

weekly worker



**Dave Nellist and Tusc:
no Bradford spring for
the divided left**

■ Italian elections
■ Reading 'Capital'
■ Communist Students
■ Paul Le Blanc

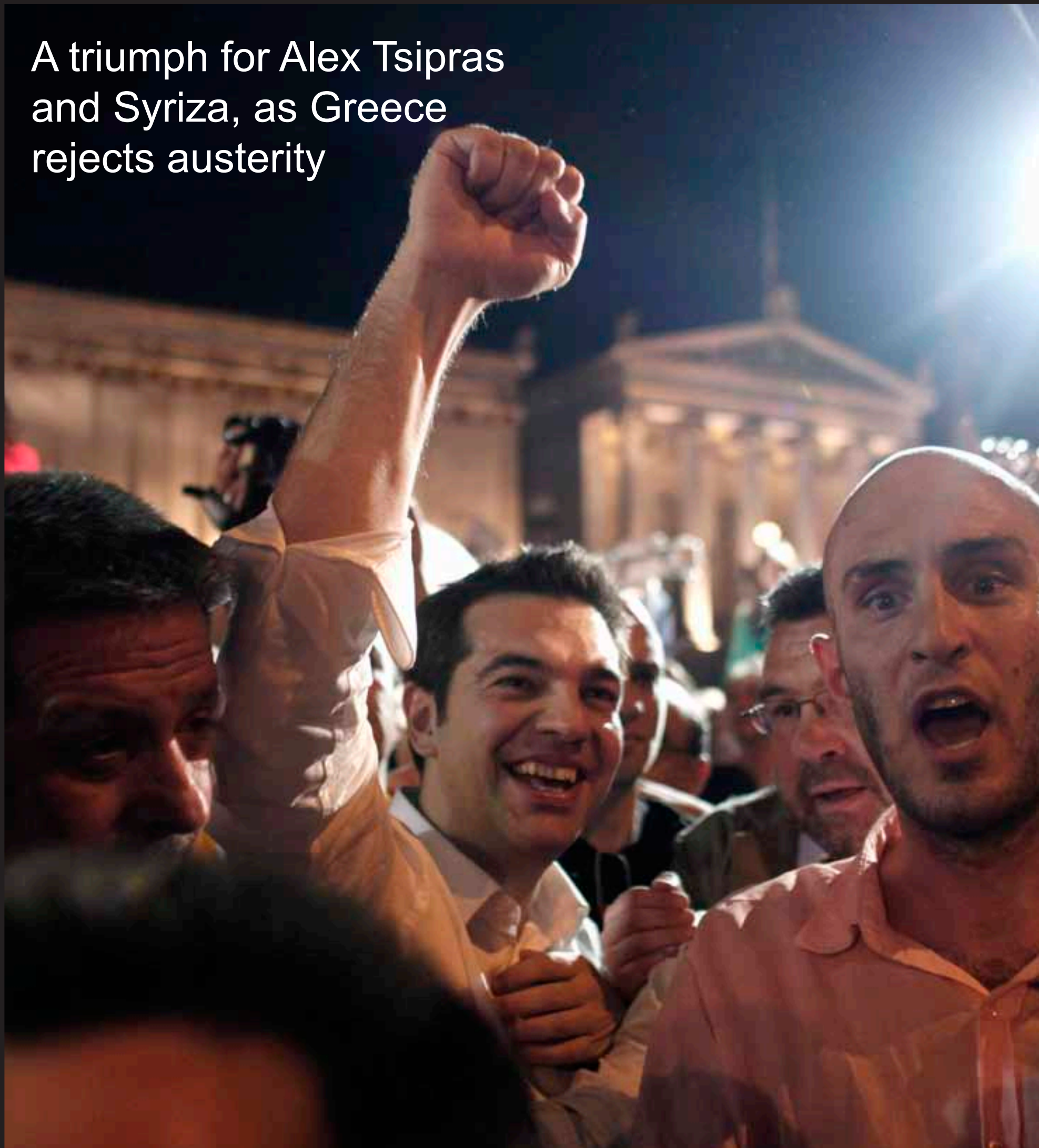
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and Syriza, as Greece
rejects austerity



LETTERS



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

Denigration

Whilst flattered to be a topic of the CPGB's last aggregate, I can't help but feel a little disappointed that the personal denigration that was usually reserved for e-lists, meetings and whispers of the gossips has spilled over into public ('Perspectives for the left', May 3).

I will answer the two charges of lack of commitment and not understanding the CPGB method here and deal with the political issues elsewhere. Firstly the amount of money I have put into the CPGB, Communist Students and Hands Off the People of Iran in Manchester far exceeded regular dues and in an email to the Provisional Central Committee on March 27 I noted that I could not afford this and regular dues. Funnily enough, I was asked to continue shelling out for rooms, printing, stalls, etc instead of paying dues. But this is now something to denigrate and attack me? In terms of active involvement in the group you only have to look at the quantitative and qualitative difference of the work I have had the pleasure to be involved in through Manchester Communist Students to know who has been doing what.

Secondly, it is frankly nonsense that I did not understand the CPGB's politics or approach. Problems arise because the approach is exceptionally hollow and often has no practical direction for comrades. Hence the slow, drip-drip-dropping out and resignations from comrades involved in trade unions or the broad movement. It is also a typical response within the left to claim those who leave failed to understand this or that: it is a self-preservation mechanism, usually the reserve of sect apparatchiks.

Strangely these kind of attacks only undermine the assertion that the CPGB is an open and democratic organisation.

Chris Strafford
Manchester

Get serious

Ben Lewis's criticism of the new Anti-Capitalist Initiative exposes not the weakness of our new project, but the problems of his own sect and its approach to politics ('Ditch sects and fronts', May 3).

Firstly, deriding the meeting as small is petty and misleading. The meeting was initially planned as a small get-together of people who were interested in the project. Indeed, it was an organising meeting and was never intended to be a 'conference'. It was only after it captured some momentum on Facebook and over 100 people were down as 'attending', with a further thousand invited, that it became a *de facto* open event. Even then, not a single leaflet was given out for it - it was only advertised through Facebook - but we still got 80 people along. They were all activists, in one way or another involved in building the movement, who wanted to organise a new kind of left, people who wanted to get stuck in, not just talk.

And even though it was just an organising meeting, it was still bigger than anything the Campaign for a Marxist Party - the CPGB's one-time 'baby' - was ever able to pull off, and was it as big as the initial meetings for the London Socialist Alliance back in the late 90s, an initiative which at the time the CPGB heralded as the "start of a real fightback".

We believe, like the CPGB once did, that "what characterises the left

throughout the country is a fatal lack of ambition, a timid paralysis in the face of the task of challenging Labour and bourgeois politics in general for the allegiance of our class. Organised on a militant platform of independent working class politics, the left has the possibility to start to exercise hegemony over far wider sections of society than simply itself." Today that possibility could be realised with the Anti-Capitalist Initiative, yet the CPGB seem too bitter to take part and have absented themselves from this struggle.

Lewis goes on to bemoan that the meeting dared discuss the situation in the unions and how to organise a genuine rank-and-file initiative. No-one at the meeting claimed that "80 people are going to go off and build" such an initiative, but those involved in the conference can be part of the steps that are being taken to rebuild basic working class organisation. There is nothing "delusional" in wanting to link up existing forces fighting for this, such as Grass Roots Left or the rank-and-file committees in the building industry. This task is an immediate necessity for the working class and any revolutionary organisation of any worth or relevance would see it as a priority.

On the charge of liquidationism - let's get real. It is true that some of us involved in the project have recently left small, narrowly defined propaganda groups to build something larger and more plural. No-one has renounced Marxist politics, but we are realistic that we cannot simply slap down a Marxist programme and rally thousands to our banner. We need to convince and be prepared to be convinced over political questions, and recognise we do not have all the answers, although we have some ideas and principles on how to proceed.

Of course, Lewis is right that liquidationism can be the reverse side of the coin to sectarianism, but he does not realise that in his accusation of us as liquidators he is simply revealing himself to be a sectarian of the highest order. The ex-Workers Power members did not want to form a new Marxist-Leninist-Trotskyist micro-grouping with their own website and regular publication. That would have been sect-building. Instead they are trying a different approach. However, the *Weekly Worker* has accused the ex-WP grouping of both building a sect and liquidating themselves, all within the space of a week. Our heads are spinning - we can barely keep up with the polemic!

What we defend in this new initiative is that we are launching a process of discussion, debate and united action, with the aim of launching a revolutionary organisation in the future - one which is more united and brings in wider forces of the left. Have we achieved that now? No, which is why we are taking it slowly and carefully, despite the demands of various sects that we must adopt a programme and policies and all sorts of slogans straightaway. Our answer to all the sprinters is that this is a marathon: you are welcome to come with us on this journey, but you will have to slow down your pace a little. Be more cautious and pragmatic about which political battles you pick and how you fight them.

It is a curious situation that the CPGB can find a problem with an attempt to engage the widest range of those on the left in serious discussion. Yet in almost every issue of your paper, stitched-up conferences that end up with Labourite platforms are condemned. Arguing for an open

process of unity and then dismissing such a process is hypocrisy and demonstrates a lack of seriousness in approach. Amongst the British left, there is a common approach that each and every group believes and thinks it has all of the answers. In their isolation, they comfort themselves with the idea that the objective situation is awful, or the other groups are the problem, but ultimately what most left groups have in common is the belief that they are fighting for unity, but having to wait for everyone else to agree with their particular method and programme. We believe that this is a failed, self-replicating dead end and that, as communists, we need engage in a wide-ranging rethink to clarify what a revolutionary programme looks like today. That takes time, not one afternoon in London.

But for all of Lewis's bluff and bluster, the CPGB did not submit a single resolution to the conference, let alone their much fabled Marxist programme. He urged us to adopt a Marxist programme "right away", calling for workers' control of production and internationalism. Yes, Lewis says the meeting was disappointingly small, implying it had no basis to really do anything. Do we really want another small left meeting declaring a revolutionary programme and party? Isn't this what we should try and get away from? Aren't we sick of the latest sect declaring itself, bells and all, with a new international programme without first going through the essential task of discussing and debating out what should be done with activists from across the unions and social movements? The CPGB is fond of Marxists working within the NPA in France - but that party took nine months of pre-founding meetings and discussions over policies to decide on an initial programme before it was launched. How come our French cousins have almost a year to organise their party but we have less than an afternoon before we are written off as liquidators? This is not a serious criticism.

