike Macnair
email

Sect who?

In his article on the latest split in Workers Power, Ben Lewis perfectly summarises all that is wrong with *Weekly Worker*/CPGB politics ('Another split, another sect', April 26).

He takes the new grouping to task for "throwing themselves into the liquidationist Anti-Capitalist Initiative", when apparently they should be concerned with "Marxist fundamentals". Ben delivered the same little lecture to the 80 people who came to the first national meeting of the ACI, telling us how we were all on the wrong track, were trying to be too politically broad and how we should be regrouping people around Marxist fundamentals.

If we started only with people who only agreed with "Marxist fundamentals" (whatever they are), we could meet in a very small conference chamber. The point of the ACI is to relate to real struggles, real campaigns, real political movements of activists like UK Uncut, Occupy, climate camp and union activists fighting sell-outs.

Very few of these activists are committed to "Marxist fundamentals", but they are fighting injustice, oppression and for a new type of society. The point, for those of us who *are* Marxists, is to convince them in struggle, in working together, in argument, in an organisation, that Marxism has some relevance to 21st century struggles.

What is the CPGB's alternative? We have already seen it in their 'Campaign for a Marxist Party'. And what a rip-roaring success that was!

Ben declares that the ACI "appears to consist of distinctly *old*, recycled variants of previous far-left electoral campaigns". I don't know where Ben gets that idea from. I have not heard anyone even suggest it in the ACI, and

indeed most participants would run a mile if a proposal was put to turn in that direction. But isn't this critique a bit ironic now that the CPGB is deeply ensconced in the electoralist party *par excellence* - the Labour Party, where it is busy making itself at home amongst the strategic entrust right wing of the Labour Representation Committee?

We are happy to be working closely with the comrades who have left WP within the ACI - a group of comrades which the article characterises as a "sect" within a fortnight of its appearance. Surely a record! We have much in common with them politically and very little in common with the sterile, passive propagandism that characterises the CPGB.

Stuart King
Permanent Revolution

Expose them

In the latest issue of the *Weekly Worker*, Peter Manson calls for critical support for Ken Livingstone ('Like looking for a needle in a haystack', April 26) and, in the same issue, an article on the French elections says that "Marxists are calling for a Hollande vote on May 6" ('Disappointing result for the left'). Same methodology!

The conception of 'critical support', where Marxists supported class struggles, even if led by reformists, has been turned into 'critical support' for reformist electoralism. Bourgeois elections have nothing to do with the class struggle. Instead, Marxists need to expose the nature of bourgeois elections, which are contests between the various bourgeois elites creating a false sense of democracy. At best we can hope for an outcome like Allende's Chile, where the left 'won' an election and then made an electoral deal with the Christian Democrats - who then later allied themselves with general Pinochet, with the result that the mass movement in Chile was crushed.

No doubt Livingstone will carry out reforms (new traffic rules?), but the system will not change. Marxists should support specific reforms, but not support reformists. Our task is to show why reforms are insufficient, particularly now, given the world crisis of capitalism.

Earl Gilman
email

Racist workers

If we analyse the results of the first round of the French elections, it is clear that Jean-Michel Edwin is wrong ('Disappointing result for left', April 26). Mélenchon's votes did not go to the Parti Socialiste and Hollande. The PS vote held between the polls and the election. Mélenchon's lost votes were a straight transfer to Marine Le Pen from racist workers and middle class voters, who had been impressed by her father's defence of their living standards and pensions, but also by his nationalism, his Islamophobia and his support for French imperialism over Libya and Syria, but now became more impressed by a more determined defence of the 'nation', Marine. No-one was fooled by Mélenchon's bogus 'anti-racist' attack on Marine Le Pen: 'I'm not a racist, but no veils and no more immigrants'.

The collapse of the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste and Lutte Ouvrière vote is likewise down to this factor - a support for, and a total inability to strongly oppose, French imperialism in its foreign and therefore in its domestic agenda. These racist workers' votes may now transfer in large enough numbers to elect Hollande, or they may all go to Sarkozy. A rightwing dynamic saw these backward French voters swing back to the right as soon as they recognised a more consistent and determined racist. And on this crucial point we may yet see the victory of

Sarkozy over Hollande. After all, who is the more consistent and determined defender of the ruling class and French imperialism? I fear that the rightwing dynamic that shifted these votes from Mélenchon to Hollande may yet result in the election of Sarkozy. I hope I am wrong.

Gerry Downing
email

Peak foil

Not too long ago Arthur Bough, basing himself on Kondratiev's long-wave economic theory, wanted us to believe that capitalism had started a new period of growth and prosperity. But the world upon which Kondratiev based his theory is in the process of disappearing. It was one of cheap, abundant energy and other resources, readily available to a relatively small number of industrially developed countries. It is important to mention this because it is not usually understood that capitalism can only thrive when only a few countries are industrially advanced.

The problem which capitalism faces today is that, the more countries seek development, the more pressure there is on diminishing and scarce resources. We only have to think of China and India, with populations of over one billion each, to appreciate that they are increasing demand and bidding up the price of resources. Arthur Bough was able to put forward the growth and prosperity argument by ignoring the contradiction between rising demand, resulting from more countries seeking development and stagnating supplies of essential resources - in particular, of course, the global peak in oil production, which is now underway. If the global economy is already stalling at peak,

what do you think will happen when the decline begins?

Now Bough is raising the possibility of the energy revolution coming along in the nick of time to save capitalism from its well-deserved demise (Letters, April 12). He claims that I ignore the variety of fuels that can replace oil. But it is not simply a technical question of replacing oil, but rather fuels which can replace oil in terms of cheapness and abundance. Running capitalism on sunshine, windmills and biofuels won't work. To grasp the significance of oil we only have to consider that one barrel of oil contains the energy equivalent of 8.6 years of labour-power working intensively, according to energy analysts, or that, in the absence of oil, 66 billion energy slaves would be required to maintain the global economy at its present level.

It is no use Bough bringing in billionaire financier T Boone Pickens. While the latter has helped to sound the alarm in regard to peak oil, his suggestion that gas is a way out of our problems cannot be taken seriously; for a start, US gas production peaked around 1973 and the global peak for gas will be only a few years after world peak oil. Bough also turns to seabed methane as a possible answer. There is certainly plenty of it, according to the experts. In this case, its economic potential has not been proved. Even when we overcome the technical challenges of getting seabed methane, what is often overlooked is that it is a more potent greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide. Warming the seas further would lead to the uncontrollable release of methane, making a serious problem even worse.

Tony Clark
email

Fighting fund

Subbing subbers

As I pointed out last week, the *Weekly Worker* has increased its annual subscription rate by £10 in response to Royal Mail's huge hike in postage rates.

True, the extra we have to pay in stamps comes to about £7 a year for each subscriber, but for many years now we have simply absorbed the additional postage costs. We have not increased the subscription rate for a decade! And when you take into account the fact that our cover price remains at £1 (we have not raised this over the same period either), and you will get 48 issues for £60, then we are clearly still subsidising our subscribers quite a bit.

But the *Weekly Worker* is not about making money. We rely on the generosity of our readers and supporters to ensure we keep getting our message out. And that central message is quite simple: the left needs to unite in a single, democratic Communist Party armed with a principled Marxist programme. The more comrades who read, understand and are prepared to act on that, the better, so we are more than happy to distribute the paper that carries it at the lowest possible price.

For that reason here's another deal we're offering. When your sub comes up for renewal, you can actually pay *less* than last year if you switch to a standing order (£12 a quarter or £48 a year). Once again it suits us to bear the extra cost because we know we

will be getting regular payments. And, of course, there is always the chance that regular readers will voluntarily increase those payments in appreciation of our consistent partisanship!

That is what dozens of current readers have done. For example in the last few days of April we received £148 in standing order donations to our fighting fund, plus two PayPal transfers - £50 from SW and £30 from BL. The extra £228 we got in four days took our total for last month to £1,358 - unfortunately a bit short of our £1,500 target. But we start May with £212 in the kitty after just three days, mainly thanks to the standing orders that come in at the start of each month (including a new one for £10 from comrade ET - thank you!).

So what about it? How about taking out a standing order subscription? Or, if you prefer to read us online, a standing order donation would do just as nicely! There again, if you were one of the 10,762 internet readers we had last week, you could make use of our PayPal facility and help keep the *Weekly Worker* going with a one-off gift. Please do what you can to ensure we make up for last month's deficit in May.

Robbie Rix

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

ULA

Clare Daly: abortion rights



Sectarian stumbling block

The April 28 United Left Alliance conference in Dublin was dominated by a debate on the future of the project and the huge hurdles we need to overcome if we are to move forward were well and truly illustrated.

It was particularly frustrating to hear Socialist Party comrades still justifying their refusal to consider anything like a democratic structure on ever more spurious grounds. Although, as leading SP member Kevin McLoughlin admitted, objective circumstances have changed, his organisation has not. It refuses to budge on the current organisational arrangements, which consist of a mainly unelected national steering committee, and a membership which has no say.

Two representatives from each of the founding groups - along now with two elected non-aligned delegates - run the project. An organisational proposal which appears to have been approved by the steering committee will see the setting up of a national delegate body with representatives from branches. But this delegate body has no power to make decisions and all matters will have to be referred to the steering committee.

Again, as in 2011, no voting was allowed at conference. No resolutions could be submitted from branches. The members present could only speak, time permitting, to an agenda over which they had no say. They then returned home with all decisions left in the hands of a small group. It is no wonder that so many non-aligned members have resigned or drifted away in the last year. Frustrated and demoralised by the democratic deficit and lack of branch activity, they have voted with their feet.

In contrast to the SP's stubborn intransigence, the Socialist Workers Party appeared to have been converted to the need for democracy. SWP leader Kieran Allen argued that the ULA needs to become a membership organisation. He called for a voting conference and pledged that his group would accept being in a minority if it lost the vote on a given question. This was all positive. However, unfortunately but predictably, the organisation he wants to build is one where "we create a space for people who don't agree with us yet". A mass social democratic, as opposed to revolutionary, organisation.

Many are not convinced of the SWP's new-found democratic credentials. The group is not known for its tolerance of differences and willingness to compromise. In fact the opposite is typically true. So, while comrade Allen's arguments

for a democratic culture are formally correct, they must be put to the test. Putting off that moment will not make things easier for the SP. Its leaders declared that the recruitment of thousands of workers would make all the difference. Only then would they be prepared to consider the party project - or indeed basic democratic norms. They seemed blind to the fact that in the meantime those "ordinary workers" are leaving by the dozen.

As one such member argued at conference, "We are sick of the main groups jockeying for position at the expense of the ULA. We need to move to a party, where groups have platform rights." Working class people will want to join an open organisation where members have a voice. The narrow interests of the groups are squandering our opportunity to build such a party.

The morning session began with a lead-off by councillor Brid Smith (SWP) and MEP Paul Murphy (SP). Comrade Smith stressed the necessity of struggle from below and pointed to the self-organisation of the Greek working class as an example of what we need to fight for. She believed that things are changing and that the ULA had outflanked Sinn Féin in the fight against the household tax. Greece showed how working class people could organise their own alternative organisations to serve their communities in the absence of government provision of healthcare and other services. She believed that we need to generalise the struggles and focus on building an alternative to Labour. Trade union members should end their financial support for Labour through the political fund.

Comrade Murphy criticised the slavish attitude of the Irish government towards the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and European Central Bank and how government ministers were patted on the back by the troika for their submission. He said that austerity policies have not worked and not provided any stimulus for the economy. This idea of stimulus is something that the SP keeps returning to. Its leadership appears to have illusions in the ability of the present capitalist system to reinvigorate itself for the good of "ordinary working people". As a number of opposing speakers argued, in fact austerity *has* worked for some sections of capitalism. For us the issue can only be what is in the interests of the working class.

Comrade Murphy asserted the importance for the ULA of the Fiscal Treaty referendum on May 31. He quite rightly argued and that we need to build unity with workers across

Europe and that the ULA should take the lead on this. But since the conference both the SP and the SWP have launched their own separate 'no' campaigns. There is virtually no difference between them politically, the only problem being unwillingness to unite even on this issue. Sadly the ULA looks likely to be sidelined for the duration of the referendum campaign. There are now at least five separate leftwing 'no' campaigns (set up by the Communist Party of Ireland, the Workers Party, the SWP-backed People before Profit Alliance, the SP and Sinn Féin). It looks as though they will all come together in an umbrella group under the hegemony of Sinn Féin. Sadly this just about says it all. These organisations can only stand to be together when the right wing is in the majority. Rather than distinguishing itself sharply from Sinn Féin's nationalism, the left looks set to bow down to it.

There were a number of positive aspects to the conference. The most important was the establishment of a non-aligned group, which agreed to work together to build the ULA as a party. There are 130 non-aligned members out of a total membership of approximately 370. Our two elected representatives, Therese Caherty and Joseph Loughnane, will keep us informed of all discussions and decisions of the steering committee. This is something badly overdue. We will have a national meeting of all non-aligned comrades on June 9. It was stressed that we do not want to set up yet another group within the ULA. Instead we will use all our efforts to steer the organisation in the direction of a party formation. There are different views on how we should relate to that task, but all are agreed that the ULA needs its own publication as soon as possible.

Six policy groups were set up at conference, to involve members in developing programmatic questions. One of them was on equality and will hopefully focus on abortion rights. The conference seemed to be in agreement that we should challenge the 'right to life of the unborn' under the Irish constitution. The ULA has already made an important impact on this central question and TDs like Joan Collins and Clare Daly are playing a very valuable role.

At least this year, unlike in 2011, the SP and SWP were to some extent prepared to air their differences. Let us hope that the struggles to come will force them to rethink and overcome decades of sectarianism. Old habits die hard ●

Anne Mc Shane

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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 May 6, 5pm: Introduction to Marx's *Capital*. Speaker: Jack Conrad. Caxton House, 129 Saint John's Way London N19. Followed by weekly political report.

Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.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>.

No complicity with war crimes

Wednesday May 9, 7pm: Meeting - 'Israeli settlements and the role of Veolia'. The Venue, University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1. Speaker: Daniel Machover.

Organised by No to Veolia Action Group: novag@hotmail.co.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>.

National Shop Stewards Network

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

CPGB wills

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SOLIDARITY

War threats and Iran's impoverished workers

The Iranian people are the main victims of the sanctions campaign, insists Majid Tamjidi

Over the last few years western governments have created an atmosphere of war against Iran and in the last few months severe sanctions have come into effect. In addition we face the threat of military attacks by Israel against Iran's strategic centres, including nuclear facilities.

On the other hand, inside Iran the authorities - in particular supreme leader Ali Khamenei and president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad - have reacted to these threats with exaggerated bravado. The regime is trying to convince the population that these are just empty threats, that sanctions have had no effect and that Iran is capable of giving a fierce response to any military attack. On sanctions Ahmadinejad's line is: 'Even if we don't sell any oil for two or three years we will have enough foreign currency to survive perfectly well.' Of course, all this is taking place against the background of both secret and open negotiations with the west.

Both sides imbue their opponents with specific characteristics. The west portrays Iran as a dictatorship depriving its population of 'human rights', pursuing nuclear technology and thus threatening 'world peace', arguing that in order for a 'democratic regime' to be established in Iran, another Middle East war might be necessary. The Islamic regime states that it has no intention of producing nuclear arms and claims to be a state relying on the religious and moral beliefs of its population: beliefs that are superior to western ideologies about 'human rights'.

It is not difficult to rebuff western excuses for creating this atmosphere of war and sanctions. The west is Israel's main ally in the region and that country is a nuclear power. The US and its allies have never questioned Pakistan's nuclear weapons, nor have they threatened it militarily. The imperialist powers' main interactions in the region are with Saudi Arabia, which must hold the gold medal (or at least silver) for human rights abuses. The western media do not pay attention to the real victims of human rights abuses in Iran, such as Mahmoud Salehi, the labour activist who has spent the last few years in and out of Iranian jails for organising a May Day gathering. The soft war against Iran conducted by media like the BBC Persian service and Voice of America has not mentioned Salehi's recent trip to France as a representative of the Iranian labour movement, while people like former Islamic guard Mohsen Sazegara and other 'democracy campaigners' are getting wall to wall coverage to such an extent that it is difficult to distinguish them from these stations' presenters.

On the other hand, the Iranian people have shown time and again that they have no allegiance to the laws of their country and they have protested against them. The constant arrest, imprisonment and forced exile of many students, women, labour activists, writers and supporters of religious and national minorities is testimony to the fact that the Iranian people do not support Islamic legislation.

Most probably Iran has put back its military nuclear programme. However, for the regime nuclear capability has become an elixir capable of providing eternal life. So what is the conflict really about? It has nothing to do with the way the two sides portray each other. The west is not really concerned about the 'abuse of human rights' or Iran's nuclear



Iranian oilworker: white contracts

capability. The issue is that Iran remains outside the direct sphere of influence of the US and its allies, and the west is determined to bring back Iran under its direct influence. For its part the Islamic regime is trying to consolidate and strengthen its regional authority.

Is there another side to this conflict? In all the representation by the media on both sides, there are only two poles: the west and Islamic fundamentalism. If this was a true reflection of what was going on in Iran, then we could say Samuel Huntington's 'clash of civilisations' had come true. But both in Huntington's theory and in reality another major dimension to this bipolar presentation is completely forgotten - and that is the Iranian people and their demands. In the west we are given the impression that the Iranian people are keen for imperialist intervention and (pro-western) regime change. Not just that, but, using its vast media resources, the west is creating alternatives around 'political personalities' - some of the most dubious political forces are portrayed as highly important individuals and organisations capable of replacing the Islamic regime.

On the other hand, the Iranian government has silenced the genuine voices of the opposition with repression and used the most obvious populist techniques to portray its population as a 'Muslim nation' supporting its rulers. The area I know best, where I have been active for over 30 years, is the labour movement. In order to deal with this I will leave aside the repression of the women's movement, the abuse of the rights of writers, intellectuals, religious and national minority activists, and so on.

Assault on workers

The western media present the Islamic regime as a bunch of ignorant fundamentalist mullahs who know nothing about management and governance. Of course, it is true that the Islamic regime is a reactionary force relying on religious laws. However, this is not the total truth.

As far as industry and production are concerned, the Iranian government has, especially over the last 20 years, adopted exactly the type of policies adhered to in the west. It has followed the dictates of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. It has abolished subsidies and introduced 'rationalisation' and intensification of labour productivity in order to get rid of workers. It has ended all collective negotiations and imposed contracts enforcing post-Fordist labour policies and Toyotaist management techniques in major industries, especially its car manufacturing plants, Iran Khodro and Saipa.

These policies have led to a situation where, out of 12 million employed workers, 80% (10 million) work under temporary contracts and managers have the right to sack these workers when it suits them. These employment contracts are known as 'white contracts' - the employee signs an empty page and management adds the text as and when it chooses.

More than half of Iran's employed workers have no insurance against accidents or job loss. The worsening economic situation and the rise in the number of smaller firms taking risks have resulted in a sharp increase in work accidents in the last few years. Statistics show 25,000 work-related accidents in a year, 13,000 of which resulted in the death of workers. The minimum wage is now \$270 a month: ie, one-fifth of the poverty line. The abolition of subsidies has led to an astronomic rise in prices and, according to official statistics, 60% of workers live below the poverty line. The reality is that many of these workers are forced to take second or third jobs and have to supplement their income by renting out rooms in their house.

Non-payment of wages and the sacking of workers without warning is Iranian government policy. However, the intensification of sanctions over the last two months has led to a situation where these two policies have taken on disastrous dimensions. Many firms are bankrupt, cannot pay their debts and, of course, most of

them are not paying their workers. Immediately after the Iranian new year holiday (April 1 2012) the state and factory owners used sanctions as an excuse to sack large numbers of workers - around 30% of contracts were not renewed. The atmosphere of war and sanctions is used to impose further repression on labour activists, while increasing attacks against workers as a whole. On the one hand, workers' wages are not paid, but, on the other, there is an astronomical budget to improve military capability.

The cost of war

If there is a war, one of the two conflicting parties will win: the west led by the US or Iran's Islamic Republic. Those, whether of the right or the left, who think there will be a third pole which can become victorious, should it be organised independently, are mistaken. If there is a war, the third party to this conflict - ie, the Iranian people and the working class - will be the main victims. In current circumstances there is no possibility of transforming a reactionary war into a revolutionary one.

Progressive forces must stand firm against sanctions and the threat of war. In the current international scene I cannot see any ray of hope for a people already hit by sanctions if a war starts. I have mentioned some of the problems caused by sanctions. If there is a military attack on Iran, the devastation caused so far by sanctions will be very little compared to the ensuing destruction. Under those circumstances the benefits of getting rid of the Islamic regime will be nothing in comparison to the kind of damage to the economic and social state of the country.

Some say a sharp shock attack will do the job. But even those who make such claims know full well this is just a bluff. Saddam Hussein's army fell with little resistance. However, returning Baghdad to the city it was under Saddam will take decades. The dictator was eliminated, only to be replaced by tens of dictators.

Following the first military attack on Iran a full-blown war will start and

all that has been built step by step, at terrible cost - prison, torture, forced exile - by the workers' movement, women's movement and other social movements will be destroyed. Those who claim to be defenders of human rights while supporting the war will ensure that human rights and its activists will be the first victims of the conflict. We all remember how Saddam's military attack against Mehrabad airport in September 1980 marked a serious blow against the revolutionary movement and its activists. War broke the back of the opposition movement, especially that of the workers and the oil workers in particular.

The way to overthrow the Islamic Republic is not through starting another war in the Middle East. The way to put pressure on the Islamic regime is not through economic sanctions, which is taking hostage the basic needs of the Iranian people. The way to create a democratic Iran is by strengthening the ranks of those fighting for equality and freedom in the country's social movements. The way to replace the Islamic regime is not through the creation of an artificial opposition - a false alternative, based on anti-democratic, anti-freedom forces. The way to create an alternative is to strengthen the genuine forces fighting for freedom and equality. If we really believe in the construction of a post-Islamic Republic Iran based on democratic, egalitarian rule, we must stand firm against sanctions and war, and support those who are paying a heavy price for this in prison and under torture.

We will judge those claiming to defend human rights in Iran by the way they react to prison sentences against Vahed bus workers' leader Reza Shahabi, who was recently handed a six-year prison term. We will judge them on how they react to the continued incarceration of Ali Nejati from the sugar workers' union, who is still in prison despite his illness. We will judge them on their support for the Shahab Khodro workers and metal workers who have been protesting on the streets of Tehran ●

CONSTITUTION

Abolish the second chamber

Whether partly elected or not, the House of Lords will continue to impose checks and balances against democracy, writes **Peter Manson**



Constitutional monarchy: mystification

Bourgeois politics is divided over the extent to which the undemocratic second chamber should be tinkered with. While all three main parties are officially agreed that an elected element should be introduced, there are differences over the balance between a partially elected Lords and the Commons, whether the question should be put to a referendum and the exact composition of the new chamber.

Of course, there is a section of diehard Tories that unashamedly declares that an unelected Lords, which has stood the establishment in such good stead with its solid upholding of reactionary tradition, is best left well alone. At the April 19 meeting of the rightwing 1922 Committee of backbench Conservatives only one MP thought there should be any change at all. The noble ladies and gentlemen of the Lords - aided and abetted by a gaggle of Church of England clerics and all those totally loyal 'non-political experts', appointed to help ensure there can never be anything too radical enacted - are doing just fine as they are, thank you very much.

However, the majority of the political establishment is aware that there is a problem with this approach. After all, ingrained in the British ideology of national chauvinism is the central precept that it is our 'democratic values' that help make us special. You see, we British are especially committed to the rule of the majority, implemented by representatives elected by universal suffrage.

It is widely agreed that a second chamber performs the essential role of imposing 'checks and balances' on the Commons - just in case those unreliable MPs, perhaps worried about the prospect of an impending election, rather too hastily vote for legislation that might undermine the solidity of bourgeois rule. But this

delaying and obstructive role must not be too obvious. In fact it would help a lot if the Lords itself could be more convincingly portrayed as an intrinsic part of the democratic process. Which is what the proposed reforms are all about.

While the actual measures will be formally revealed in the May 9 queen's speech, a taster was given on April 23 by the parliamentary joint committee on Lords reform. As readers will know, the committee, in its majority, proposes that the size of the Lords be reduced to 450 full-time members, of which 80% (360) will be elected by a complicated version of the single transferable vote system. Laughably these elected members would serve for a term of 15 years - a period that is so extended that it surely calls into question the whole idea of legitimisation through elections. And just so that the embedded role of the Church of England should not be weakened in the slightest, 12 of the appointed 90 members will continue to be the church's wise bishops, whose divine insights are crucial in ensuring that all legislative changes take account of god's wishes. There will be a transitional period of at least 10 years before the new arrangements are fully in place.