In his previous article about the split in Workers Power, we find a similarly unserious piece of advice for us. Lewis's suggestion to the ex-Workers Power members was that they should have stayed in our group and carried on a protracted faction fight and broken discipline in public. If they had followed his advice, it would have resulted in a demoralising year of internal struggle, as well as bitter acrimony from their former comrades, for flouting the group's rules on public debate.

What appalling advice! If you disagree with a group's method or line, then you have to follow the organisational principles your group lives by to try and change them; if you disagree with them fundamentally and there is no hope of reform, then you leave. Advocating breaking party rules just because you don't agree with them strikes the ex-WP members as unprincipled. Furthermore, we are not talking about large organisations, let alone a mass party. It can sometimes be the case that the fight for unity can be better served by having the debate openly, not just within the confines of narrow Trotskyist grouping.

Finally, by cutting through the tone and ferocity of the CPGB's criticism, we arrive at a stark truth. The CPGB is going nowhere fast, its various attempts to unite the left on their version of Marxism have failed and now they have collapsed into the Labour Representation Committee. It is not us that is moving right, comrades: it is you. We have supporters in the new initiative who

are active in the anti-cuts movement and playing an important role in student struggles. We do not want to build a sterile sect fixated on reliving the glory days of Kautsky and Plekhanov. We are looking to the future and want to build a revolutionary organisation that is suited to the conditions and tasks we face today.

Those of you who want to come with us are more than welcome; to the rest, we wish you luck in the Labour Party. You are going to need it.

Simon Hardy and Chris Strafford
email

Caffeine rush

Ben Lewis reports on his attendance at the April 28 Anti-Capitalist Initiative meeting with all the fervour and accuracy of a *Daily Mail* exposé. Shock, horror he walked into an organising meeting before the event, one that was openly publicised in the ACI beforehand. Worse, he was actually asked to do something!

As for the rest of his 'report', either he was having a caffeine rush to the head or had put something stronger in his coffee. Ben repeats his charges of liquidationism, running to the right, etc, that he wrote about the week before he came to the meeting, and once again declares the CPGB is in favour of unity around "Marxist fundamentals". Strange then that in the CPGB leaflet given out at the meeting, a leaflet which laid out "the principles we think should inform any anti-capitalist alternative", we find only a set of democratic demands: the need for republican democracy, accountability and recallability of labour leaders, common action in Europe on strikes and days of action.

We find no mention of revolution, overthrowing the state, worker council democracy, the need for a revolutionary party that is, ideas most of us understand to be "Marxist fundamentals". Surely this is a case of the pot calling the kettle black? When it comes down to it, the CPGB offers only its minimum democratic programme as a basis for anti-capitalism and regroupment.

Ben also reveals to his shocked readers that he discovered another secret in the University of London Union café that Permanent Revolution are considering launching a "new journal". This is no secret to WP or the comrades who left WP, who saw it in our perspectives last November. We are indeed canvassing sensible people on the left about having a broader Marxist journal, which is why the CPGB hasn't known about it.

And congratulations to the artist who did the accompanying cartoons for the article they got Ben's finger-wagging style at the ACI meeting down to a tee!

Stuart King
Permanent Revolution

Small rooms

Stuart King provides a defensive and unintentionally hilarious missive on the Anti-Capitalist Initiative, which sees his ex-Workers Power grouping attempt to butter up another ex-Workers Power grouping, in full view of yet another (smaller) ex-Workers Power grouping, and - for good measure - Workers Power itself (Letters, May 3).

Comical enough to begin with - a unity initiative consisting primarily of the fragments of a single small Trot group. Yet the real kicker is added, unnecessarily, by comrade King, when he disputes the CPGB's focus on Marxist politics. "If we started only with people who only agreed with 'Marxist fundamentals' (whatever they are), we could meet

in a very small conference chamber," he writes; but, of course, the ACI was launched, indeed, in a very small "conference chamber" (or, as the University of London Union might less grandiloquently call it, a seminar room), with the vast majority present members (or recent-vintage ex-members) of extant Trot groups.

Like it or not, comrade King, you have indeed "started" with people who agree with "Marxist fundamentals" - albeit, people who are so embarrassed by them that they cannot even mention them in a motion to be voted on by other Marxists.

And yet there is that pregnant "whatever they are" in parentheses - it could be read as dismissive of our supposed 'vagueness' (read any issue of our paper, comrade), but also as an admission of ignorance. The most fundamental of Marxist fundamentals is science, and science is at the end of the day about marshalling the past to shape the future - experiment, and repetition of experiment, to toughen up a hypothesis that can guide us in action.

There is one hypothesis that has proven stubbornly difficult to dissolve, in spite of overwhelming evidence of its abject stupidity. It is the hypothesis of the masses 'out there', just waiting to join a group 'broad' enough to have them. The Socialist Alliance, in which - before all Workers Power's misfortunes - we and they worked together productively, failed to attract notional thousands of disaffected Labour voters. Respect - from which WP abstained on pedantic Trot grounds - failed to attract teeming masses of angry Muslim activists. Most successors to those have been so insignificant as not to be worth mentioning.

There is an objective side to this failure - new Labour 'parties' run up against the fact that the old one still exists. There is also the subjective side, which is that everyone who has been in the movement for more than five minutes can spot a bunch of Trots pretending to be Labourites (or, in this case, anarchists) a mile and a half off - and, frankly, find this manipulative behaviour more than a bit weird.

Now, Stuart King imagines that the *specific* branding of the ACI will mean UK Uncut and Occupy types will transcend their obsessions with camping and Twitter to bother talking to him. I suspect, strongly, that he will be disappointed. If he thereby finally learns something about Marxist fundamentals, it will have been for his own good.

Paul Demarty
London

Liquidationist?

I have to unbend the stick yet again, since comrades in the Communist Party of Great Britain mischaracterise where I stand on parties and party-building efforts.

First Mike Macnair claimed I advocated a "process by which dissent is recuperated into the bourgeois political game" ('Both Pham Binh and Paul Le Blanc are wrong' *Weekly Worker* April 5); and now Ben Lewis accuses me of drawing "movementist" and "liquidationist" conclusions ('Ditch sects and fronts' *Weekly Worker* May 3). Unfortunately, Lewis cannot be right about my position against Macnair, since Macnair acknowledged that I favour multi-tendency socialist parties over single-tendency 'Leninist' organisations. If that is liquidationism, then I am as guilty of it as Lenin was in 1912, because he advocated just such a model for the Russian Social Democratic Party at that time.

Lars T Lih is absolutely correct to point out that liquidationism - that is, dropping the goal of a democratic revolution in autocratic Russia and confining socialist organising to what the tsar deemed legal - was viewed by many of the RSDLP's Menshevik and Bolshevik activists as an existential threat, a danger to all factions and tendencies, because it threatened the RSDLP itself (See LT Lih, 'A faction is not a party' *Weekly Worker* May 3). I think Lenin and his comrades were right politically and organisationally in how they handled the problem of liquidationism, and I am certainly not a liquidationist (if I was, I would have written historical articles *attacking* Lenin and the 1912 Prague conference, as the liquidators did). What Lenin and the Bolsheviks meant by liquidationism is completely at odds with Lewis's (ab)use of the term.

James Cannon, a founding member of the American Communist Party, was also accused of being a liquidationist, since he favoured scrapping the CP's underground, illegal organising in conditions where legal organising was both possible and necessary (See, for example, www.workerspower.net/james-p-cannon-and-the-fight-for-communism-in-the-usa). In Cannon's case and in mine the charge is bogus, without any merit whatsoever.

I suspect that Lewis sincerely believes I am a liquidationist because six months ago I called for regroupment on the American socialist left in 'Occupy and the tasks of socialists' (<http://links.org.au/node/2657>), a position I reiterated in greater detail in 'Another socialist left is possible' (<http://links.org.au/node/2735>). Calling for the liquidation of the existing Marxist groups does not make one a liquidationist in the way Lenin understood it, because *we in America do not have a mass worker-socialist party to liquidate!* Perhaps this is news to Lewis, but for us here in the United States it has been our central stumbling block for the better part of half a century. If we did have such a party, I (and tens of thousands of others) would be part of it and would fight against any attempt to liquidate it under any pretext.

Today, the existing groups on the American socialist left stand in the way of and block the development of such a party. Does Lewis (or the CPGB) stand in favour of this status quo, or should the existing divides be liquidated in favour of a qualitatively better organisation - more democratic, fluid and open than the unchanging socialist sects and their proprietary front groups that currently clutter the left landscape? This is the *real* question that needs to be answered - not by Lewis and the CPGB alone, but by all socialists, Marxists and anti-capitalist revolutionaries; and not by words alone, but through *deeds*, through action.

This is precisely what the Anti-Capitalist Initiative (ACI) seems to be attempting to do and why I believe the project has merit, whatever its flaws. A living, breathing, provisional experiment like the ACI has a much better chance at succeeding than a group or publication that focuses on getting the demands, programme, formal politics, history and theory 'right' (or criticising everyone else's demands, programme, formal politics, history and theory for being wrong), because the former has the possibility of real, qualitative transformation and development, while the latter can only repeat its criticisms *ad nauseum* and will in practice go nowhere, *no matter how right* those criticisms are.

The key for the ACI (or any new initiative) is whether it develops meaningful democratic mechanisms to create a culture of accountability and comradely, critical and honest self-reflection, the essential

preconditions for straightening out the inevitable political and organisational errors.

The central disagreement I have with the CPGB is the following statement by Lewis: "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."

Our task is not "at all times, whatever the level of the class struggle ... to unite all those committed to a Marxist political party". This is ahistorical. It is also wrong in a situation where the Marxist wing of a crippled workers' movement is made up of fragmented, competing splinters and slivers. Getting these marginal elements to all agree on *the definition of Marxist fundamentals* would not help to recreate the powerful worker-socialist movement that Europe's ruling classes feared and hated at the turn of the 20th century.

More importantly, making the "fundamentals of Marxism" the precondition for any party-building project guarantees that our efforts never get beyond the conceptual stage of abstraction for a simple reason: there is no consensus about what constitutes "the programmatic fundamentals" of Marxism among Marxists (Marx probably foresaw this absurd situation when he declared, "I myself am not a Marxist"). It would be impossible to obtain even an Occupy-style 'modified consensus' margin of 90% on the content of Marxist fundamentals if a national meeting with representatives of all the existing Marxist groups as well as independent socialists were held either in the United States or in the United Kingdom.