Although for the moment the mass of the population acquiesces in its own subjection and for the most part is not moved to challenge the anti-democratic devices put in place by the UK constitutional monarchy, there is no guarantee that this will continue indefinitely, and so the consensus amongst the main parties is that a little 'modernisation' might be in order. However, while it is essential for the ruling ideology that a degree of 'democratisation' of the Lords be carried through, an equivalent process is most certainly not contemplated for the institution of the head of state - by

ditching the monarchy in favour of an elected presidency, for example.

The queen plays her essential stabilising and unifying role for the ruling class precisely because she is supposed to be 'above politics'. She announces and rubber-stamps policy decided upon by the cabinet - having, of course, made the prime minister aware of the possible defects of proposed legislation in the interests of us all. The monarch symbolises both continuity with an unbroken tradition of British values and the supposed commonality of interests of all classes in a way that an elected - and therefore politically partisan - president could never do. While the complete and utter absence of any element of democratic accountability in a second chamber is a serious problem for bourgeois ideologues, in the case of the monarchy it is still seen as a positive asset.

It remains to be seen, however, whether the Lords reform will do the trick and ensure its future legitimacy in the eyes of the majority. It is not just the absurd 15-year term of office, but also the continuation of the practice

of appointing some of its members. If such legitimacy demands the election of the majority, why does that not apply to the whole lot? If most members are to be the elected representatives of the people, is it not possible that the minority will be regarded as establishment placemen and women?

Moreover, if members of the Lords are put in place by the same electorate that voted for MPs (albeit by a different method), then what exactly are they supposed to be doing that MPs cannot? What is the point of electing a second batch of representatives just to oversee the work of the first batch? There is no point, of course, since a single chamber could (and does) set up various specialist committees empowered to examine the detail of proposed legislation and recommend changes. It is for these reasons that the Tory right insists that it is best to leave well alone - there is a danger that the institutions of the ruling class will be demystified and thereby opened up to more serious questioning.

But at least this whole affair has

highlighted the question of genuine democracy. For our part, we are clear: abolish the second chamber, together with the monarchy and all the other 'checks and balances' against democracy. We are for a single chamber that can easily be held to account - intimidated if need be - by the population. For this reason we are also opposed to an elected presidency, whose occupant inevitably acts in some ways like an elected monarch and cannot easily be made accountable.

If there is to be that dictator's device - a referendum - on this question, it will surely ask a question for which there will be only two, equally unacceptable, answers: Do you approve of the proposed changes or do you favour the status quo? The left should make use of the current debate, and any referendum campaign, to emphasise the kind of genuine democracy that we demand *vis-à-vis* the state: the radical republican democracy of Marxism ●

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From CPGB Draft programme

3.1. Democracy

Under capitalism democracy exhibits two sides. There is mystification, whereby the masses are reconciled to their exploitation and fooled into imagining themselves to be the sovereign power in society. On the other hand, there is the struggle to give democratic forms a new, substantive, content. This can only be achieved by the working class taking the lead in the fight to ensure popular control over all aspects of society.

Hence, communists do not counterpose democracy to socialism.

Democracy is much more than voting every four or five years. Democracy is the rule of the people, for the people, by the people. To make that aspiration real necessarily means removing all judicial, structural and socio-economic restraints on, or distortions of, popular control from below.

3.1.1. Winning the battle for democracy

Communists stand for republican democracy. That means demanding:

- Abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords, and a single-chamber parliament with proportional representation, annual elections and

MPs' salaries set at the level of a skilled worker.

- No to the presidential prime minister. End prime ministerial appointment of ministers and all other forms of prime ministerial patronage.

- Disband MI5, MI6, special branch and the entire secret state apparatus.

- For local democracy. Service provision, planning, tax raising, law enforcement and funding allocation to be radically devolved downwards as far as possible and appropriate: to ward, borough, city and county levels.

www.cpgb.org.uk/pdf/draft_programme_2010.pdf

LENIN

A faction is not a party

Did the Bolsheviks seek to create a ‘party of a new type’ in 1912? Lars T Lih looks at the historical record

In recent online debate, the question of Lenin’s thoughts on the relation between Bolshevism and the party as a whole has come up frequently. I would like to shed some light on this question by examining his views at three different points: 1912, 1917 and 1920. In this first instalment I look at material from 1912.

Lenin’s views on this topic in the years before World War I can be summed up succinctly: Bolshevism was a faction (*fraktsiia*), a part of a larger whole: namely, the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP). Bolshevism was a party within the party: just as the RSDLP stood for a specific platform within the society at large, Bolshevism stood for a specific set of tactical views within the larger Social Democratic whole. Like a political party *vis-à-vis* society, the Bolshevik faction had particular views about how to run the party: it propagated those views and tried to ensure that the central party institutions were inspired by them. But even if Bolshevism had control of the central committee, it did not become the party. One could still be a member of the party, but not a Bolshevik - in fact, this was seen as the normal situation. *Fraktsiia ne est’ partiia*: a faction is not a party.

But, one may ask, if these were the views of Lenin and other Bolsheviks, what about the Prague conference of January 1912, when the Bolsheviks attained a large majority on the central committee? Aren’t we assured by many writers today that this conference represented the creation of a new Bolshevik Party, where the former *fraktsiia* became the whole *partiia*? Nevertheless, if we look at sources from the period, one thing becomes overwhelmingly clear: Lenin and the Bolsheviks as a whole did not set out to create a Bolshevik Party, did not think they had created a Bolshevik Party, and denied strenuously that they had organised the conference for this purpose. Not only was this outcome not a goal: it hardly even made sense to them.

Recently Paul Le Blanc has written a long and instructive essay on the Prague conference which concludes that “for all practical purposes, the party that emerged from the Prague All-Russian RSDLP conference of 1912 was a Bolshevik party”.¹ The key words here are “for all practical purposes”. Paul points to a number of reasons for equating Bolshevism and the party: the new central committee was composed overwhelmingly of Bolsheviks; the Bolshevik effort to forge a coalition with “party Mensheviks” never amounted to much; the other factions did not acknowledge the legitimacy of the central institutions voted in by the Prague conference and they tried (not very successfully) to set up competing institutions; there is direct organisational continuity between the 1912 central committee and the Communist Party of 1918 that added ‘Bolshevik’ to its official name.

All this is true, but in no way clashes with my earlier statement about the *outlook and aims* of Lenin and the Bolsheviks in 1912. Paul’s argument to the contrary is partly a matter of sources. He says he is relying on “primary sources”, by which he means material coming from direct participants in party life before the war. But he relies overwhelmingly on sources written *after the event* and particularly after



Lenin: unite the partyists

the Russian Revolution of 1917. Using memoirs and other after-the-event sources is always tricky, but there are a number of reasons why they are particularly unreliable in the case of the Prague conference. By the 1920s, there were indeed two parties, leading to a tendency to retroject current views back to the earlier situation. Furthermore, and most importantly, by the 1920s the whole idea of having factions in the party was delegitimised.

Another reason why later sources are unreliable is that the internal party situation in 1912 was insanely complicated. A historian friend of mine told me that he “couldn’t get his head around 1912” - and that was my own attitude before I got so fascinated by the topic that I took a couple of months off simply to absorb the details necessary to read documents from the period. Many later sources spend only a sentence or a paragraph on inner-party conflicts in 1910-14 (the most useful memoirs are those that have the space to describe party life during this period in detail). We should be aware that any source that reduces the conflict to ‘Bolsheviks vs Mensheviks’ is radically oversimplifying. (I too will be forced to vastly simplify the situation in order to bring out the main point.)

Paul Le Blanc does use one source that comes directly from the pre-war period: Lenin’s own writings. I think that if you take all of Paul’s references directly to Lenin’s writings, a rather different picture emerges than the one set forth in his own main conclusions. For example, he accurately notes that in 1912 Lenin did not yet contest the legitimacy of having an opportunist wing in a social democratic party - which leaves us with the strange picture of Lenin creating a Bolshevik Party in which opportunism was allowed.

Nevertheless, I believe that Paul does not sufficiently allow for the possibility that the Bolshevik *outlook* in 1912 cannot be directly deduced from what turned out to be, “for all practical purposes”, the actual outcome. In my own essay, I will bring out some themes from

the writings of Lenin and others that Paul has not brought out or not sufficiently emphasised. In doing so, I will make heavy use of the Lenin material made available in Paul’s own excellent Lenin anthology *Revolution, democracy, socialism* (London 2008).

One other point about sources before beginning. As mentioned above, the Soviet Communist Party radically delegitimised factions within the party. The regime was therefore embarrassed by the way Lenin and others talked about factions during this period. To lessen the embarrassment, at least in translation, they simply refused to translate *fraktsiia* as ‘faction’, but relied on euphemisms such as ‘group’ or ‘section’. I have found instances of this practice in translations from Lenin, Stalin and Krupskaya. In the discussion below, I have corrected these falsified translations.

Fraktsiia ne est’ partiia

One document touching on our theme is worth quoting at length, since Lenin sets out his views unambiguously on the difference between the party and a faction. The scene is a meeting of the Bolshevik faction in 1909. Lenin is arguing that a faction - defined as a group with “a specific tactical physiognomy” - can exclude members on criteria that would be improper for the party (the text is taken from *Revolution, democracy, socialism* pp202-03, retranslated when necessary).

In our party Bolshevism is represented by the Bolshevik *faction*. But a faction is not a party. A party can contain a whole gamut of opinions and shades of opinion, the extremes of which may be sharply contradictory. In the German party, side by side with the pronouncedly revolutionary wing of Kautsky, we see the ultra-revisionist wing of Bernstein. That is not the case with a faction. A faction in a party is a group of *like-minded persons* formed for the purpose primarily of influencing

the party in a definite direction, for the purpose of securing acceptance for their principles in the party in the purest possible form. For this, real *unanimity of opinion* is necessary. The different standards we set for the unity of a party and the unity of a faction must be grasped by everyone who wants to know how the question of the internal discord in the Bolshevik faction really stands.

Lenin then advances his idea that ‘liquidationism’ and Menshevism should not be equated, since “a minority of Mensheviks” is also anti-liquidationist. He assures his Bolshevik audience that he is not going soft on Menshevism:

There is no question of sinking our tactical differences with the Mensheviks. We are fighting and shall continue to fight most strenuously against Menshevik deviations from the line of revolutionary social democracy. Needless to say, there is no question of the Bolshevik faction dissolving its identity in the party. The Bolsheviks have done a good deal toward making partyist positions dominant, but much remains to be done in the same direction. The Bolshevik faction as a definite ideological trend in the party must exist as before.

Lenin ends by praising the Bolsheviks for being the faction most dedicated to “preserving and consolidating” the party: that is, repelling challenges to its basic programme and institutions. Precisely because of this role, “in this hour of adversity it would be truly a crime on our part not to extend our hand to partyists in other factions who are coming out in defence of Marxism and partyism against liquidationism”.

Lenin could not be clearer: a faction is a different sort of entity than the party, with very distinct criteria for membership. The current danger to the party does not arise out of the tactical views that define the Menshevik faction. The fight against these tactical views must continue, but in a very

different spirit than the fight against liquidationism. The Bolsheviks should seek to lead the party, but certainly not become the party.

If Lenin consciously set out in 1912 to create a Bolshevik Party, then he must have radically altered his views on these subjects between 1909 and 1912. Did he? In her memoirs, Nadezhda Krupskaya offers her opinion on this topic:

The experience of the Capri school had shown how often the factionalism of the workers was relative and idiosyncratic. The thing was to have a united party centre, around which all the social democratic worker masses could rally. The struggle in 1910 was a struggle waged for the very existence of the party, for exercising influence on the workers through the medium of the party. Vladimir Ilych never doubted that within the party the Bolsheviks would be in the majority, that in the end the party would follow the Bolshevik path, but this would have to be a party and not a faction. Ilych took the same line in 1911, when a party school was being organised near Paris to which *Iperod*-ists and partyist-Mensheviks as well as Bolsheviks were admitted. The same line was pursued at the Prague party conference in 1912. Not a faction, but a party carrying out a Bolshevik line.

Paul Le Blanc gives some of the passage (in the misleading Soviet-era translation) and comments: “By ‘not a group’ Krupskaya seems to mean not simply a factional fragment, but rather the entire RSDLP.” Paul’s comment is correct as it stands, but it should not be taken to mean that Krupskaya wanted the Bolshevik faction to *become* “the entire RSDLP”. Just the opposite: she envisions the Bolsheviks fighting for their views, *not* by declaring themselves the party, but rather by convincing the majority of the party.