Discussions of theory and programme should not be a precondition for working together in the same party, network or whatever word it is we use to label our political associations these days. These discussions can *only* be fruitful on the basis of common activity, common experience, common struggle, against common enemies and for common goals. A little common sense would not hurt either (<http://links.org.au/node/2836>).

If the CPGB's 'anti-liquidationist' approach of "uniting all those committed to a Marxist political party" had prevailed in 1875, the German Social Democratic Party would have never gotten off the ground, because it was a merger of Marxist and non-Marxist elements (followers of Lassalle) on a thoroughly non-Marxist basis: the Gotha programme. If this merger had not occurred on the basis that it did, there would have been no German SPD, no international social democracy, no Erfurt programme of 1891, no Bolshevism, no Russian Revolution, no Lenin. In that case, we would be in really big trouble, building new models from scratch and having to learn all of the painful lessons these experiences gave rise to all over again in a period where the very existence of unions and social safety nets is on the line.

If the permanent marginality of the Trotskyist movement has anything to teach us, it is that the 'theory/programme/ideology first' approach must be liquidated if we want to make real-world progress. The longer we wait, the less likely there will be a world left for us to win.

Pham Binh
email

Fantasy thesis

Paul Demarty's 'Crisis and creeping despair' is too fundamentally lacking

to be an actual analysis (*Weekly Worker* April 26). What actually is the Islamic 'threat', as seen by the mad Anders Breivik? One would have thought a careful examination of Islam in Norwegian society today would have been a fundamental requirement of any proper analysis. Actually Paul doesn't give it a mention, notwithstanding the fact it was perceived great enough an issue to drive a young man to kill scores of his fellow young citizens.

On the face of it an intrusive Islamic presence in Norway, where one perceives the dominant Nordic population to be classically blue-eyed and blond, seems unlikely. Of course, Islam is a religion and not actually a race, but, unless the Scandinavian, formerly pagan, then Christian, population has experienced a mass conversion to Mohammed in recent times, where would such a presence come from? Norway hasn't ever had an empire as such and outside the days of Viking colonisation and settlement one would have thought it rather an isolated sort of a population. To the best of my knowledge Norway isn't a member of the EU and so wouldn't suffer from enforced inward labour and ethnic minority migration either.

So if there is an Islamic - and presumably that would mean Asian - presence in Norway, where and why has it got there? Breivik has concluded that they were deliberately introduced and invited for no other reason than someone in the ruling class and establishment decided the overwhelmingly predominantly white, secular, Christian population needed breaking up and required manufactured diversity, like it or not. If this were the case (and I say 'if'), then that surely would be a thoroughly racist conclusion and plan wouldn't it? It's reasonable to ask whether this has in fact been the case - in the absence of any other explanation one is forced to give it at least a starter for 10.

Following this thesis, Breivik then goes on to draw the conclusion that it is the middle class, liberal, left political establishment that has drawn up an agenda of race-fixing and social engineering aimed at producing a mix more in line with their own visions of what populations should look like. If multiculturalism is your gospel and you live in country which has no race and 'cultural' mix you may feel it's your task to create one. Has that in fact happened, or is there another explanation?

Paul Demarty does nobody any favours by just assuming the Islamic presence in Norway is some 'natural' process which requires no explanation whatever. Breivik would doubtless see this as par for the course - the 'left' acting as the Trojan horse for the jihadist constituency to form and develop in Europe and so pave the road with good intention to a fundamentalist, theocratic hell.

There may be some other explanation for the sudden and surprising presence of an Islamic population of Norway, and I would be grateful to know what that is. Needless to say, although this paper is rotten with Islamophobia-phobia, I have to say that nothing in imagination or reality warrants the bloodbath of death and destruction wrought by Breivik on the hapless Labour youth he murdered. The man is clearly mad, but the social and political nudge which pushed him over the edge (and to one extent or another is present across Europe among traditional populations, which feel themselves to be manipulated, marginalised and ignored) warrants more of an analysis than the one Demarty attempted.

The whole picture, please.

Willie Hunter

Berwick Upon Tweed

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 13, 5pm: Marx's *Capital* Vol 1: sect. 1-2. Caxton House, 129 Saint John's Way London N19. Followed by weekly political report.

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

Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesday May 15, 6.15pm: 'Blood sacrifice and the hunter's "own kill" rule'. Speaker: Chris Knight. St Martin's Community Centre, 43 Carol Street, London NW1 (two minutes from Camden Town tube). Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: radicalanthropologygroup.org.

Stop the War activists

Thursday May 10, 6.30pm: London meeting, 52 Club, 52 Gower Street, London WC1.

Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk.

Building a fightback

Thursday May 10, 7pm: Meeting, St John's Church Hall, Grainger Street, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1.

Organised by Tyne and Wear Left Unity: twleftunity@gmail.com.

Bring a tent

Saturday May 12, 1pm: Occupy London strikes back, part of global day of action, St Paul's cathedral, 36 Carter Lane, London EC4.

Organised by Occupy London Stock Exchange: www.facebook.com/events/327612820626082.

End Israel's ethnic cleansing

Saturday May 12, 1pm: Demonstration - 'Remember the naqba'. Opposite Downing Street, London SW1.

Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.palestinecampaign.org.

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.

Popular protest and today's struggles

Thursday May 17, 7pm: Talk, Bishopsgate Institute, 230 Bishopsgate, London EC2. 'Captain Swing'. Speaker: Carl Griffin. Followed by Q and A. Free entry, collection on exit.

Organised by Socialist History Society: www.socialisthistorysociety.co.uk.

Socialist study

Thursday May 17, 6pm: Study group, the Social Centre, News from Nowhere, Bold Street, Liverpool L1. Studying Hillel Ticktin's 'Conclusion' from *What will a socialist society be like?*

Organised by Socialist Theory Study Group: teachingandlearning4socialism@gmail.com.

No to Nato

Saturday May 19, 1pm: Protest, US embassy, Grosvenor Square, London W1. Part of protests round the world on the day Nato leaders meet in Chicago. No attack on Iran, troops out of Afghanistan.

Organised by Stop the War Coalition: <http://stopwar.org.uk>.

Olympic spirit

Monday May 21, 6pm: Meeting, Friends House, 173 Euston Road, London NW1: 'Resistance, the best Olympic spirit'. Speakers include: John Carlos (1968 Olympic sprinter who gave black power salute), Doreen Lawrence (mother of Stephen), Weyman Bennett.

Organised by RMT activists: unjummirza@yahoo.co.uk.

Cut rents, not benefits

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

Organised by Housing Emergency: mitchellav@parliament.uk.

A people's history of London

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

Organised by Bishopsgate Institute: www.bishopsgate.org.uk.

Don't Iraq Iran

Friday May 25, 6.30pm: Benefit, St James's church, Piccadilly, London W1. Evening of music and spoken word. Featuring: Mark Rylance, Tony Benn, Roy Bailey.

Organised by Stop the War Coalition: <http://stopthewar.org.uk>.

No war on Iran

Monday May 28, 7.30pm: Meeting, Fishermead Trinity Centre, Fishermead Boulevard, Milton Keynes. 'Why we must oppose war threats and sanctions'. Speaker: Moshé Machover (Hands Off the People of Iran).

Organised by Milton Keynes Stop the War group and Hands Off the People of Iran: <http://hopoi.org>.

CPGB wills

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

ELECTIONS



Ed Miliband: connecting

Round one to Miliband

Labour is obviously pleased with the outcome of last week's local elections - but the government is not as weak as it looks, writes **Paul Demarty**

Labour is back - that is the main story to come out of the May 3 local elections. Labour gained 824 councillors across the country, taking control of 32 local authorities.

The media would dearly love to sell this as somehow not enough; there are all manner of outcomes Miliband has to achieve to 'prove' he is capturing the 'centre ground' rather than simply preaching to traditional Labour supporters. On this score, even Tory bigwigs have had to concede he has done well. The gaffe of the day came from Sayeeda Warsi, Conservative Party chair, when she tweeted that Labour would have to take 700 seats to be taken seriously; and then hastily tried to up the arbitrary bar to a truly impossible 1,000, as Labour cruised towards her first target.

Labour took control of councils all over England and Wales - but it is those in the south of England, which are thought to have mysterious Labour-resistant qualities, of which the Labour leadership are clearly most proud. Councils in Plymouth, Exeter and Thurrock turned red, and Labour comfortably held Oxford too. Symbolically, the three wards up for election in Chipping Norton - the Oxfordshire market town, home to David Cameron, Rebekah Brooks *et al* - all went to Labour.

The expected nationalist breakthroughs in Scotland and Wales, meanwhile, effectively failed to materialise. The Scottish National Party failed to take Glasgow from an infamously corrupt, institutionalised and now split Labour establishment, although it did pick up Dundee. Plaid Cymru were outstripped, particularly in the south of Wales, by a resurgent Labour, which registered major gains in Cardiff, Port Talbot and elsewhere.

Coalition trouble

If it was a good day for Labour, it was a pretty awful one for the ruling

parties.

The Tories lost 12 councils and 403 councillors. The Liberal Democrat cohort was culled to the tune of 329, though the party only lost control of one authority. This amounted to the decimation of much of its remaining footholds in the Labour heartlands, where once - it seems so long ago! - it could do fairly well by outflanking Tony Blair to the left.

Not surprisingly, many Lib Dems are unhappy with the way things are going, and the damage coalition government is doing to their party. Yet, as this paper has repeatedly argued, it is increasingly clear that there is nowhere else for them to go. To break with the Tories would trigger a general election, which would see them comprehensively wiped out; the leadership has little choice but plough on in the hope of some kind of electoral deal with the Tories at the next election.

The Tories, on the other hand, do not need the Lib Dems - but Cameron just might. The Tory rank and file are getting restive; they are starting to feel alienated from what they consider to be an out-of-touch, liberal clique at the head of their party. Nadine Dorries, a Tory hard rightwinger, got a certain amount of publicity for accusing Cameron and Osborne of being two posh boys who don't know the price of a pint of milk; numerous figures on the Tory right mutter about bleeding votes away to the UK Independence Party.

The solution in these people's eyes is easy enough: ditch Clegg and co, and go to the polls with a hard Thatcherite programme - with extra anti-Europe and anti-immigrant chauvinism for good measure. In short, the British people are a bit nasty - and they want their Nasty Party back.

Tim Montgomerie, a former staffer at Conservative central office and editor of the Tory rightwing blog, *Conservative Home*, has knocked

together an 'alternative queen's speech' with 15 Tory dissidents. The content will surprise nobody - reduce top-rate tax on the basis of a thinly disguised Laffer curve, put in place a 50% turnout threshold for trade union strike ballots, referenda on Europe, immigrant-baiting and so on.