Consider the following sentence from the passage just quoted: “The struggle in 1910 was a struggle waged for the very existence of the party, for exercising influence on the workers through the medium of the party.” The struggle discussed here by Krupskaya was not over *which* views, Bolshevik or Menshevik, should be propagated by the party. That was a different, more normal, less existential struggle. Rather it was about a perceived threat to the very institutional existence of an underground party and its mission of propagating the basic social democratic programme shared by both Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. Just for this reason the Bolsheviks could appeal to right-minded Mensheviks to join them in their struggle.

When put alongside Lenin’s pronouncements from 1909, we find that Krupskaya is stating with extraordinary clarity that Lenin did *not* change his views between 1909 and 1912 and that he continued to see a *fundamental difference in kind* between a faction and the party.

Two parties

In the memoirs of the Georgian Menshevik, Gregory Uratadze, we find the following accurate description of party affairs in this period:

A fiercer struggle blazed up around ‘liquidationism’ than around Bolshevism and Menshevism.

The party lexicon was enriched by new terms: ‘liquidator’, ‘anti-liquidator’, ‘partyist’ [someone who wanted to preserve the underground], ‘Leninist partyists’, ‘Bolshevik partyists’, ‘Menshevik partyists’, ‘liquidator undergrounders’, ‘Trotskyist-partyist’, ‘Trotskyist liquidators’, ‘Plekhanov liquidators’, and so on. And all this in one party!¹²

The terms ‘liquidationism’ and ‘liquidator’ were important enough to generate corresponding terms for their opponents: *partiinst* and *partiets*, which can be translated as ‘partyism’ and ‘partyist’. The partyists claimed that they were defending the very existence of the party from attack. This is the reason why the liquidationist-partyist divide was so passionate and why, as Uratadze shows, it *cut across* the usual factional lines.

The Bolshevik attack on liquidationism can be summed up by saying that this tendency posed an existential threat to the party and that therefore other factional differences should not interfere with a coordinated fight against it. The case against liquidationism had two major headings:

(a) By repudiating the need for an illegal underground, the liquidators put into jeopardy the very existence of a social democratic party that preached socialism and anti-tsarist revolution - views that could not be expressed legally in Stolypin’s Russia (Stolypin was the prime minister in Russia during much of this period)

(b) The liquidators were also guilty of sabotaging efforts to revive central leadership bodies and they had done their best to prevent the resuscitation of the central committee or the calling of an all-party conference.

We do not need to pronounce a verdict on the justice of these accusations. The point is that the Bolsheviks claimed that, unlike normal factional struggles to control party policies, the liquidators posed a threat to the very existence of the party (in Krupskaya’s words) as a “medium” for “exercising influence over the workers”.

The case against liquidationism is set forth in the rather extensive (over 200 pages) *Two parties*, written by Lev Kamenev in 1911: that is, at the very time the Prague conference was being organised. As Kamenev relates, his book was written in close consultation with Lenin. It can therefore be called a manifesto in which the Bolsheviks explained what they were trying to accomplish with the Prague conference.

In 1924, when the book was republished (just when the anti-Trotsky polemics it contained would do most good, from Kamenev’s point of view), he wrote in the preface of the reprint: “The title of the whole work - *Two parties* - points to the fact that, despite the formal unity of the party, we looked on the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks not as two factions of one and the same party, but as two hostile parties fighting each other.”¹³

This is a good example of retrospective tidying-up. In the preface to the first edition of 1911, Kamenev wrote something rather different:

As firm proponents of the most merciless ideological struggle against groups and grouplets that are nourished by the counterrevolutionary atmosphere, we are also equally firm proponents of the unity under the banner of the party of all revolutionary Marxists - *irrespective of faction and tendency* and in spite of these or those differences on concrete questions of current politics ... The RSDLP must apply its energy and all its strength toward helping and serving in a comprehensive way, *irrespective of faction and*

tendency, all worker circles, groups and associations, legally or illegally working toward the resurrection and strengthening of proletarian organisation in Russia [my emphasis].¹⁴

The contrast is striking. In 1924, Kamenev says that he argued for regarding Mensheviks as a separate and hostile party. When we read what he actually wrote in 1911, we find he appeals to all social democrats “without distinction of faction” to join the fight against liquidationism. In fact, Kamenev insists that ever since 1909 the idea of reaching out to the partyist-Mensheviks has “determined the whole internal party course of the Bolsheviks”.¹⁵

Kamenev is saying as insistently as he can: you don’t have to be a Bolshevik to support our drive to exclude the liquidators. Our motive is *not* to impose specifically Bolshevik views on the party, but rather to save the party for all of us.

The slogan “two parties” was therefore *not* a call to create a new party - and certainly not to create a new party designed to propagate specifically Bolshevik views. In fact, this slogan represented an attempt to defend the *old* party against people who (Kamenev claimed) were trying to build a new party. Kamenev is saying to the liquidators: go ahead and create your new party - no doubt there are people who will support it - but don’t do it in a way that wrecks the RSDLP.

Perhaps the objection will be made that the “partyist Mensheviks” were actually a very small minority and that “for all practical purposes” the Bolshevik wager on a coalition with them failed. This objection is factually based (at least if we restrict ourselves to émigré politics), but nevertheless it does not challenge my description of *what the Bolsheviks thought they were doing*. They thought they were creating a cross-factional bloc against a specific existential threat to the very functioning of the party. In 1910, for example, Lenin says in a letter that he thinks that Menshevik workers in Russia itself were overwhelmingly partyist. In 1915, even after many disappointments with Plekhanov (the one party leader associated with Menshevik partyism), he still wrote that “the best Mensheviks” were revolted by liquidationism.

Lenin really believed in the possibility of such a cross-factional bloc. Hostile observers at the time and later thought all that this talk of ‘party Menshevism’ was a ruse and an excuse to obtain an all-Bolshevik party. Underneath it all, they say, he equated liquidationism with Menshevism as such. It seems to me that anyone who says that Lenin was consciously creating a Bolshevik Party is committed to a similar view about Lenin’s duplicity.

Party of a new type

A split in a party can be justified on two very different grounds. One is: your views are unacceptable; you must go. The other is: only my views are acceptable, only my group can stay. The first view excludes a specific group. The second view excludes all except a specific group.

Which type of justification was used at the Prague conference? Clearly, the first one. Besides all the arguments I have just reviewed, we can point to the resolutions of the conference, in which only a very specific group of writers grouped around a couple of newspapers were pronounced “outside of the party”.

This type of exclusion was not incompatible with the practice of ‘parties of an old type’, if by that we mean the social democratic parties of western Europe during the Second

International. These parties had been set up to propagate a certain message, and they were willing to cast off groups that denied the essentials of this message - most famously, in the case of the anarchists in the 1890s. In his defence of the Prague conference, Lenin brought up this episode, along with other actions of discipline and exclusion undertaken by western social democratic parties.

Lenin further insisted that he was *not* trying to exclude the opportunists in general - in other words, he was not trying to purge the Menshevik faction as a whole. Any such description of what he was trying to do, he told European socialists, was a vile slander. He insisted that no European party would have tolerated the sabotage and indiscipline attributable to the liquidationists for a second. Like the song says: “If you’d have been there, if you’d have seen it, you would have done the same.”

There is a long-standing interpretation of what happened at the Prague conference: namely, that it inaugurated a ‘party of a new type’, one that contrasted strongly with the social democratic parties of the old type by a new emphasis on *homogeneity*. The logic of exclusion is now said to be the second type, according to which one faction becomes the entire party. The logic that Lenin earlier restricted to the *faction* - unanimity of outlook by “like-minded individuals” - was now (so it is claimed) extended to the party as a whole. From now on, only those who agreed with Bolshevism were welcome in the party.

This interpretation was enshrined in the famous *Short course* of party history created by Stalin’s government in the late 30s. Obviously, it was congenial to a regime that had delegitimised factions within the party. Unfortunately, it was also at odds with historical documents - so much so that the records of the Prague conference were not even published until the late 1980s. This same logic of a ‘party of a new type’ is also central to the interpretation of the work of Carter Elwood, the main academic investigator of the Prague conference.

In his Lenin anthology, Paul Le Blanc writes:

The RSDLP was hopelessly divided by factions of liquidator and non-liquidator Mensheviks, Leninist and anti-Leninist Bolsheviks, and others - including a faction against factionalism led by Trotsky! Lenin and those around him conclude that effective revolutionary work could not be accomplished by such an entity, and in 1912 they reorganised themselves as the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, distinctive from all other entities bearing that name ... (p198).

Le Blanc explicitly rejects the ‘party of a new type’ interpretation. Nevertheless, his words might be read (incorrectly, I believe) as implying that Lenin regarded a multi-factional party as *per se* ineffective, so that he made sure that only one faction remained in his new “reorganised” party. Le Blanc fails to make clear enough that Lenin’s case was rather that party work was made ineffective, not by the profusion of factions, but by the doings of one particular group: namely, the liquidators.

Lenin recognised that there were many people in the party who were opposed to the liquidators, but who disagreed with the necessity of excluding them - or perhaps simply disagreed with his method of excluding them. These people had to make a choice, but Lenin was nevertheless perfectly happy to have them in the party and he cannot be said to have excluded them in any meaningful way.

In my opinion, the argument over

whether or not the Bolshevik Party was created in 1912 is less important than strongly rejecting any ‘party of a new type’ interpretation and any assertion that Lenin was now applying the logic appropriate to factions to the party as a whole. The historical record overwhelmingly shows that, as of 1912, Lenin believed that “A fraction is not a party.”

Usurpation or continuity?

In a section of his anthology that he entitles ‘Final break with the Mensheviks’, Le Blanc gives us Lenin’s report to the western European socialists about the recent Prague conference. In this report, Lenin has this to say about the process of organising the conference: “In all, 20 organisations established close ties with the organising commission convening this conference: that is to say, practically all the organisations, both Menshevik and Bolshevik, active in Russia at the present time” (p204).

A funny way of organising a final break with the Mensheviks, one might think: making a good-faith effort to represent all Russian underground organisations regardless of faction. The paradox goes further, since Lenin insisted on continuity between the leadership institutions elected at Prague and the older party. He claimed that the central committee elected at Prague was the authoritative representative of that party and the faithful executor of earlier party decisions (especially party conferences in 1908 and 1910, in which Mensheviks participated and agreed to the relevant resolutions).

If the purpose of the Prague conference was to set up a Bolshevik Party, then Lenin was making a strikingly arrogant claim to possession of the mutual patrimony of both Mensheviks and Bolsheviks. And indeed a common hostile label for him within the party was ‘usurper’. If his aim really was to set up a distinct Bolshevik entity, this label seems appropriate.

In Paul D’Amato’s contribution to the recent discussion, he acknowledges that the way Lenin described his activities to European socialists was duplicitous, if in fact Lenin was doing what D’Amato claims he was doing.¹⁶ D’Amato evidently justifies this duplicity as all in a good cause. In any event, I think he has a better insight into the problem than Paul Le Blanc, who does not seem to recognise any contradiction between his description of Lenin’s activities (setting up a ‘distinct Bolshevik entity’) and Lenin’s own description in the report to the Second International.

Whether or not the Bolsheviks actually did make a good-faith effort to organise a true ‘all-party conference’ is a vexed question. In my own survey of documents from the period, I was impressed by the Bolsheviks’ consistent and energetic insistence that they were not organising a factional conference. Some non-Bolshevik opinion also partially supported their claim to represent at least the underground organisations of Russia proper.

I will add the strictly personal opinion I have expressed elsewhere: if indeed Lenin wanted to create a Bolshevik Party, he set about it in a way that was deceptive, disloyal, destructive and not to be imitated.

After Prague

Looking at social democratic activity between January 1912 (the date of the Prague conference) and 1914, I do not find much evidence that people were thinking in terms of two separate parties. Rather, people continued to think of the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks as two factions of a single party, factions with separate

organisations and devoted (as they always had been) to destructive internecine warfare, but who still thought of themselves as parts of an ill-defined but meaningful whole. In other words, the post-1912 situation did not seem qualitatively new.

A couple of examples, just to show what I mean. A month or so after Prague, the newspaper set up by the conference, *Pravda*, published its first issue, which contained an editorial - written, as it happens, by Iosif Stalin - which made a bid for party unity irrespective of faction. In the fight between *Pravda* and its rival *Luch* over the choice of social democratic candidates for the upcoming legislative elections, both sides based their pitch on the idea of party unity. *Pravda* called for party discipline, and *Luch* called for a common front.

During 1912-14, Lenin often defended the legitimacy of the *Pravdists* (NB: *not* the Bolsheviks as such) by saying that they represented a large *majority* of social democratic workers in Russia. That is to say, despite the exclusion of certain ‘liquidator’ groups at the Prague conference, Lenin still automatically thought in terms of an opportunist minority among the workers as a *legitimate* part of social democracy, even though misguided.