As a means to mass popularity, it is perhaps slightly dubious - although, as the rise of the US Tea Party movement shows, things can move pretty fast on the populist right. Ukip did well in some localities; but overall the vote for 'fringe' candidates was squeezed. Ukip and Respect aside, parties and individuals outside the 'big three' lost 200 councillors. For those who could be bothered to make a protest vote, it went to Labour.

Nonetheless, the Tory right is a more substantial threat to the government than the Liberal Democrats. The reason is simple - while the parliamentary Lib Dems will never eat lunch in Chequers again if they rebel, the likes of Dorries, David Davis and co will *gain* if Cameron comes to grief.

Against this, Cameron has the Lib Dems - but that may not be enough. He will no doubt attempt to meet these people halfway, and incorporate at least some of their reactionary gibberish into his operative programme. Above all else, however, he needs another ally with the institutional power to return his party to government, and keep his faction at the top of the food chain.

London calling

Here, we may turn to the one result which truly 'bucked the trend' - the victory, by the narrowest of margins, of Boris Johnson over Ken Livingstone in the London mayoral poll.

An anomaly it certainly is - Labour, in the same vote, took control of the London assembly - but one that the

Labour right will not be too displeased with. It has been accounted for most commonly by stressing the personality-led nature of the contest: Ken, the plain-spoken lefty institution, versus Boris, the lovable posh-boy buffoon. Boris beat Ken because we like the cut of his jib, and because Ken's reputation for honesty was severely damaged by revelations concerning his tax arrangements.

Indeed, such is the personality-led component of the directly elected mayoral system that, up and down the country, cities overwhelmingly rejected their introduction in referenda (the one exception was Bristol, where the 'no' campaign happened to be led by the Lib Dems ... coincidence, I'm sure). Cameron's pitch - a Boris in every town - was met with widespread horror.

Yet what is it that drives the personality contest? *Why*, as soon as anyone says 'Ken' or 'Boris', do we instantly know we speak of Livingstone or Johnson? It is because they are named thus in every issue of *Metro* and the *Evening Standard*. It is the *media* which railroads a political contest into this sort of asininity.

And the media, it should be stressed, were absolutely behind Boris Johnson, every step of the way. Dodgy tax arrangements did not lead Tottenham Hotspur manager Harry Redknapp to be hounded into the ground - he got away with it, in part due to sympathetic reporting. The media *chose* to beach Livingstone on this particular rocky shore, and chose to back the various Boris gimmicks.

The media did not support Cameron. *The Guardian*, *The Independent* and *Daily Mirror* obviously never would. The Murdoch papers, as I have argued previously, have turned on Cameron over the Leveson inquiry. *The Daily Mail* and *The Daily Telegraph*, meanwhile, are sympathetic to the hard-right of the Conservative Party, and will be

chuffed to bits with the strongish showing for Ukip. That leaves precisely no allies in the press - and where the press leads, TV news and the rest follow.

Cameron is probably in for a rough patch, then. A faction of his own party is gunning for him; sections of the Tory press are effectively in support, hoping to push Cameron further onto the hard-Thatcherite, chauvinist territory they favour.

Yet this weakness is probably temporary. Cameron may ride it out - just as he has dodged many bullets already. Then, as the prospect of an actual general election draws near, he can expect the *Mail et al* back on side - if it is him or Ed Miliband, the glove-puppet of the trade unions in the rightwing imagination, the choice is obvious. That appears to be the Cameron-Clegg strategy at present: press on, weather the storm and wait for better opportunities.

Likewise, jubilation in the Labour Party camp is likely to be muted in more sensible quarters. This was, after all, a local election, where incumbent governments rarely come out on top; Labour's excellent result was achieved in the wake of a disastrous month for the Conservatives, on the worst turnout in a decade. The prevailing political mood is precisely apolitical - 30% of the population got out of bed to give the government a firm slap on the cheek; the rest are tired with the lot of them.

The underlying lesson is this: Labour has failed to reconnect with its base, because its bureaucratic leadership fears losing control to the local party organisations that could actually do so. Miliband is more vulnerable to the fickle moods of the press than any Labour leader in history; but it is difficult to see him taking the steps necessary to insulate himself a little more ●

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LEFT

Same old failings

With the Tory-Lib Dem coalition on the ropes and Labour proposing no positive alternative, the left seems incapable of taking advantage. **Peter Manson** reports

After George Galloway's stunning by-election victory on March 29 in Bradford West, I admitted I had been taken by surprise - like just about everyone else, of course. However, the left results for the May 3 local and Greater London elections more or less matched my expectations.

In a previous article I made clear my disagreement with Mark Krantz of the Socialist Workers Party, who, a couple of weeks before the elections, wrote in the SWP's internal *Party Notes*: "Galloway has shifted the ground for us all ... You can feel the qualitative shift, compared to all previous election campaigns".¹ But it was not to be. Comrade Krantz picked up a respectable 368 votes (8.7%) in Manchester Chorlton, but I do not think this, compared to the usual 3%-4%, can honestly be described as a "qualitative shift". However, revealing his own modest hopes, as opposed to his public 'official optimism' before the election, he tweeted in the early hours of May 4 that this was "a great result".²

It was always going to be unlikely that there would be a series of mini-Galloways last week - there were just a handful of seats where the left had a chance of winning - four of them where the candidate was attempting to hold on to, or recapture, their seat. I thought St Michael's in Coventry, where long-time councillor Dave Nellist was attempting to keep his place in the council chamber for the Socialist Party in England and Wales, would be a good indicator: "St Michael's may be regarded as the seat where we will be able to judge most accurately the extent to which the left has benefited from the 'Galloway effect'".³

Unfortunately though, comrade Nellist just lost out to Labour. He picked up 1,429 votes (43.4%) against the successful candidate's 1,673, thus depriving SPEW of its last remaining councillor. However, there was better news in Preston, Walsall and West Dunbartonshire for the left candidates. In the latter case sitting councillor Jim Bolland was re-elected for the Scottish Socialist Party in Leven ward,

while in Preston Town Centre Michael Lavalette won back the seat he had previously held for seven years until 2011 - first for the Socialist Alliance, then Respect and finally as an "independent socialist". This time he was standing under the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition umbrella, but his official description was "independent". Comrade Lavalette polled 967 votes (48.5%), as against Labour's 872. Finally Peter Smith of the Democratic Labour Party in Walsall recaptured Blakenall, also under the Tusc umbrella.

The one city where it would have been a shock if the left had *not* won seats was, of course, Bradford itself. Five out of the 11 candidates standing for Galloway's Respect Party were elected. But Respect stood only three other candidates in the whole country. In Oldham Werneth and Tower Hamlets Weavers (the latter a by-election), both wards where it previously enjoyed support from the largely Muslim patriarchal networks, it came second to Labour; but in Manchester Gorton South, the territory of Respect national secretary Clive Searle, it was nowhere.

Standing still

What about the rest of Tusc's candidates? There were 134 of them

altogether, so was there a marked increase in support over 2011, for example? The Tusc website carries a useful article, written in the style of comrade Nick Wrack, which compares results in the 73 seats where Tusc contested in both 2011 and 2012.⁴ Last year the coalition won 13,493 votes in those 73 wards, whereas this year the figure was slightly down, at 13,071. However, because in 2012 the turnout was rather lower, the author can claim a higher proportion of support - 6.7%, up from 5.4% last year. Expressed as an average of all 133 seats contested this year, support was also up (from 5.2% to 6.2%), but once again the small matter of reduced turnout means that this 'increase' translates into *fewer* votes by and large. I think it is safe to say that Tusc has more or less stood still.

There were, however, some satisfactory results. Altogether 14 candidates scored over 10% (although only the three mentioned above got more than 20%), while 53 picked up more than 5%. As *Socialist Worker* points out, the better results usually came where "candidates had roots and a record". So, for example, "there were good results for Tom Woodcock in Cambridge (19%), George Tapp in Salford (19%) and Maxine Bowler in Sheffield (14%)".⁵

However, *Socialist Worker's* headline, "Tusc: roots are the key to success", is actually wrong, especially when it refers to the work of individuals, as here. True, it is pretty obvious that someone who is known for campaigning consistently in the locality is likely to win some support over time. But that is hardly the "key to success" if we are talking about organising a political fightback. What is required is a *permanent national organisation* fighting for a *principled socialist programme*. Tusc, like the Socialist Alliance before it, literally disappears between elections and mostly stands as "Trade Unionists and Socialists *Against Cuts*".

Over and over again the *Weekly Worker* has pointed out that is counterproductive to water down our Marxism when we stand in elections.

If SPEW, the SWP and the rest of the

left actually united around what they profess to believe in, rather than around a set of basically trade union-type, defensive demands, that would begin to make real "success" a possibility. We would begin to be seen as credible and, what is more, as viable - Marxism is, after all, the *only* viable alternative to crisis-ridden capitalism. I am not saying that this would immediately transform our election results. But it would start to make a difference over a relatively short period.

But at least the SWP does not make excuses for Tusc's overall disappointing showing, particularly in the London assembly elections, where it won just 0.8% support (17,686 votes) for its all-London list. According to SPEW, this "in no way reflects the response campaigners received from workplaces all over London during the campaign. Socialist Party members visited hospitals, council workplaces, job centres, fire stations, tube stations, talking to workers about Tusc and the need for political representation for working class people. Overwhelmingly we received a positive response: 'They're all the same, we can't trust Labour any more, it's about time trade unionists stood in elections.' Everywhere we went, workers took piles of the Tusc postcards to distribute themselves."

Blaming the Beeb

So what happened to this "overwhelmingly positive response" when it came to actual voting? SPEW has its answer: "... how scandalous it was that there was a complete blackout of the campaign in the mainstream press. We received a derisory two-second flash on BBC London news. In our view, this was quite deliberate. Bob Crow is one of the most well known political figures in London after Boris Johnson and Ken Livingstone. It is not a mistake to overlook a political initiative promoted by him. It is a conscious decision by big business representatives and their media cronies to squash the voice of working class people. They want to eliminate the voice that clearly and persistently says, 'There is an alternative; ordinary working class people should not have to pay for this crisis.'"

"What it did mean, however, was that we were likely to get a low vote. All the work we did could only scratch the surface in a city the size of London."⁶

Has SPEW only just discovered media bias? Surely the way to combat it is not by demanding, as it does, nationalisation of the press (the BBC, whose coverage SPEW complains of so bitterly, is already nationalised, I seem to recall), but by organising our own, alternative media - media that would, of course, exert influence only to the extent we succeeded in becoming viable.