In his history of the party, written in the 1920s, Zinoviev makes what I consider to be misleading comments about Prague as “the moment of complete rupture with the Mensheviks” (for example, he also says, quite incorrectly, that there were no Mensheviks present at the conference). It is therefore quite revealing that immediately after making the comment just quoted, he goes on to say: “the final break from the Mensheviks came not in 1912, but in 1917 ... Up till that minute everyone thought that after the fall of tsarism social democracy would manage to unite itself and that the Bolsheviks would merge with the Mensheviks.”¹⁷

I have reported my impressions, but certainly this is a topic that could use more research.

To conclude: Paul Le Blanc makes a good case that after Prague, the RSDLP was “to all practical purposes” a Bolshevik Party. But this conclusion tells us nothing about how Lenin and the Bolsheviks viewed the relation between faction and party. The historical record is hardly ambiguous on this point: they believed (or acted as if they believed) that a faction and the party were different kinds of things - the Bolsheviks were a faction and not a party, and the Prague conference was in truth what it claimed to be: namely, an all-party conference. They rejected as a slander the idea that they were purging the party of opportunism. They did not think in terms of a ‘party of a new type’, but instead justified what they were doing by norms common to the Second International as a whole.

We are free to accept or reject these views, but not free, I think, to claim that the Bolsheviks did not hold them ●

Notes

1. P Le Blanc, ‘The birth of the Bolshevik Party in 1912’: <http://links.org.au/node/2832>.
2. G Uratadze *Reminiscences of a Georgian Social Democrat* Stanford 1968, p218 (my translation).
3. L Kamenev *Dve partii* Paris 1911 (my translation).
4. L Kamenev *Dve partii* Leningrad 1924.
5. *Ibid* p103.
6. See P D’Amato, ‘The mangling of Tony Cliff’: <http://links.org.au/node/2726>; and my comment in ‘Falling out over a Cliff’ *Weekly Worker* February 16.
7. G Zinoviev *History of the Bolshevik Party: a popular outline* London 1973 (original Russian edition 1923), p12. The citation can also be found at www.marxists.org/archive/zinoviev/works/history/ch01.htm. Zinoviev’s discussion in his history lectures of different possible birth dates for the Bolshevik Party is highly relevant to the present discussion of 1912.

RECESSION

Getting close to the edge

With the UK officially entering a double-dip recession and European voters turning against austerity, writes **Eddie Ford**, crisis is everywhere

Not exactly boosting the government's May 3 election prospects, the Office for National Statistics released data on April 25 showing that the UK has entered a double-dip recession. The economy shrank by 0.2% in the first three months of 2012, following a contraction of 0.3% in the previous quarter - though it should be borne in mind that the April figure is an early estimate using 40% of the data gathered for later revisions and hence will be subject to at least two further revisions in the coming months. But it is almost guaranteed that any revised statistics will not paint a prettier picture of the UK economy.

Damningly for chancellor George Osborne, the ONS pointed out that the fall in government spending had contributed to the particularly large decline in the construction sector. A sentiment reaffirmed by Judy Lowe, deputy chairman for the Sector Skills Council and Industry Training Board (the national training organisation for construction in the UK), who stated that the "huge cuts" in public spending have "left a hole too big for other sectors to fill".

Overall, the ONS concluded that the UK economy had been "flatish" in the past few quarters - fluctuating between quarters of extremely modest growth and then contraction. Previously, Sir Mervyn King, the Bank of England governor, had predicted that the economy would continue to "zigzag" this year, but even that has turned out to be a trifle too optimistic. Whatever the exact microeconomic details, any 'upturn' - if indeed we ever have one - will be very fleeting. Blink and it's gone.

But there was more bad news for George Osborne on May 1 with a survey showing that manufacturing growth slowed to a virtual standstill last month. Markit's Purchasing Managers Index (PMI) reveals that the UK manufacturing sector only just managed to keep above the 50 level which separates growth from contraction. Dangerously close to the edge. And there is no doubt that the still unfolding European crisis is damaging output in Britain, the data showing the sharpest fall in new export orders since May 2009. In a separate study by the accountancy firm Deloitte, 51% of people were "downbeat" about their household's disposable income, up two percentage points from 49% in the previous quarter.

To further add to the gloom - where has the sun gone? - another report last week by the Ernst and Young Item Club said write-offs on corporate loans will increase to 1.9% from 1.6% in 2011. Insolvencies, we read, are "likely to rise more sharply in the north-east of England and Wales, where economic output is set to contract by 0.1% and 0.3% respectively". If so, this will be the highest annual rate of write-offs since the mid-90s. And, obviously, the more loans banks have to write off, the less money they will have to lend. A classic credit squeeze, in other words.

All this has fuelled speculation that the Bank of England's monetary policy committee (MPC) might after all launch another round of quantitative easing (QE). At its last meeting, the MPC appeared to back away from further purchases of government bonds to stimulate lending after nearing the end of its £325 billion bond purchasing



François Hollande: talking against austerity

programme. However, the MPC meets again next week and a majority could vote for a continuation, in one form or another, of QE.

Clearly, the UK economy is bumping painfully along the bottom and can you predict with reasonable certainty that it is set to do so for at least the next decade. Welcome to the stagnation years. But only a fool, or Tory chancellor, could have failed to see this coming. It was inevitable that implementing massive cuts during a period of increased unemployment and a general downturn in world trade would have such a result. The UK's overall output was 4.3% lower in the first quarter of 2012 than it was in the first quarter of 2008, just before the recession started.

As a further sign of the times, the pound hit a two-year high against the euro - at one stage it bought more than €1.23 on the foreign exchanges. Yet the rise in sterling was not a vote of confidence in the UK economy, but rather a collective vote of no confidence in the euro zone. Cheaper foreign holidays, yes, but more expensive UK exports to Europe. The pound was also stronger too against the US dollar, thanks to last week's weaker than expected US growth figures for the first three months of 2012 - that had slowed to an annualised pace of 2.2% in the first quarter of the year from 3% in the final three months of last year. Less, anyway, than the minimum of 2.5% growth that had been widely hoped for.

Confronted by such dispiriting economic data and trends, and absolutely no rational reason to think it will suddenly be thrown into reverse, we might get to enjoy in the relatively near future the phenomenon of a *triple-dip* recession. Maybe it is time to blow the dust off those texts books on economic history.

Catastrophic

Ed Miliband lost no time in denouncing the government for the "catastrophic economic policy" that had "landed the country back in recession". Similarly, Ed Balls, the shadow chancellor, warned that the UK was in danger of entering a Japanese-style "lost decade": ie, a period of slow or non-existent growth and high unemployment. He called upon the Tories to abandon austerity,

given that the "consensus is changing" across Europe, with countries turning away from - or rebelling against - such policies.

Naturally, Cameron refuses to budge. Though the ONS figures were "very, very disappointing", he said, it would be "absolute folly" to abandon the deficit-cutting programme - such a move would "jeopardise" the UK's low interest rates. Almost the ultimate nightmare for Osborne, Cameron and the government. Instead, he pledged to "strain every sinew" and "redouble" the government's efforts to "rebalance" the economy - which has been hit by euro zone shock waves. Upsetting some, Cameron bluntly told viewers of the BBC's determinedly middle-brow *Andrew Marr show* that we are not "anywhere near halfway through" the euro zone crisis - it still has years to run. It is true that Europe's economic and political crisis, far from abating, is developing more acute and explosive forms. Potentially, the whole euro zone project - a profoundly elitist, anti-democratic scheme from the onset - could bust apart, sending the entire global economy into a tailspin.

The evidence is everywhere. Figures released by Eurostat on May 2 showed that unemployment in the euro zone reached a new record high in March, when the jobless rate rose to 10.9% - the highest since the euro was formed in 1999. Inside the euro club, 17.4 million are now looking for work and more than three million of those are under 25. Italy's unemployment rate has reached a 12-year high of 9.8%. Surprisingly, official figures revealed that the jobless rate in Germany rose to 6.8% in March - so the number of Germans now out of work stands at 2.87 million. For the whole of the European Union, including countries such as the UK and Denmark, which remain outside the euro, the jobless rate is 10.2%.

Additionally, Markit's PMI score for the euro zone dropped to 45.9 in April from 47.7 in March - the lowest reading since June 2009. Easily on the wrong side of the 50.0 danger level. Most worryingly for the Euro-bourgeoisie, the rate of contraction in Germany was the fastest since April 2010. The German economic powerhouse is not beginning to look so mighty now.

Then, of course, we have the

rapidly developing disaster that is the Spanish economy, which - to the use the words of foreign minister José Manuel García-Margallo - is facing a crisis of "huge proportions". Latest official figures showed unemployment had climbed to 24.4%, or 5.6 million - 1930s-type levels, if not worse. Inevitably, the rate has soared on the back of 'labour reforms' that make it a lot easier and cheaper for the bosses to sack workers. Some 374,300 jobs were lost in the first three months of this year, representing an estimated reduction of €953 million in income tax receipts. In four of the autonomous regions the jobless rate is over 30% and across the country an appalling 52% of under-25s are out of work - leaving 1.72 million households without a single member in work. Despairingly, the Spanish employment minister, Engracia Hidalgo, said there were "no positive indicators" - whilst García-Margallo described the figures as "terrible for everyone and terrible for the government". Never a truer word said.

If things were not bad enough for Spain, there are growing concerns that the country's chronically ailing banking sector may need a €120 billion or so bailout before the end of the year. It is an open secret that Spanish banks have attempted to disguise billions of euros of bad debts on their books after a collapse in property price wiped more than 60% off the value of homes in some areas. Many families have somehow managed to maintain mortgage payments during the crisis, but a steep rise in unemployment has sent the number of bad loans soaring. No longer able to avoid the mess, the government is considering whether to create a holding company for the banks' toxic real-estate assets after three rounds of forced clean-ups and consolidations in the financial sector failed to draw a line under the problem.

Making matters even worse - it never rains but it pours - the Standard and Poor's ratings agency downgraded Spain's credit status on April 29 - not to mention nine Spanish banks, including Santander and BBVA. The agency based its decision on the quite logical conviction that the situation was worsening. Rising defaults on loans and mortgages could quickly undermine the banking sector, for instance. S&P expects the Spanish economy *at best* to shrink by 1.5% this year and 0.5% in 2013. Spain's rapidly deteriorating economy caused sharp falls on the Madrid stock exchange, while interest rates on 10-year sovereign bonds touched, once again, 6%. Fear of contagion stalks the markets. If Spain starts to topple, or finds it has to beg for a bailout, then Italy would surely start to buckle as well - effectively signally the end of the euro.

European spring?

No wonder that the more intelligent sections of the bourgeoisie are deeply worried. The current situation is obviously unsustainable *politically* and in that way poses a danger to the capitalist system as a whole. Therefore the *Financial Times* has been running a series of articles on the 'crisis of democracy': crucially, how on earth do you get people to vote for more austerity? Unless something serious is done, 'austerity fatigue' is bound to set in and we might even get the outbreak of a European spring - with the masses, and voters, rejecting all

those parties and governments that are committed to deficit reduction and austerity.

Yes, initially that might take the form of voting for the nationalist right, as in France. But, equally, the left can benefit as well. The first round of the French presidential elections saw a significant revival of the Communist Party of France (PCF). 'Official communist' warts and all, the PCF is seen by an increasing number of people as an *alternative* to the austerity politics of Nicolas Sarkozy and the French bourgeois-capitalist establishment as a whole. François Hollande himself, the bookies' clear favourite to win on May 6 after Marine Le Pen advised her Front National voters to abstain, has regularly used the slogan, "Say no to austerity" - promising to "rewrite" or "renegotiate" the new European fiscal pact, which institutionalises 'book-balancing' and 'fiscal consolidation'. German chancellor Angela Merkel quickly retorted that the pact was not up for discussion or negotiation. Period. But now Dutch elections have been called for September after Mark Rutte's government was unable to win parliamentary support for vicious austerity package - another rebellion?

On May 6 we have the Greek elections too - so it could possibly be Black Sunday for the European Central Bank, European Commission and International Monetary Fund troika and all those committed to the fiscal pact. The most recent opinion polls are fairly disastrous for New Democracy and Pasok, the two mainstream parties of right and left increasingly hated for their role in imposing austerity - and utter misery - on the masses. ND is on about 20% of the vote and Pasok has fallen from 44% in 2009 to about 15%. Despite the fact that the electoral system offers an outrageous, anti-democratic, 50-seat 'bonus' to the party with the most votes, it seems extremely likely that no single party will have a working majority in the next parliament.

Under these circumstances, The only way for Pasok and ND to continue implementing their austerity measures - as commanded, of course, by Berlin and Brussels - is for them to form another coalition government: but only if they can scrape together the requisite 151 seats between them. If there is still a bookies' office open in Athens, go in and take a look at the odds - it will not look good for the governmental parties. But just remember that, taken as a whole, the anti-austerity vote is the largest, with the three left parties - Syriza (the Coalition of the Radical Left), the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) and the Democratic Left - jointly polling at about 40%.

As things stand now, therefore, the likelihood is that ND will come first on May 6 - thus securing the 50-seat 'top-up'. Pasok will *probably* come second and the Syriza (the Coalition of the Radical Left) is expected to come third. Alexis Tsipras, Syriza's leader, has promised to "cancel" the austerity package and "negotiate" a debt reduction programme - placing growth and "EU reform" at the heart of the party's programme/manifesto. He has also come out in favour of a coalition government constituted of *left* parties, supported by "popular mobilisation" ●

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AGGREGATE

Perspectives for the left

Where does George Galloway's election victory leave us? What does the CPGB say about recent resignations from its ranks? **Michael Copestake** reports on last weekend's aggregate meeting of members

Meeting in London on Saturday April 29, the CPGB members' aggregate discussed the state of politics after George Galloway's surprise landslide victory in last month's by-election for the parliamentary seat of Bradford West. Is it, as Galloway modestly dubs it, the "Bradford spring" - representing a sea change, an earthquake in British politics? Or is it simply the final late fruit of George Galloway's political autumn and no more than a one-off fluke, albeit a dramatic one? Mike Macnair for the CPGB's Provisional Central Committee opened the discussion with his own assessment, which he left open-ended.

Also on the table was the issue of the recent resignation from the CPGB of comrade Chris Trafford and his decision to throw himself into the recently formed Anti-Capitalist Initiative - a 'broad front' unity initiative formed primarily by Workers Power, the recent split from WP led by Simon Hardy and others, and the previous split in the shape of the comrades from Permanent Revolution. At least one other CPGB member has also left the organisation, although these comrades have said that they will continue to work with the CPGB in groups such as Communist Students, Hands Off the People of Iran and indeed elsewhere.

Post-Galloway prospects

The question of whether Galloway represents the beginning of a wave of political change or is a canny political operator who got lucky remains open, stressed comrade Macnair during his introduction, and will be best answered when the May 3 local election results are in. Either way, he gave a useful survey of the general state of politics in austerity Europe and Britain itself and outlined possible consequences for the left and the workers' movement.

The comrade began by noting that the recently released economic statistics indicating that the UK economy has suffered a double-dip recession were indicative of stagnation with inflation rather than dramatic decline and that we should expect this situation to continue, perhaps for some time. Contrasting the European north and south as "creditor" and "debtor" nations, comrade Macnair noted that the German economy was doing relatively well, with the lowest levels of unemployment since reunification. Meanwhile states like Spain and Greece are undergoing wrenching and destructive economic deterioration.

Turning to the political opposition this has generated, he observed that in some German local *Länder* parliaments the Social Democratic Party and Greens were actually offering more intransigent opposition to an austerity budget than the leftwing Die Linke. The Communist Party of Greece (KKE) by contrast calls for the people to elect a majority of MPs who would implement a programme of Keynesianism in one country. In short the response of the entire left has been feeble and politically inadequate.

The recent presidential election in France has caused much comment, but, the comrade said, the thing to note is that the Left Front under Jean-Luc Mélenchon, supported by the Parti Communiste Français, has



George Galloway: recognition factor

only managed to re-assemble the leftwing vote from 2002 - albeit this time with the PCF at the head (the far-left Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste and Lutte Ouvrière were marginalised in the election). This is combined with the fact that it has been the right in the form of the Front National which has taken the anti-austerity vote. Indeed, the government of the Netherlands has recently fallen following the refusal of the right to vote for austerity. Present polling indicates that there may well be a political breakthrough for the UK Independence Party and the fascist Golden Dawn in Greece.

In terms of significant change to the political landscape of the UK in the near future, the comrade felt that *potentially* we might see further losses by Labour at the hands of the Scottish National Party north of the border - Labour could end up largely restricted electorally to the north of England and parts of London, and without the ability to form majority governments. The generalised political discontent that Galloway represents may tip over into a series of high-profile votes for every protest party going, from Ukip to the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition.

What does this mean for the left, he asked? Firstly, the massive groundswell of spontaneous anti-cuts resistance that the left anticipated has not (yet) occurred. So far, while public sector unions have been able to mobilise their members for one-day protests, the competing anti-cuts campaigns themselves have been restricted to the usual suspects. The small but noticeable increase in strikes may, however, be indicating that people are turning more, if only a bit more, to their trade unions to resist attacks on living standards. This in turn may lead the left groups to emphasise work in their own trade union fractions, at the expense of attempts to provide a *political* lead, which are already pretty limited.

As far as this concerns the CPGB, the comrade noted that the nature of our project - the unity of Marxists on a principled basis - means that we must be where the left is. The problem for the CPGB is that the left outside Labour has split and separated itself far and wide, while no substantial move to the left has occurred in the Labour Party despite our previous predictions that this is likely to occur.

In the discussion that followed comrade John Bridge expressed uncertainty that a 'turn to trade unions' was happening, given just how small

the increase in strikes has been. The comrade foresaw a world without the Liberal Democrats as an independent party - a section would probably end up as an unofficial wing of the Tories through some electoral pact. While the PCC had not thought that Galloway would come close to winning in Bradford, he noted that it was also a surprise to just about everyone else - even Respect itself had not at first expected it. Speaking of Respect, he said it had the advantage of George Galloway as its candidate, and his name is high recognition compared to say, Tusc, which appears out of thin air at election time in limited parts of the country to advocate left Labourism before promptly vanishing again.

Soheil Frazad thought that the state of the economy was *worse* than was being officially suggested and wondered how things may look when the Olympic spending comes to a halt. Comrade Frazad also thought that Labour's national vote may well hold up, despite the party having nothing to say which resonates - not even some kind of Keynesianism. However, she could see Labour losing control of Glasgow to the SNP simply because of the infamous corruption of the Labour council during its seemingly never-ending years of control - an assessment echoed by comrade Sarah McDonald.

Comrade James Turley was of the opinion that, as far as the political side of things goes, there was the possibility of the Anti-Capitalist Initiative being directed in a more positive direction despite its significant flaws. He suggested that at least some of those involved were rethinking the history of Bolshevism and the meaning of unity, which is a step forward. The comrade also called for the CPGB to undertake serious theoretical work in relation to the trade unions, as it had, for example, with the Labour Party.

Weekly Worker editor Peter Manson pointed out that despite the lack of a convincing move to the left by Labour there had nevertheless been a shift in the tone of its leaders' rhetoric, even up to appearing ambiguous about the recent high-profile public sector strikes.

Comrade Jim Gilbert forthrightly stated his belief that those who were looking for a strong move to the left from Labour were deluded and that many in the labour movement looked at the three main parties and saw only three shades of Toryism. The comrade lamented the attitude of the existing Labour left: it was utterly unwilling

to think critically about its politics, engage with the anti-cuts movement as a whole or even criticise the rightwing leadership out of a sense of duty to 'our party', he said.

Mike Macnair rounded up the discussion by agreeing with comrade Turley's point that a restatement of the basics of Marxism regarding trade unions would be a useful tool to have. He thought that comrade Gilbert's characterisation of the state of the Labour Party was broadly correct and that, as always, the Labour left is organically tied to the Labour right through its conviction that progress could only come through a Labour government.

The Labour leadership, added comrade Macnair, is refusing to adopt even mildly radical policies, as it feels it can win the next general election simply by letting the Tory coalition lose it, and keeping quiet in order not to put off the middle class swing voters and lose the good graces of the bourgeois media, which go into attack mode whenever there is even a hint of a move to the left. Comrade Macnair finished by lamenting the stupidity of some on the left who appeared to believe that the CPGB is advocating general entryism into the Labour Party when it is not and never has done so.

Resignation

CPGB national organiser comrade Mark Fischer opened a session devoted to discussing the causes and consequences of the recent departure of Chris Trafford and what this means for the CPGB.

The comrade began by noting that comrade Trafford was a hard-working and quietly charismatic comrade who seems to have left because, despite his membership of the CPGB, he had never quite 'got' our politics. Comrade Fischer suggested that this may have something to do with his background as an anarcho-syndicalist who has recently appeared enamoured with movementism and Occupy. He said that despite the attempts by the PCC to draw out comrades Trafford's political differences with the majority, and the plentiful opportunities afforded him to do this, including in the pages of the *Weekly Worker*, the comrade had never set out in detail what his political differences were, though they found expression in, for example, his opposition to the majority view of the Labour Party. This and the comrade's enthusiasm for 'movements' were seen as probably borne of political frustration with the period we are living in.

The continued political and practical disintegration of the left, said comrade Fischer, most certainly affects the CPGB, which remains small, although it exercises disproportionate influence thanks to the *Weekly Worker*. We suffer from the absence of a firm national infrastructure and an unequal attitude to the duties of members - with some comrades fulfilling many and others very few. It was perhaps far too easy for frustrated comrades to simply blame the leadership, which is already swamped with competing priorities. The comrade concluded by stressing the importance of party organisation: all members must prioritise important CPGB events, ensure they pay dues and take the need for education seriously.

Comrade Maciej Zurowski began

the discussion by stating that comrade Trafford was unequivocally wrong to have resigned. He reiterated the necessity for our project that we must interact with the left. That means we must be where the left is and it was good that the CPGB had intervened at the ACI event happening on the same day with an excellent leaflet.

Tina Becker re-emphasised a point made in the previous session that it is hard to go through the left when the left refuses to do anything very much. Using the example of the often moribund local anti-cuts coalitions, the comrade observed that the political frustration with the general situation that may drive comrades to leave the CPGB makes it harder to cohere our existing forces when the left is doing so little together.

Comrade Frazad said that comrade Trafford had repeatedly criticised the CPGB for being 'distant from the movement', but she thought his criticisms were basically wrong. Comrade Frazad also said that the party should be more optimistic and less negative about efforts like the ACI and, irrespective of their failings, we have to make the best of whatever the left is doing. The comrade finished by questioning the tone of some of the discussions on the e-list and suggested that some comrades were too quick to categorise others as holding 'ultra-left' politics or whatever. Perhaps this may have contributed to comrade Trafford's resignation.

In response comrade John Bridge of the PCC said that all we can do is attempt to foster a positive culture. But we certainly will not censor comrades who label the politics of others in such a way. He also felt that, while the loss of any comrade was sad, Chris should have taken the advice the CPGB always gives to comrades across the left: which is to stay in the organisation to which they belong and fight for their politics rather than splitting - especially as in this case the comrade was given the room to do exactly that.

Comrade Bridge also highlighted the fact that in the past the CPGB had thrown itself wholeheartedly into the Socialist Alliance and had also involved itself in both the Socialist Labour Party and Respect from the outset. If there was a viable option allowing us to do the same again, then the PCC would absolutely not hesitate in recommending such a course. However, he felt that the attempt by Workers Power and co to set up yet another halfway house party would not attract significant support beyond its own very limited milieu.

The comrade also stated that he was now convinced that the CPGB needs a more thorough induction process to ensure that prospective members understand our political principles, not to mention their own rights and duties. For example, although Chris Trafford had been a member for four years, he had not really engaged with the organisation, rarely attending party events or aggregates and failing to pay regular dues. Mike Macnair noted that, in the absence of any significant left regroupment into which the CPGB could throw itself, there seemed to be nothing capable of holding comrade Trafford as a member.

The aggregate unanimously agreed to the proposal of comrade Becker that Soheil Frazad be elected to the PCC with immediate effect ●

LEFT

Ditch sects and fronts

Last Saturday's launch of the Anti-Capitalist Initiative provided further evidence of an increasingly fractured, rightward-drifting left. **Ben Lewis** reports

As I reported in last week's *Weekly Worker*, bound up with the recent decamping of 15 younger comrades from Workers Power (British Section of the League for a Fifth International) is another far-left *unity* drive under the title of the Anti-Capitalist Initiative. I was at its founding national conference on April 28, and was thus able to get more of an insight into the dynamics. All three recent splinters are heavily involved: Workers Power itself, Permanent Revolution and the former WP youth.¹

Not that the split was openly, honestly debated and accounted for from the conference floor. I think I was the only speaker to mention it at all. Most of what I was able to discover about what is *actually* going on came from where the politics really happens - in the café before the meeting, and in the pub following it. This is, after all, British Trotskyism, and Saturday was about talking to the 'broader' masses: ie, the 40 or 50 people who are *not* involved with Workers Power and its splits (those present from WP/ex-WP backgrounds must have numbered around 25-30).