But the SPEW comrades were are in good company when it comes to blaming the media for our own failings. On May 4 the following appeared on the website of Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party: "The continuing censorship of the SLP by all the mass media, including the BBC, *The Guardian*, Sky, ITV, *Telegraph*, etc, continued after yesterday's local elections around Britain. The BBC could not even bring themselves (again) to list the SLP as

a political party."

It is hardly surprising that the BBC failed to mention its handful of candidates, as the SLP itself could not provide a definitive list of its own contests. In an April 11 press release it had stated: "Our candidates that have been notified to date include the following"; and listed 18 standing in England, Scotland and Wales. The wording seemed to be suggesting that there would be more; and the word "include" implied that this was not even a comprehensive list of those that had been "notified".⁷

But under 'Latest news and comment' posted almost a week ago, the comment continues: "Early results to hand of SLP candidates include [note that word again] Jennifer Cooper in Wolverhampton with over 10%, Terry Robinson in Barnsley, who beat the Tory, gaining over 5%, and John Tyrrell in Birmingham with over 6%. Simon Parsons in Cardiff beat the results of Tusc and two of the three Lib Dems."⁸

The SLP candidate did indeed poll 106 votes in Cardiff's Canton ward, as against 118, 98 and 84 for the three Lib Dems and 90 for Tusc. Labour's three candidates received well over 2,000 votes each. Not that much to boast about, is it?

Dismal

Another feature of the left's campaign was the further evidence of the absolutely dismal state of the left in Scotland. In my pre-election article I wrote: "Glasgow will also be a reasonable test of the 'Galloway effect', I suppose." That was because Tusc's sister organisation north of the border had come to an electoral arrangement with the SSP, whereby there would be a single left candidate contesting each council seat in the city. But the results were dire - especially those for the Scottish Anti-Cuts Coalition. Some SACC candidates could only muster 20 or 30 votes.

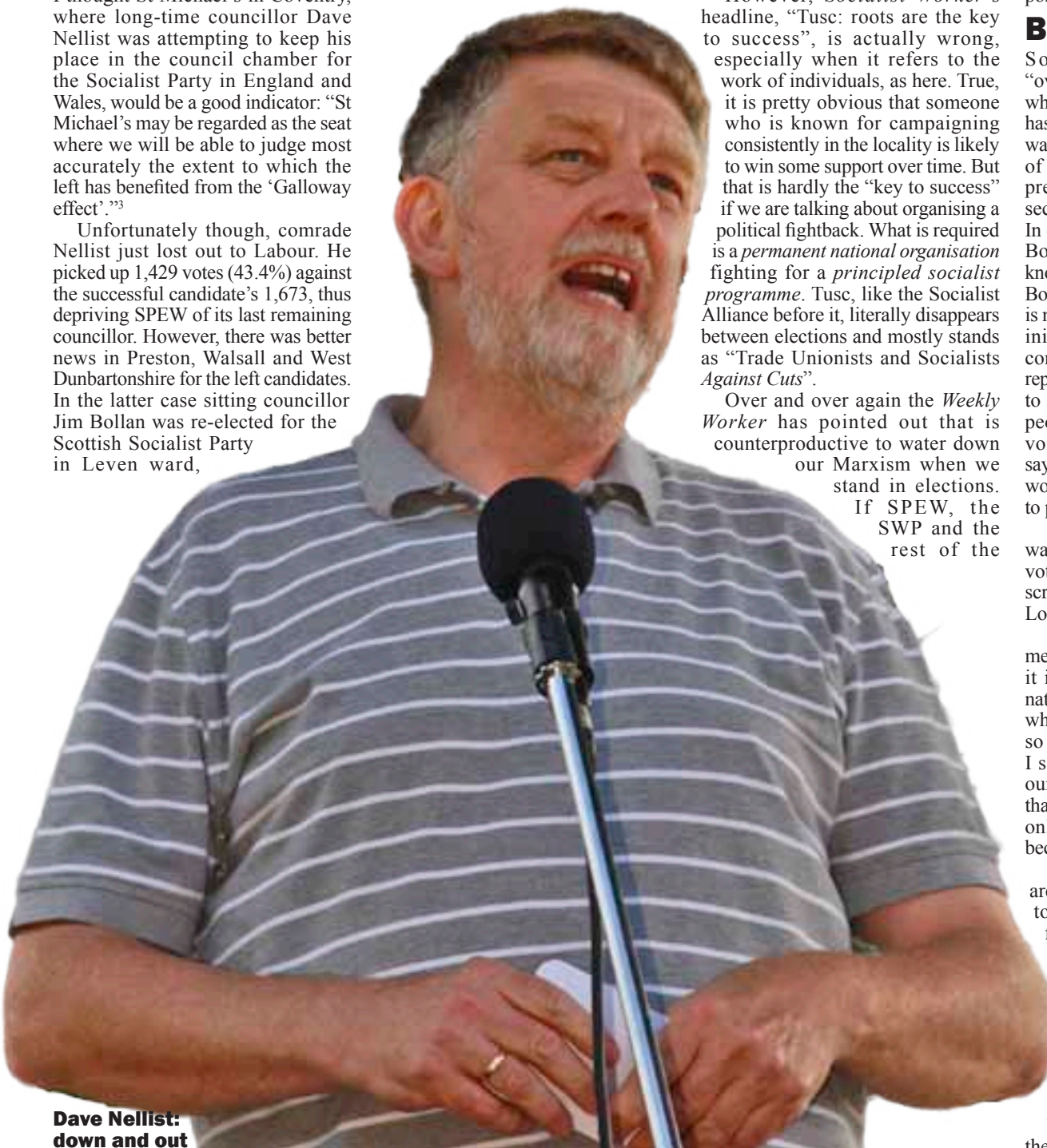
As I write, SACC has not updated its website since before the elections, but the Socialist Party Scotland reports that SACC's 38 candidates received 3,200 first-preference votes under the proportional representation system operating in Scotland. I make that an average of 84 each. But not to worry: there were also 4,500 second preferences and 10,000 third preferences to brag about, the SPS points out.⁹

The only half-decent vote in Glasgow was for Gail Sheridan, the partner of the disgraced former convenor of the SSP and leader of the Solidarity split, Tommy Sheridan. Standing for Solidarity under the SACC umbrella, Gail managed 5.8% (472 votes). It seems there is something to be said for the cult of personality after all ●

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Notes

1. *Party Notes* April 16
2. <http://twitter.com/#!/VoteKrantz/status/198226939889205250>
3. 'Like looking for a needle in a haystack' *Weekly Worker* April 26.
4. www.tusc.org.uk/press060512.php.
5. *Socialist Worker* May 12.
6. www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/14461/04-05-2012/may-2012-local-election-reports.
7. www.socialist-labour-party.org.uk/press.html.
8. www.socialist-labour-party.org.uk/news.html.
9. <http://socialistpartyscotland.org.uk/news-analysis/91-elections/390-con-dems-battered-in-scotland>.



Dave Nellist:
down and out

EUROPE

Electors in France and Greece strike a blow against auster-

But, writes **Eddie Ford**, the call must be to resist the temptation of office. The working class ought to constitute itself if it is ready to carry out its full programme

It is no exaggeration to say that May 6 turned out to be Black Sunday for the architects of austerity. Parliamentary and presidential elections in Greece and France - even to some extent the local elections in Italy - saw a decisive rejection of deficit reduction, 'fiscal consolidation', 'book-balancing' and all the rest of the crap we have endlessly heard from the capitalist automatons. Any idea of a popular consensus or mandate for the cuts assault has been blown away and now the bourgeoisie will find it a lot harder to rule over us in the old way.

Critically, the election results represented a collective - and contemptuous - repudiation of the European Union fiscal pact so ardently championed by the Angela Merkel administration, the former French president, Nicolas Sarkozy (albeit an initially reluctant convert), and the fiscal 'hawks' within the European Union bureaucracy. A compact that, in theory, institutionalises austerity economics *in perpetuity*: you can vote for who you like, but you will always get the same polices.

But that was challenged in France, when François Hollande (supposedly Mr Normal) became the first Socialist Party president in 20 years after winning the run-off with 51.63% of the vote. Legislative elections, which are expected to produce an SP-led government, will take place in June. Hollande, of course, has promised to "rewrite" or "renegotiate" the fiscal pact - his central campaign pledge. A call to arms against the *Fiskalpakt* and the 'Merkozy' alliance. "Austerity is no longer inevitable," he declared, and his "mission" is to "give to European construction the dream of growth". Merkel congratulated Hollande on his victory and said she looked forward to doing business with him - no doubt. But she has also adamantly insisted that the fiscal pact is "not negotiable" - whether in Greece, France or any of the other euro zone countries. The pact has been signed by the 25 governmental leaders and that is that. Just obey.

Mr Normal, needless to say, will discover all manner of virtues in the German government's approach to Europe once he is comfortably bedded down in the Élysée - it must be those goose-feathered pillows or something. But that does not mean that there will be a smooth and easy transition from Merkozy to 'Merkollande' and it will soon be business as usual. An Hollande aide told the BBC that "we have 45 days to succeed", meaning the new French president only has a limited amount of time to come up with some sort of amended European deal over the fiscal pact - *anything* - that he can then sell to those who supported him on May 6 as proof that their vote has not been wasted. If not, the SP could pay the price in the June elections and one major benefactor could well be Marine Le-Pen's Front National, which won 17.9% of the vote in the first round of the presidentials.

Cracks

However, encouragingly for Hollande - and also the working class, to the



Alex Tsipras: Syriza leader

extent that it might signify a partial retreat from the austerity regime - cracks appear to be opening up in the EU bureaucracy. Maybe a dawning realisation that unless there is a change in direction, or at the very least a radical change in presentation, then the whole euro project itself could disappear down the plug-hole - not just the fiscal pact. Thus on May 8 Herman Van Rompuy, the (unelected) president of the European Council - which under the Lisbon treaty is charged with outlining the "general political directions and priorities" of the EU - announced that a "special summit" will be held in two weeks time.

At this "special summit", Hollande will apparently unveil his proposals for "tackling" the euro crisis - which will involve demands for "pan-European investment" to generate growth and create jobs. A stimulus package, in other words. Similarly, Olli Rehn, the EU commissioner for economic and monetary affairs, in a speech on May 6 talked about "seizing the moment to advance our proposals in the new political climate" - with austerity being increasingly rejected by European workers and voters. What is to be done?