Indeed, almost all of the 'local anti-capitalist groups' represented at the meeting came from areas where WP and its splinters have traditionally been organised - south London, Sussex, Manchester and Leeds. In spite of the 'official optimism' witnessed in several reports² of the weekend, the low numbers, the low level of politics and the inability to reach out to wider forces must have been a cause for some disappointment.

Behind the scenes

More of that later. My first impressions

of what was in store came when I arrived at the University of London Union early to grab a coffee and catch up with some reading. I came across the two people who had made it down from Manchester - former WP leading member John Bowman and ex-CPGB comrade Chris Strafford. We were soon joined by other members of the recent split, such as Simon Hardy and Luke Cooper, as well as Stuart King of the Permanent Revolution group.

It slowly became evident that I had inadvertently walked into some kind of organisational meeting for the day. Who was going to run registration? Who was going to chair? Etc. Indeed, in between some exchanges around my article on the WP split in the *Weekly Worker*, I was also asked whether I would run the registration desk (I politely declined, but comrade Chris Strafford was more than willing to carry out such a task).

I then heard something in conversation which made my ears prick up. A comrade was having a jest with Simon Hardy for not placing any demands on Permanent Revolution in relation to "a new journal", when he quite clearly should have asked for "less on Kronstadt, and less on political economy". I enquired as to the status of this journal, and was told it would be "announced when it is announced". It would appear that there has been some behind-the-scenes rapprochement between PR and the WP youth. This seems to have taken place two weeks ago, when leading WP youth were seen at the 'PR publications' aggregate.

I later found out, again in private conversation, that this journal was going to be for "the Marxists in the

Anti-Capitalist Initiative". Only those in Permanent Revolution and the recent young split seem to be in the loop for now.

Anyway, this little organisation meeting did allow me to also get an impression of what those pulling the strings in this project understand by it. For Stuart King, whose joint resolution with Luke Cooper was later passed, the Marxists should seek to be "as minoritarian as possible" within a new formation, reaching out to "broader" forces in the Occupy movement, anarchists, autonomists, etc. Stuart took issue with my argument that the failures of the left in the last 10 years or so should be located at the level of programme and faux-attempts at unity around things like the sub-reformist, nationalist hodge-podge that was *People before profit*. For Stuart, however, the latter was a "good, leftwing programme" for unity.

Just before the conference, I also spoke to Richard Brenner (WP majority), who was very friendly and forthcoming. He explained what he meant by his proposals for an anti-capitalist initiative, arguing that the 'non-affiliated' unions could play a role in what he saw as a kind of 'transitional party' on the way to the revolutionary party we need. I asked whether, as a result, he would, for example, support Unison disaffiliation from Labour, which he affirmed. When I pointed out that such a move would be likely to lead to an apolitical dead end, comrade Brenner said that I did not understand Trotsky's workers' party tactic of the 1930s. That we are not in America, or the 1930s, did not seem directly relevant to him.

I then made my way up to meeting room 3B, more aware of what was going on behind the scenes than many of the other comrades attending, who would be told nothing of the plans of those pulling the strings. (Indeed, Richard Brenner was also surprised to hear of the plans for a publication!)

It was quite clear, however, that both sides of the WP split were seeking to set their agenda 'to the right' of the Marxist politics they purportedly uphold.

Déjà-vu

In introducing the meeting, Simon Hardy talked about how the initiative had been launched last December,³ following a sense of "disappointment" with a situation where there are three different national anti-cuts campaigns and there has been such a weak level of resistance to austerity. While, behind the scenes at least, his plans were quite clear, he stated that "nothing was off the table" in terms of a future organisation. He wanted it to be "an open forum where people can come with their ideas". Nick Jones of the National Union of Teachers then spoke about the mood for a fightback in the NUT, something that was being held back by the leadership and the union 'broad left'. This necessitated a rank-and-file movement in the unions.

Quite right, and this discussion dominated the first session. Many bemoaned the fact that little was done about actually building a rank-and-file movement, despite the left constantly talking about a much needed initiative. But what politics was this movement to have? I made the point that the *political* basis of such a movement would have to offer

a consistent, viable and inspiring alternative to the nationalist, state-loyal and anti-democratic outlook of the trade union bureaucracy, including many of the 'broad lefts' or 'left bureaucrats'.

Moreover, the notion that 80 people are going to go off and build a rank-and-file movement in the unions is either cynical posturing or naive self-delusion. Rebuilding the class as a whole, not just in the unions, presupposes a partyist project that is different from, and counterposed to, Labourism. Matt Cooper from the Alliance for Workers' Liberty made the point that a rank-and-file movement is not something that is announced or built overnight: it takes long and patient work.

Little by way of programme was discussed, with most comrades content to speak about the "key points we agree on" (Andy, Leeds Workers Power), especially since "nobody on the left" was attempting rank-and-file work at the moment. The basis for this rather odd assertion was that the Socialist Workers Party's Unite the Resistance front had cancelled its proposed conference. But is establishing another, significantly smaller, front really the answer? Comrade Barbara Dorn from the International Bolshevik Tendency did suggest that the problem was one of "programme": ie, that we were divided on the key question of reform or revolution. Therefore, it would be better to join in common actions wherever possible and discuss such cardinal questions as honestly as possible. That is certainly preferable to setting up yet another front group.

All three strands of current/former WP cadre mainly focussed their fire on the need for grassroots organisation and rank-and-file structures in the unions, which often involved reporting on the state of basic union organisation and structure. This was not entirely without merit, but it also exposed the 'activist/spontaneist' limitations of the comrades. One of the WP youth splinter talked about pushing for a national demo on the national health service through an organisation similar to the Stop the War Coalition, but geared towards the NHS. He cited the "days of action" that "drew the mass" behind the student movement of 2010-11, which is hardly thinking big.

To the extent that the party question emerged at all, it mainly came from the ranks of those who saw such a formation as the last thing that was needed, given they had already spent years of their life 'building the party'. Doubtless sincere, these comrades were obviously burnt by their experiences, and thus were content to concentrate on building 'the movement'. This sentiment was hardly challenged by the Marxists in the room.

Resolutions

The politics of the new initiative was discussed in the second session. Comrade Brenner introduced a motion from Workers Power, which broadly sketched out a "process to develop a political programme" based on the template I critiqued in my last article: ie, "opposition to austerity, privatisation, racism, sexism, imperialist war". Comrade Brenner said that his proposals did not mean "waiting for the unions", but taking steps forward now (this did not mean

that the programmatic proposals were *not* aimed at luring 'left' unions, of course).

However, his proposals did actually have the merit of putting forward actual politics aimed at some kind of *party* project - Luke Cooper had defended a 'broad network' by pointing out that there was not agreement on the party question at this point. While he did not do so explicitly, Stuart King defended this kind of anti-party liquidationism with clarity: "Let's not rush it," he implored. "If we say we are for a party then UK Uncut and the anarchists will run a mile." Toby Abse said that the forces for revolutionary regroupment were "too small" at this time. Better, he thought, to set up a broad party able to fight back by defending the NHS, etc. Things got even worse when Bill Jeffries of PR spoke. Echoing the infamous words of John Rees at the founding conference of Respect, he said: "We are building a network from the base up." Therefore, it was not the people at this meeting who would decide our policy, but those not currently in the room - "the ones who are out there joining" the movement.

I wonder, then, just what Bill thinks the role of Marxist politicians actually is. Why bother with programmatic debates, and studying the works of Marx, Lenin, Trotsky *et al*? Speaking against WP's motion, Simon Hardy said something that perhaps let slip the limited nature of the project's aim. For him, WP's (halfway house) proposals should be seen more as "the end of the process than the beginning". Agitating for what she called "libertarian communism", one comrade quite rightly made the point that this whole thing smacked of the far left once again toning down its politics in the name of a quick fix.

The first resolution from PR and the ex-WP youth was almost entirely lacking in programmatic content. It was important to search out "avenues for unity and cooperation that present radical and socialist ideas in a way that is more appealing to new layers of activists"; and to promote "activity and struggle that aims to overcome division and sectarianism and points the way to a new type of society without exploitation and oppression" (in line with the spontaneism of WP, this emphasis on 'action' as the main way of overcoming left divisions and sectarianism was a common one).

Given the choice between an open, unashamed halfway house party (Workers Power, motion 2) and one that left this aim unstated (motion 1), I argued that both should be opposed - it is utterly pointless setting up a network on such a basis, and much better to continue to seek further political and strategic discussions. As it was, the first part of motion 1 passed by 35 votes to 13 with 11 abstentions. The second part, establishing a steering committee etc, passed with just two votes against and a handful of abstentions. Motion 2 was fairly soundly defeated (I do not have the exact figures), so the ACI is not officially aiming for any kind of party. A third motion, aimed at establishing a campaign to defend the NHS, was unsurprisingly passed with just one recently expelled WP activist dissenting.

For all the talk of a 'new' initiative, on Saturday, the speeches, atmosphere and nature of the discussions reminded me of the many student 'unity' conferences I have attended over the years. The difference being that initiatives like Education Not for



Both sides are....

Sale, Education Activist Network, Student Respect, etc actually mobilised *more* numbers to their events, despite the fact that they were limited to students.

Those like Chris Trafford who walked out of the CPGB in order to pursue the “positive step” of the ACI, but who remain members of Communist Students, might do well to look back at the CS critique of these ‘broad front’, ‘anti-capitalist’ student organisations such as ENS. They apply in equal measure to the ACI. What Dave Isaacson and Ben Klein wrote after an ENS conference in 2007 could apply to 2012: “The Alliance for Workers’ Liberty is setting up this organisation - it supplies the bulk of the organised activists and has political control of ENS. Instead of looking to establishing something guided and informed by the politics of Marxism, the AWL comrades are, in the name of unity with largely imaginary forces, consciously limiting their politics.”⁴

Comrade Trafford, unwilling to take up the argument for the ACI in the CPGB, is now concentrating his fire on getting Communist Students involved. Aware that he cannot now plausibly argue that the problems of the left in the past 20 years have stemmed from illusions in broad frontism and the conscious limiting of the Marxist programme, his recent article on the CS website offers us a new explanation: “The last two decades are littered with the corpses of failed left unity projects. One of the key errors of these attempts was the focus on or collapse into electoralism. Instead of building organisations that were in tune with the rhythm of working class struggle, the left built entities that hibernated between elections. The left must dump this approach and see elections as an occasional opportunity to spread its programme or progress a particular struggle”.⁵

This is highly confused. It is true that the Socialist Alliance in particular “hibernated between elections” and that it was guilty of “electoralism” by opportunistically watering down its programme. But in this it is at one with the approach of the ACI. The idea is not even to “spread” a dishonest, extraordinarily limited and thoroughly incoherent programme. The idea is that

action, almost in and of itself, provides the key to the future. A hopeless perspective.

Liquidation

So what about the recent split from WP? So far neither side has published the details of their disputes, but some kind of picture is starting to emerge. I agree with the WP majority (with reservations) when it describes the recent split as liquidationist: ie, that these comrades saw “the transitional organisation” (the ACI) as “an end in itself, a replacement for Workers Power in its present form and with its present politics”.⁶ The comrades of the split are clearly junking their old politics, but together with their former comrades are bent on setting something up which has nothing whatever to do with the Marxist world outlook, the Marxist programme and the Marxist method of party building: in other words all three current and former WP factions are committed to the politics of liquidationism.

It is delectably ironic that these debates are occurring around the time of the 100-year anniversary of the 1912 Prague conference of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party. The controversy surrounding liquidationism and partyism at that conference has big ramifications for today. If the newly decamped WP comrades are claiming to draw on some of the latest scholarship on Lenin and the Bolsheviks, then they are definitely drawing the *wrong* conclusions. Certainly not the kind of Marxist-partyist conclusions we in the CPGB draw. Rather disingenuously, a WP statement attributes the liquidationism of their former comrades to “the quasi-libertarian critiques of Leninism and Trotskyism presently fashionable on the English-speaking left: Pham Binh, Louis Proyect and the *Weekly Worker*”.⁷ But this paper has polemicised against the movementist and, yes, liquidationist conclusions drawn by Pham Binh.

Of course, what the young WP comrades are liquidating is not Marxism, but the *sect* outlook they have acquired in Workers Power. This constant flipping between sectarianism and liquidationism/opportunism has, unfortunately, been characteristic of the far left for far too long. On the one hand, Marxism for them means

the ideological agreement of the tightly-knit sect around things like the first four congresses of Comintern or the nature of the Soviet Union. On the other hand, the comrades constantly limit their ‘practical’ political outlook so as to ‘get an audience’, ‘catch the wind’ or provide a space to seek allies to their right. This, not “electoralism” *per se*, is the “key failure” of the left to make any serious moves in the direction of a united Communist Party.

Understanding the sectarian side of the coin is important, because it directly *feeds into* liquidationism. The former WP comrades are reacting negatively, apolitically, to the culture of their former organisation. WP states: “The public discussion of internal disputes is not a general principle of communist organisation. It is, of course, unavoidable in a mass party, whose internal life will be reported in its mass press. There is no abstract ‘right’, however, for an individual party member, or for minorities, to criticise the party in public.”⁸

In conversation with me, comrade King accused the CPGB of operating on a similar sect basis to WP and the IBT: ie, that the CPGB is only prepared to unite with you “when you agree to our programme”.⁹ But again this is nonsense. What we say is that unless we openly commit to building a party committed to the programmatic *fundamentals* of Marxism, with space and room to debate tactical and indeed strategic disagreements, then we will not get anywhere at all. What do we learn from 1912? That at all times, whatever the level of the class struggle, the task of Marxists is to unite all those committed to a Marxist political party.

For us, theory and programme are not afterthoughts, or things that are abandoned for further ‘down the line’ as part of some non-defined ‘process’. Social democracy is not a signpost to Marxism.

Comrade Brenner and other speakers on Saturday quite correctly highlighted the anti-capitalist sentiment that exists in society. There is a real mood for change. But the task of Marxists is to finally break with both sides of the sect dichotomy. That requires a political *fight* amongst the advanced sections of the class, not walking away from big disputes like the younger comrades from WP in the name of ‘getting out there’, frustrated at the failures of the left. So now we have yet another ‘broad front’ initiative (with a behind-the-scenes regroupment project in the background), which now seems to have spilled over into the ranks of Communist Students.

If we are to live up to the great historical responsibilities thrown the way of revolutionaries, then we must foreground the creation of a political alternative that *can* rebuild the class, instead of merely posturing in that direction ●

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Notes

1. There is a fourth splinter around those who were expelled at the last conference of Workers Power for breaking discipline over Libya. These comrades appear to be working closely with Gerry Downing’s Socialist Fight group.
2. ‘Building a new left: a great start’ (<http://southlondoncapitalists.wordpress.com/2012/04/30/building-a-new-left-a-great-start/>) includes this quote from ‘Tom’, which shows the direction in which the project is headed: “I’ve long been active in social movements and interested in Marxist ideas, but the idea of joining a top-down left party never appealed. I’m excited about this new initiative because it offers a space to discuss a range of anti-capitalist perspectives and organise action as equals.” Stuart King’s report, ‘A hopeful start’, can be read at www.permanentrevolution.net/entry/3400.
3. In reality the ‘anti-capitalist party’ tactic of Workers Power has a much longer history. See Peter Manson’s report of the (united) Workers Power advocacy of halfway-housism: ‘Rival CNWP launched’ *Weekly Worker* November 19 2009.
4. ‘Left unity not on offer’ *Weekly Worker*, May 15 2008.
5. <http://communiststudents.org.uk/?p=7354>. Bizarrely, given what actually happened on Saturday, his article is entitled ‘Revolutionary unity and building the fightback’.
6. ‘Statement on resignations from the British section of the League’.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. Such an approach is not exclusive to the IBT. It is also that of Workers Power. In its statement WP writes, without any sense of irony or humility: “We do not present our programme as an ultimatum, in a ‘take it or leave it’, ‘all or nothing’ way. We are clear, however, that without it the new organisation would not be a fully revolutionary organisation; it would be some sort of intermediate centrist organisation.” This is all the more absurd, as it is essentially arguing that it is somehow incumbent upon Marxists to *establish* centrist parties!

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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Our side needs
its own mass
media

Murdoch bites back

The News International owner has his moment of revenge on David Cameron writes **Paul Demarty** - but the establishment is the real victim

The usual function of a public judicial inquiry is to bore everyone slowly to death of its remit, before delivering a convenient whitewash.

Perhaps that is exactly what David Cameron had in mind when he convened the Leveson inquiry. Last summer, the phone-hacking story was rapidly extending its tentacles into every upper echelon of society; *something* had to be done to slow down its spread. Who better to turn to than a judge, to help kick the thing into the long grass?

Unfortunately for him, it has hardly turned out like that. The reasons are various. Firstly, there is the interest Murdoch's rivals have in sticking the knife in where the opportunity arises - though this is more true of *The Guardian* and *The Independent* than other outlets, which are generally complicit in the sort of thing over which Murdoch's papers have come to grief.

Secondly, there is the small matter of the Labour Party. The latter's strategic refusal to differentiate itself politically from Cameron in any meaningful way, for fear of being judged 'fiscally irresponsible' by 'middle class swing voters' (or, what is the same thing, the bourgeoisie), has left it peculiarly reliant on those moments when bad news haunts the government. All parties, of course, are implicated in Murdoch's power-broking; but it is inevitably harder for an incumbent government to dissociate itself from him - particularly a Tory government, always more obviously in the pocket of the wealthy. Ed Miliband and his allies thus feel they have something of a free hand in hammering Cameron.

On the Hunt

Finally, and perhaps most ominously for Cameron, it is increasingly clear that Murdoch (and the press more generally) has turned on him. The latter's support for Alex Salmond in Scottish elections is one, early sign - but it should not be forgotten that it was a Murdoch paper that broke the Peter Cruddas 'cash for access' scandal.

Any doubt on this score should have been thoroughly dispelled by last week's hearings at the Leveson inquiry, which saw both Rupert and James Murdoch testifying. Both had been coached to give exactly the right answers, no matter how implausible, to avoid dropping themselves in it.

This shield of denial, however, was not large enough to accommodate culture secretary Jeremy Hunt, who was dropped in it by the younger Murdoch's submission of a new tranche of incriminating emails. The background, as many will remember, was Vince Cable being caught by *Sunday Telegraph* journalists claiming he was going to nix Murdoch's attempt to take a 100% stake in BSkyB; amid accusations of bias, Cameron handed the brief to Jeremy Hunt.

Hunt proclaimed he was approaching the deal in an apolitical, "quasi-judicial" manner - by which he meant the official image of the judiciary as an impartial dispenser of

an impersonal law. Of course, justice is, by and large, for sale to the highest bidder; and in this respect, Hunt had impeccable 'quasi-judicial' credentials.

Murdoch junior provided extensive documentary evidence to the effect that Hunt's office was squarely behind the BSkyB takeover from the off, that he or his aides had been treated to various freebies courtesy of the Murdochs (notably a Take That concert, a slightly worrying treat for a minister of *culture*), and that in the early stages of the crisis over the phone hacking of teenage murder victim Milly Dowler, Hunt remained on the look-out for ways to complete the deal successfully.

Hunt has defended himself in two, more or less equally implausible, ways. Firstly, there is the 'shit rolls downhill' tactic - his aide, Adam Smith, has had to take the flak for 'improper' relations with lobbyists. The notion that Adam Smith really was a serviceable meat shield between Hunt and the Murdoch empire is, as Dostoevsky would put it, a 'stick with two ends': viz, if it is true, Hunt is incompetent; and if it is false, Hunt is dishonest and corrupt.

To bolster that flimsy case, Hunt further claims that Frédéric Michel, the lobbyist in question, was exaggerating his influence over Hunt to please his bosses. This may even be true to an extent - but if *all* Michel's damaging allegations were false, in particular a 'sneak preview' of a significant Hunt speech, it would have been quite impossible for James Murdoch not to twig that he was being taken for a ride. The honourable member for South West Surrey's chances of surviving a cabinet reshuffle are slim - should he avoid a brisk shove onto his own sword in the interim.

Murdoch's revenge

The other headline testimony came from the patriarch himself. This was, for the most part, self-serving. As far as the phone-hacking affair went, he

pleaded ignorance as to its extent at the *News of the World*, and claimed that the dirt had been withheld from him by the likes of Colin Myler, the paper's last editor, and its chief lawyer, Tom Crone.

This may backfire on him - Crone, in particular, has already resisted attempts to paint him as the top man in the cover-up. His unwillingness to play patsy has already delivered Rebekah Brooks, Murdoch's former chief lieutenant, into the tender attentions of the Metropolitan Police. Brooks had a direct line to Murdoch, with whom she was personally as well as professionally close. The more alienated former employees like Crone and Myler become, the more likely they will be to take down the Murdochs with them.

In particular, given the report of the culture, sport and media select committee on phone hacking, published this week, Murdoch may want to tread carefully. Discrepancies between the accounts of senior and junior figures are seized on to produce a report absolutely damning of the Murdochs, accusing them of not being fit to run a major corporation, and raising the prospect of criminal proceedings against high-profile individuals who misled parliament. How hard will it be to turn Tom Crone into a witness for the prosecution?

After all, is this not precisely the game Murdoch is playing with Cameron? Though relatively circumspect, despite utterly ludicrously claims that he had never secured favours from a prime minister, acidic side comments abounded about almost every major political figure for the last few years. Asked if, upon meeting David Cameron for the first time, he considered him a light-weight, Murdoch slyly replied: "Not then." If the political class has discovered the requisite intestinal fortitude to disown Murdoch, then the latter is quite prepared to make good on the veiled threat he has issued to every political

leader for decades - we have the dirt; if you do not play ball, we will do you in.

It has often been remarked - in this paper and elsewhere - that the Murdoch scandal has opened a window onto the shady ways of the establishment. What is perhaps more remarkable is that, since *The Guardian* finished the first lot of heavy lifting last June, the establishment has done most of the damage itself, in a flurry of mutual accusations and desperate arse-covering. Their cosy lash-up exposed, every partner in the deal - the Murdochs, the News International employees sacrificed to save them, the police, the media as a whole and the political class - has been quite desperate to dish the dirt on everyone else. If ever there was a demonstration of that old adage about honour among thieves, this is it.

The question is not whether we will return to 'business as usual' - this, all things being equal, is more or less inevitable. If Murdoch's interests in this country do not survive, others will replace them; slowly, the links between the different fractions of the bourgeois elite will be reforged. The question is: how much damage will need to be repaired? Will it cost Murdoch another newspaper, the Met another figurehead, her majesty her government?

Workers' media

Most importantly: what opportunities will the left and workers' movement take hold of? Once the establishment - in a year, or two years, or even longer - finally manages to close ranks, we will be back to 'business as usual' in another sense: the most powerful enemy of the ruling class will not be so very much itself, and will be the left once more. The bourgeois press, whose centrality to bourgeois political rule cannot be overestimated, will have gone through its lowest ebb of legitimacy perhaps in the whole history of this country.

This period is ideal for the workers' movement to consolidate its *own* press, to produce a whole set of media

organically connected to the lives of millions. *The Sun* could be replaced in every greasy spoon in the land with a mass-market paper that did not treat its readership as a pack of idiots concerned only with celebrities, tits and suspicious foreigners; and *The Guardian* could be supplanted by a broadsheet with more than an episodic commitment to high-quality investigative journalism. We could have rolling news channels and websites as spangly as the BBC's - the whole kit and caboodle.

Alas, where the bourgeoisie has its establishment, we have our own. The labour movement is dominated by the bureaucracy - and bureaucratic propaganda sheets, from the occasional magazines of the trade unions to the *Yawning Star*, to the Brezhnev-era *Pravda*, are uniformly dull.

As for the far left, nominally the most far-sighted and critical-minded members of that movement, its press leaves more than a little to be desired. *Socialist Worker*, in pursuit of the *Sun/Mirror* market, apes the stupidity and delusional content of the tabloid press. *The Socialist* contains on average one page of material worth reading, with the other 11 utterly unchanging in content from week to week (the *Weekly Worker* office runs a tally of the number of times the words 'cuts' (previously 'strike') appears in the headlines of each issue of *The Socialist* - the mean average is currently around seven). For both the official and the far left, criticism is intolerable - and so, development of a meaningful discourse in its press is impossible.

There is immense potential for a diverse and challenging workers' press with a genuine mass appeal, against which even the likes of Murdoch could not compete - but to achieve that potential, we will need to challenge the dominance of the labour bureaucracy and the petty, self-interested sect regimes that will sing only the tune of official optimism.

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