Yes, Rehn continued, fiscal consolidation and structural reforms are "unavoidable" - no turning back.

Having said that though, he claimed that such 'reforms' (ie, cuts and attacks) could be implemented in a "growth-friendly" way. Very sensible. "Active public policies to promote sustainable growth" are, he stated, "equally as important" as deficit reduction. He also claimed that the fiscal pact is "not stupid" - absolutely not - but entails "considerable scope for judgement when it comes to its application".

Additionally, he mapped out the EU's plans to boost growth by using public spending to foster private investment and reiterated proposals to increase the capital base of the European Investment Bank by about €10 billion - which could be used as collateral to inaugurate large infrastructure "pilot projects" on a pan-European scale this year. There is also €82 billion, we hear, in "unused" structural funds from the EU's medium-term budget which could be tapped to promote growth and jobs, amounting to a quarter of the total EU budget. Furthermore, Rehn envisaged the creation of "project bonds" (not Eurobonds, of course) for infrastructure, suggesting the EU bosses could be ready to start funding this project within months.

All these wondrous "growth-boosting initiatives", Rehn informed his Brussels audience, could be

"combined to create a European investment pact". This must be music to Hollande's ears, given that he deployed very similar arguments - and language - during his presidential campaign. More importantly still, if "growth-friendly" projects do emerge from the "special summit" then Hollande might be able to return triumphant. The man of the people who gets things done.

Perhaps in another sign of the times, the president of the EU commission, José Manuel Barroso, strongly hinted that there could be a "relaxation" of the *binding* budget targets as laid out in the *Fiskalpakt*. Not that this signals a retreat from 'fiscal consolidation', perish the idea. However, he hastily added - did we briefly see panic in his eyes? - any such fiscal/budgetary loosening would not apply to Greece, which still has to obey *every* imperious demand of the EU commission, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund troika.

In fact, Jörg Asmussen - a member of both the Social Democratic Party of Germany and the ECB executive - told the *Handelsblatt* business newspaper on May 9 that there was "no alternative" to the troika programme and Greece could be kicked out of the euro forthwith if it reneged on the bailout conditions.

Sentiments endorsed by Wolfgang Schäuble, the German finance minister, who days before the Greek parliamentary elections warned - or threatened - that if Greek voters were to foolishly vote for parties that will "not honour those agreements" then they "will have to bear the consequences".

Greek warning

However, the Greek masses ignored Schäuble's warnings - big time. The two establishment parties that have ruled the country since the military rule came to an end in 1974, New Democracy and Pasok, were humiliated. Punished for their role in inflicting austerity and misery upon the masses. On a 65.1% turn-out - the lowest ever in modern times - two-thirds of the electorate voted for anti-austerity parties, whether from the left or right. ND received just 18.9% of the vote, representing a 14.6% drop from the last parliamentary elections, but managed to secure an artificially high number of seats (108) due to the anti-democratic rule in the constitution which rewards the party that secures the highest number of votes with a 50-seat 'bonus' (so-called 'reinforced proportionality'). Naturally, this law was introduced in order to enhance 'governmental stability' - the rule of the bourgeoisie, in other words.

So ND with less than 20% of the vote gets almost two seats for every one allocated to other parties in proportion to their vote - despite the fact that more people actually *declined* to vote than voted for ND. Very fair and democratic. Ironically enough - and quote gloriously - this rule designed to promote 'stability' is if anything now having the very opposite effect, as it was obviously predicated on the happy notion that the extra 50 seats would always ensure that the leading party would to form the government. Now there is the possibility that ND will not be part of a new government, but will still retain its extra 50 seats as part of an obstructive bloc - thus throwing the whole Greek constitution into disrepute. An excellent development, as far as communists are concerned - being that we are extreme democrats.

Meanwhile, Pasok, quite inevitably, was decimated, getting a mere 13.2% of the vote (41 seats) and coming third to Syriza - the Coalition of the Radical Left - which got 16.8% and hence bagged 52 seats. Then we had the Independent Greeks, a rightwing organisation formed only in February this year by a disgruntled former ND MP, on 10.6% (33 seats). Next was the 'official' Communist Party, KKE, on 8.5% (26 seats) and the far-right Golden Dawn making a significant breakthrough on 7.0% (21 seats). The Democratic Left, a semi-rightist split from Syriza - though still considerably to the left of Pasok - got 6.1% (19 seats).

Overall, the combined vote for the parties to the left of Pasok represented in parliament came to 32.3% (or 97 seats). It is worth noting that those parties that did not reach the threshold obtained 19.03% of the vote between them, hardly an insignificant figure. That included other groups to the

I Greece austerity

ate itself as a party of extreme opposition until

left of Pasok, including the Ecologist Greens (2.9%) and the Anti-capitalist Left (1.2%).

Amidst the carnage, ND's Antonis Samaras tried to form a government of "national salvation" - having three days to pull off the trick before the Greek president handed over the 'mandate' to the leader of the party with the second biggest share of the vote. But Samaras threw in the towel within 24 hours, describing his task as "impossible". Even if he could get Pasok on board for another coalition government, they still would only be able to muster 149 seats between them - two short of the 151 needed to form a parliamentary majority. Unsurprisingly, nobody else was remotely interested in linking up with ND - who would want to be associated with one of the former governmental parties that brought such misery to the Greek people?

Therefore, the baton was handed on to Alexis Tsipras - head of Syriza and also president of Synaspismós, the Coalition of Left Movements and Ecology, the largest component within Syriza. He was faced with a similarly impossible task, given the parliamentary arithmetic, and quickly gave up trying - no doubt Evangelos Venizelos, Pasok's president, or anyone else asked by the Greek president to form a government, will fail dismally. As the *Weekly Worker* goes to press though, it is being widely reported Venizelos will not even bother taking up the 'mandate', which - if it turns out to be true - almost certainly means (barring a military or constitutional coup) that fresh elections will be called for June. Such an announcement might possibly be imminent.

But only someone from Mars could believe that angry Greek voters will suddenly flock back to the mainstream/establishment parties: the centre cannot hold. Indeed, there is a *reasonable* probability that Syriza could come first next time, when you consider the very large number of *uncast* votes up for grabs - such votes would surely go overwhelmingly to anti-austerity parties, mainly ones on the left (ie, Syriza). A near perfect recipe for electoral stalemate, which in turn means Greece is heading for *more* political instability - not less. Not the bourgeois game plan, you can bet.

Faced with fears that the country might crash out of the euro relatively soon - hardly a fanciful speculation - the markets across Europe fell markedly, with investors turning to the safe havens of US treasuries, German bonds and UK gilts. Greek stocks fell to a 20-year low, whilst the euro slipped 0.3% against the dollar to \$1.3022.

Lash-up?

We are obliged to ask - does Alex Tsipras and Syriza offer a viable *working class* alternative to the rule of the bourgeoisie in Greece? He has shocked establishment Greece - and Europe as a whole - with his militant declaration that the "popular verdict" had rendered the troika's bailout package "null and void" and that therefore there should be a

moratorium on Greek debt payments. He is totally correct, of course, though we communists would prefer an even more militant and direct stance that calls for the immediate *cancellation* of the "barbaric" debt - as he calls it, quite rightly again. Tsipras says that he is not against the euro *as such*, but "opposed to the policies being pursued in the name of the euro", which we take to mean that he - like the majority of Greeks - has no nationalist desire to pull out of the euro/EU.

Then we have to examine Tsipras's five conditions for entering into new coalition government: the immediate cancellation of all "impending measures" that will "impoverish Greeks further", such as cuts to pensions and salaries; and those that "undermine" fundamental workers' rights, such as the abolition of collective labour agreements; the "immediate abolition" of a law granting MPs immunity from prosecution, "reform" of the electoral law and a general "overhaul" of the political system (which include the abolition of the 50-seat 'bonus'); an "investigation" into the practices of Greek banks and the "immediate publication" of the audit performed on the Greek banking sector by BlackRock in January, and the setting up of an "international auditing committee" to investigate the causes of Greece's public deficit, with a moratorium on all debt servicing until the findings of the audit are published.

Tsipras's demands are quite supportable in and of themselves - and it is a perfectly legitimate tactic, depending upon the concrete conditions, to put forward all manner of demands/conditions in order to *expose* a political party, or even individual, before the masses. However, communists would be utterly opposed to the formation of a left reformist coalition, which would be committed to administering capitalism. That would be a disaster. Instead, we are for a working class government committed to carrying out the full minimum programme of Marxism.

But there is no Marxist party in Greece capable of forming such a government as of today. Communists in Greece should therefore demand that Syriza, and the Greek left as a whole, reject all invitations to form or join a government. Till we have a clear majority committed to a transition to socialism it is far better to be parties of *extreme opposition* which intransigently fight not only against the cuts but *for* a new, much more democratic, constitution. Alongside that, of course, we need to build a state within the state, eg, co-ops, workers' control over production, a workers' militia, a united trade union movement. Crucially what the crisis in the EU cries out for is a Communist Party of the European Union because only on a pan-European basis can we realistically expect to implement the full minimum programme and begin to look to the tasks of the maximum programme (ie, communism) ●

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Scandals, austerity and comic diversion

While rightwing parties were the big losers, there is no sign of a move to the left, writes Toby Abse

The results of the May 6-7 local elections in Italy reflect the Europe-wide trend of a vote against austerity - even if those dissatisfied with prime minister Mario Monti did not have the relatively clear option provided by Syriza for those reacting against Luca Papademos in Greece.

Whilst the centre-left Partito Democratico (PD) has done much better than Berlusconi's Popolo della Libertà (PDL), it has not actually advanced in this week's elections in the way that the Parti Socialiste or the Labour Party - which, as the official opposition, could pose as opponents of austerity against Sarkozy and Cameron - have done elsewhere in Europe. This is clearly a consequence of the PD's more or less total identification with the savage cuts implemented by Monti's technocratic cabinet. In no major town or city did the ex-'official communist'-dominated PD get more than 30% - even in major industrial cities with a strong left tradition like Genoa (24.4%) and La Spezia (27.9%) or former PCI strongholds in Emilia like Parma (25.2%) or Piacenza (26.5%). To give but one example, in the 2008 general election the PD obtained 43.1% in Genoa and even in the 2010 regional election it scored 31.7% in the city, so it has lost roughly 9% in four years.

The PD is obviously drawing considerable comfort from the much greater misfortunes of Berlusconi's PdL and Umberto Bossi's far-right, regionalist Lega Nord. The PdL's vote frequently fell below 10% - although in La Spezia it stayed in double figures with 12.0%. In many major towns and cities its percentage was in single figures - in Parma it was down to a disastrous 4.7%. It is hardly surprising that Silvio Berlusconi, who had not made a serious contribution to the local election campaign, confining himself to one rally at Monza, preferred to go to Moscow for the inauguration of his great friend, Vladimir Putin, as president of Russia rather than stay in Italy and publicly explain this electoral wipe-out on live TV. From a safe distance the shameless Berlusconi blamed his hapless Sicilian party secretary, Angelino Alfano, for the PdL's disastrous 8.28% in its former stronghold of Palermo.

Inevitably, there has been a great deal of internal dissension in the PdL in the wake of the election defeat, with the vampiric former fascist, Ignazio La Russa, complaining about the emphasis on choosing 'good-looking' candidates rather than politically experienced ones and calling upon the party to stop supporting Monti. Whether or not La Russa's belief that an older and uglier candidate would have done better in Palermo has any merit, the emphasis on the negative electoral consequences of support for Monti was probably amply justified. Given that one of the few promises that Berlusconi kept as prime minister was the one about abolishing the municipal house tax on first homes, the PdL's consent for Monti's restoration of this tax at a higher rate under a different name did not go down at all well with the PdL's electorate - most of whom are amongst the roughly 80% of Italian families who own their own homes. It is also worth emphasising that the growing suicide rate amongst small entrepreneurs, which had been brought to public attention by an internationally publicised march of the widows of such men the Friday before polling day, would have also resonated strongly

amongst the PdL's core electorate.

The Lega has suffered from the impact of the scandals surrounding its leading figures, such as Francesco Belsito, Rosy Mauro and Renzo Bossi, the son of Umberto. These were given an even more farcical twist in the last few days of the campaign, when it emerged from the documents that Belsito kept in his safe - presumably for blackmailing purposes - that Bossi's degree in economics was awarded not by an English private university, but by an Albanian one. Bossi, who failed his school-leaving exams three times, apparently succeeding in passing three years' worth of courses in a single year and with extremely high grades. It is doubtful whether Bossi junior has ever set foot in Tirana, given the danger of physical violence in retaliation for the numerous anti-Albanian comments that his father and other Lega leaders have made in the past.

Whilst the Lega mayor of Verona, Flavio Tosi, was triumphantly re-elected in the first ballot on 57.4% of the vote, his success was not replicated elsewhere. In Monza and Como in Lombardy the Lega scored 11% and 7% respectively and in Belluno in what had been thought to be the safer region of Veneto, it could only manage 4.9%. It was therefore eliminated from the run-off ballot for all three of these mayoralties and it is unlikely that the Lega will hold on to more than a handful of mayors in obscure small towns in Lombardy and the Veneto.

Pier Ferdinando Casini's centrist UdC did not profit from the collapse of the PdL in the way he had fondly imagined it would, or at least not to any marked degree. Whilst the UdC scored a relatively good 8.6% in Brindisi, elsewhere its share of the vote was minimal - 2.6% in Piacenza, 3.1% in Verona, 3.7% in Belluno and 2.1% in La Spezia.

Abstention

Some of the disillusion with the major parties, particularly the PdL and the Lega, was reflected in an increase in abstention - 66.9% voted on this occasion compared with 73.7% in the same localities five years ago. This trend was more marked in the PdL/Lega strongholds in the north than in the traditionally less politicised southern regions.

The one political force that has benefited massively from popular anger against both the austerity policies of the Monti government and the evident corruption of the main political parties is the Movimento Cinque Stelle, led by the famous comedian, Beppe Grillo. It has overtaken the PdL in a number of towns and cities. Its 19.1% score in Parma has meant that its candidate will be in the run-off with the centre-left candidate in the second round of the mayoral election in a fortnight's time. Whilst the 'Grillini' are not in a position to compete in any other second-round contests, they have gained 14.2% in Genoa, 11.7% in Alessandria, 9.5% in La Spezia and 9.2% in Verona. Although the vote for Grillo and his followers is clearly anti-establishment, in part coming from people who previously voted for the left and from young people with no political affiliation, it also draws on some disillusioned former PdL and Lega voters. It can hardly be seen as a positive phenomenon, given Grillo's racist opposition to the granting of Italian citizenship to the children of

immigrants and his, at best tasteless, remark - in Palermo of all places - that the Mafia only asked people for a bit of protection money (*pizzo*), unlike the politicians who 'strangled people'.

Left vote

The one mildly positive feature of the elections has been the advance of Antonio Di Pietro's Italia dei Valori (IdV), the only parliamentary force which has been consistently opposing the Monti government from the left. Its most remarkable result has been in Palermo, where Leoluca Orlando secured 46.6% in the first round of the mayoral contest, far ahead of the official centre-left candidate, Fabrizio Ferrandelli who managed to obtain a mere 20.7%. Ferrandelli emerged as the centre-left candidate after a primary that could not be remotely considered to be fair and free, in which he beat the original favourite of the PD's national leadership, Rita Borsellino, the sister of the famous anti-Mafia magistrate assassinated in 1992, after an unprecedented turnout in quarters of Palermo that have been dominated by the Mafia for decades.

Ferrandelli is not the only mayoral candidate to have some rather dubious connections - neither the Sicilian PdL nor the Sicilian UdC are known for animosity towards Cosa Nostra. UdC national leader Casini recently emphasised the humanitarian visits he pays to disgraced former Sicilian president Salvatore Cuffaro in jail, whilst Marcello Dell'Utri - jailed for conspiring with the Mafia in 2004 - is still highly regarded in Sicilian PdL circles. The Cosa Nostra prisoners in Palermo's prisons ostentatiously abstained from voting in the first round, perhaps because the Mafia vote was split. It remains to be seen whether Cosa Nostra will mobilise its electorate to prevent the return of Orlando, their long-standing arch-enemy, to the mayoralty.

The far left's performance in these elections has generally been a poor one. Whilst Marco Doria, an independent close to SEL, managed to beat the PD in Genoa's centre-left primary and with 49% very narrowly failed to be elected mayor in the first round, SEL's score as a party in Genoa was only 5.0%. If Doria is elected in a fortnight, this would be a step forward. However, there is a danger in too great a reliance on charismatic individuals - something that is already evident in the way Nichi Vendola has turned SEL into a rather personalised party and seems unaccountable for some rather dubious alliances in his regional fief of Puglia.

If the radical left is relatively weak even in an industrial city like Genoa, things are worse elsewhere. In Verona, the Partito di Alternativa Comunista got a mere 0.5% and the Rifondazione Comunista-Comunisti Italiani bloc a rather disappointing 1.0%, with SEL on 2.7%. In Palermo, despite their support for the IdV's Orlando, the communist-green alliance standing as Sinistra Ecologia per Palermo got only 4.8% to the IdV's 10.3%.

In short, the performance of the Italian radical left as a whole is closer to that of its British equivalents than their French or Greek counterparts. Whilst opposition to austerity is a very real phenomenon, there is a very serious risk that it will be channelled by dangerous charlatans like Grillo unless and until a viable communist organisation is rebuilt ●

COMMUNIST STUDENTS

A dead end and dishonest initiative

James Turley and Ben Lewis argue that there can be no short cuts to building the mass, Marxist student movement we need

We would like to express our concern at the drift of some Communist Students comrades towards the highly ambiguous Anti-Capitalist Initiative project. We are both veterans of, and also members of the Communist Party of Great Britain; we have been involved with CS since the founding conference, and have played a major role in setting its political direction.

The purpose of CS, since its inception, has been to organise Marxists in the student movement *as Marxists*, and win progressive students to our aims in an open and honest fashion. The ACI, conversely, is a regroupment project which aims, at best, for some kind of 'halfway house' formation of a kind that CS has frequently criticised in the student movement, and at worst, a capitulation to unconscious 'movementism'. Either way, it is correctly characterised as a liquidationist project, and - as we will show - offers no answers to the burning questions facing us in the coming period.

History

Communist Students was founded, in fact, because the pseudo-naïve 'anti-capitalism' of the existing student left was thought, by a number of student members and sympathisers of the CPGB, to be woefully inadequate. It came out of a debate as to whether these comrades should sign up to the Alliance for Workers Liberty's then student front organisation, Education Not for Sale.

ENS was pitched as a unity initiative against the intrusion of the market into higher education, and at the time (2006) the British left as a whole had just about exhausted its various botched unity drives - a phenomenon in which the CPGB was a highly critical participant. Still, we decided then that we would not join ENS (or Student Respect, or any of its then competitors), but rather set up an openly communist student organisation on the basis, initially at least, of CPGB politics.

Why the inconsistency? The short answer is: ENS, Student Respect and so on all shared a political method - which we termed 'student trade unionism' - fundamentally at odds with the reality of student politics as a whole. Students are not workers; the NUS is not a trade union. These projects are hopeless on their own terms; they are attempts to summon up a mass movement out of nowhere. Where a mass movement *has* genuinely come into being, as one did at the tail end of 2010, such 'broad fronts' sometimes enjoy fleeting success by riding the wave.

Whereas the Socialist Alliance at least pointed towards serious unity between the Marxist left groups, in spite of its inadequate political basis, ENS and the like could never unite anyone - because their politics were based on a fantasy.¹

The prospect of 'unity' on this kind of fudged basis has been proffered numerous times since (normally, it should be said, by ENS and its successors). The AWL once again attempted to expand ENS into something viable in 2008 - again on a vague 'anti-capitalism', so as not to alienate 'the movement'. Again, it was stillborn; and again, CS declined to join up (although there was a brief, abortive flirtation between the AWL and Revo). It is clear already that ENS's successor, the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts, is back to square one - or worse, now



Masks: the method of the sects

that it is effectively 'owned' by the AWL.

We have consistently argued for the unity of Marxists on the basis of *Marxist politics*. This is the general line of the CPGB, but it is peculiarly apposite for student politics, where the occasional mass movements are quite as likely to be driven by ideas, by international affairs, as by 'economic' interests. The ground is perhaps *more* fertile for communism than for broad frontism.

Anti-Capitalist Initiative

The questions we need to ask of the Anti-Capitalist Initiative, then, are 'What is it?' and 'Is it going anywhere?' To the first question, there is no immediately obvious answer, so it is worth looking at its political make-up.

Primarily, it consists of three fragments of Workers Power - the official group, still led by Richard Brenner and his allies; the 2006 split (primarily) of the WP 'old guard', now Permanent Revolution; and the ex-WP youth. These comrades are all united again, albeit on a far *lower* political level. So far, that political level consists of... a worthy statement on the inadvisability of privatising the NHS, and a vague commitment to 'making radical and socialist arguments to new audiences'. In addition, there are a few hangers-on, such as CS's very own Chris Strafford.

The appeal of the ACI seems to be twofold. Firstly, there is the absence of an obviously dominating left group, as with the SWP's various fronts; secondly, there is the rhetoric of building from the 'bottom up', which has a certain superficial democratic cachet.

The truth is that the dominant faction, at this time, is the united forces of PR and the ex-WP youth. The political method at work here is that of PR - the very soggiest brand of Trotskyist centrism imaginable. The 'bottom up' rhetoric is no defence against this whatever, and nor is failing to nail down a serious political basis. There *may* be elements of the ex-WP youth that are demonstrably healthier politically than PR in its present state of hopeless disorientation. They, however, are hardly keen to shout for Marxist politics at ACI meetings. They are happy to go along with organisational measures such as setting up a website.

So what is going to appear on this website? The ACI will have to have something to say about political events. Is it going to consist of elaborate political-economic essays, cultural commentary, thought-out manifestos - or urging the broad masses into 'action' against the latest attempts of the government to dump on us?

To ask the question is to answer it. The extant political lines of the component organisations are *all* committed to broad frontism. All, furthermore, share the fetish for spontaneous 'action' and 'struggle' which has acted as an alibi for all Trotskyist and post-Trotskyist opportunisms in post-war history.

In short, the website will be like *Socialist Worker*, perhaps with better prose and a more open submissions policy. We are back to the beginning - what we have is Workers Power circa 2005, but on a lower level.

It will offer further proof, if any were needed, that left organisations are *not* built from the bottom up, but from the top down. This is as much a statement of fact as it is 'good practice' - the ACI will inevitably reflect not the politics of the teeming thousands 'out there' that the likes of Bill Jefferies imagine are chomping at the bit to sign up, but rather the moribund political method and programme of its originators. The fantasy of 'bottom up' organisation simply means that there can be no programmatic clarification, and what passes as a platform must inevitably remain platitudinous.

Mass action

So why is comrade Strafford so keen on it?

His article in praise of the ACI, published on the CS website, begins with a summary of the world and British situation, which is fanciful in some respects. "Movements like Los Indignados in Spain and Occupy and the student movement in Britain have, along with the uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa, lit the fuse of mass action against capital," he writes - despite the fact that much of this activity was not 'against capital' at all.²

Likewise, his assessment of the anti-cuts movement in this country - "thousands of local groups and campaigns [springing] up across the country... [acting] as the conduit for communities to highlight and resist devastating cuts to essential services and the support for the

most vulnerable" - is simply absurd. Mass action against the cuts has been monopolised by the trade union movement; anti-cuts groups, where they are not the most limited of single-issue campaigns, merely regroup elements of the existing left in pursuit of a notional 'mass' audience.

Comrade Strafford does not provide a political assessment of the ACI at all; the most telling part of his piece is his sole criticism of the abortive unity projects of the last decade, which were - in his view - too focused on elections, and parked between them. Yet this is a *symptom* of the real issue, which is the proliferation of front groups - electoral, single-issue, whatever - which organise around inadequate sub-Labourite *politics*. (To his credit, at the ACI founding conference comrade Strafford did at least point out the fallacy of trying to create a new 'workers' party' when there is one already).

From this, we may deduce that his interest in the ACI stems from its possibilities in terms of action. He writes, presumably outlining his hopes for the initiative: "We must begin to build trust through common work in fighting the cuts, the drive to war, attacks on our environment, the fascist threat and much more. Communists have a duty to be side by side with workers and youth in the heat of battle, but also to be there carrying out the less exciting work of slowly and patiently building local and national centres of working class resistance. On a higher level there has to be a re-evaluation of the theoretical underpinnings that the left is built on. There has to be open forums to clarify where we have gone wrong, and what kind of left we want and need."

The last two sentences are correct. The problem is that the idea that *mass action* holds the key to building up the left, as outlined in the rest of the passage, is one of the many things the left needs to ditch. Action - for *what*? The desiccated reformism of the Labour Party? The sub-Keynesian politics of left union bureaucrats or UK Uncut? The Labourite politics favoured by the far left when it goes 'to the masses'?

If one simply engages in action over this or that single issue, or for something as nebulous as 'building trust', the actual political result will benefit those who dominate the movement institutionally. It is the labour bureaucracy that will determine the *meaning* of protests against cuts, war and the rest. But the point is to *overcome* the dominance of the bureaucracy, which in turn requires providing a clear, communist *political* alternative to it. We cannot dodge this question, as comrade Stuart King does, when he laughably accuses the CPGB of "passive propagandism".³ The fact is, comrade King, that at the moment we on the left primarily *make propaganda*. We can either attempt to make decent, Marxist propaganda on a regular basis (weekly in our case) or try and conjure up a 'mass movement' and *limit* our propaganda in the hope of making short-term sect gains.

This is the stumbling block which upended the Socialist Alliance, Respect *et al*, and which currently makes the likes of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition little better than a laughing stock - that their favoured form of 'action' is primarily electoral makes no odds. On present evidence, that stumbling block will see off the ACI in no time flat.

CS should polemicise against the liquidationism inherent in this

project, and attempt to win its people to a practical adherence to Marxist politics. Throwing ourselves into building it is simply a waste of time.

Revolutionary patience

The liquidationist aspect of the ACI project is quite evidently born of frustration and disenchantment with the utterly parlous state of the far left and the enormity of the challenges thrown our way. Communist Students has not exactly been unaffected by the low level of the movement at the moment, and is experiencing several difficulties in simply continuing as an organisation aimed at promoting the ideas of Marxism amongst the student population. Just recently, comrade Strafford sought to tackle this problem by proposing that CS⁴ be 'expanded' in order to include university staff, cleaners, clerical workers, etc. His proposal was soundly defeated within the CPGB and he even claimed to have changed his mind after the discussion.

It strikes us that his enthusiasm for the ACI project is once again borne of frustration, as well as a certain rapprochement with the political ideas and views of the WP youth split. We share his frustration, and quite clearly we need to put a lot more time and effort into Communist Students as a project. But we should do so on the *political basis* on which CS was established - including in any future unity talks with Revo or whoever else. As we put it in a polemical exchange with the comrades from Revolution back in 2009, we will argue "as we have consistently done, for the unity of the left around the acceptance (not agreement with every dot and comma, as in the Workers Power ... tradition) of a Marxist programme - a crucial distinction in the history of the Marxist programme."⁵

This fight will be a tough one, and is not likely to win us many friends in the short term. Yet it is the only way that the left can genuinely get its act together, regroup and seriously think about reaching 'the masses' ●

Notes

1. The more desperate attempts to justify this liquidation of a formal adherence to Marxism came when the AWL unconsciously passed off its practice in ENS as broadly analogous to that of Marx and Engels in the International Working Men's Association, an organisation it deemed a "broad alliance between all sorts of anti-capitalist and at first not even anti-capitalist working-class currents". "Only gradually", the comrades claimed, did it move to "a more explicitly revolutionary socialist direction, and right to the end it was broad enough to accommodate all kinds of different tendencies other than Marxists". There is a similar logic at play in the ACI, with several comrades making much out of a so-called "process" towards a higher form of revolutionary unity.
2. Back in 2008, CS comrades Dave Isaacson and Ben Klein were forthright in tackling this nonsense head on: "What ahistorical twaddle. Firstly, Marx and Engels (ie, the revolutionary socialist Marxists) *did not set up* that organisation. They were not in the driving seat when it was formed. They entered it and fought for communist politics. According to August Nimtz, "Marx had turned down apparently similar invitations" in the preceding years. What made this one different, and made it worth entering despite the awful politics of many who were involved, was that it contained *real working class forces*. As Marx wrote to Engels, "I knew on this occasion 'people who really count' were appearing, both from London and from Paris" (A Nimtz Marx and Engels: *their contribution to the democratic breakthrough* New York 2000, p179). See 'Left unity not on offer' *Weekly Worker* May 15 2008.
3. <http://communiststudents.org.uk/?p=7354>.
4. Letters *Weekly Worker* May 3.
5. See 'Centralism and autonomy' *Weekly Worker* May 8 2012.
6. CS exec response to Revo proposal for student "coordination": <http://communiststudents.org.uk/?p=2711>.

EDUCATION

A weapon for the movement

Comrades in London are beginning their collective study of Marx's *Capital*. Jack Conrad introduces what is still an unequalled work

Lenin called Karl Marx's *Capital* "the greatest work of political economy of our age". However, it strikes me that in *Capital* we actually have the greatest work of political economy ever written, full stop - I really cannot think of any other work that is comparable to it, from any other "age".

Marx worked on this project for 40 years - over half his life - and it ought to be said, as with many other projects, it was actually Friedrich Engels who prompted him. Engels wrote a critique of political economy - it was a very modest work, but nevertheless it was a beginning. Previous to that both Marx and Engels had been concentrating on exposing the shortcomings of Young Hegelian philosophising, of Ludwig Feuerbach's passive materialism, of French utopian socialism, etc. Engels was working for his family concern, as a capitalist, in Manchester, and had become acquainted with not only the Chartist movement, but also bourgeois political economy. After Engels wrote his 'Outlines of a critique of political economy' (1843) for the *Deutsche-Französische Jahrbücher*, Marx began to immerse himself in the subject - and he critiqued what was a stupendous body of intellectual achievement. Thinkers such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo had managed to put political economy on to a genuinely scientific basis.

What we also need to understand about classical bourgeois political economy, such as Adam Smith's rightly celebrated *The wealth of nations* (1776), is that it was as much an advocacy of capitalism as it was an analysis of capitalism. *The wealth of nations* not only attacked feudal laziness and waste: it militantly recommended the virtues of capitalist progress. However, it did so not in the dismal way found in today's Adam Smith Institute (eg, there is no alternative). Smith saw capitalism as the road to universal human freedom. What was good for the capitalists was also going to bring enlightenment, wealth and happiness to everyone.

The first public results of Marx's studies in this field was his 1859 *A critique of political economy*. You can see from their correspondence that what surprised and bitterly disappointed Marx and Engels at the time was the lack of response. There were no glowing reviews, no shocked outrage in respectable society, no rash of sympathetic study circles formed. Indeed, very few copies were sold. Nevertheless, between 1861 and 1863 Marx completed his *Theories of surplus value*, of which there are three substantial volumes. It was subsequently called the fourth volume of *Capital*.

Volume 1 of *Capital* came out in 1867 and it is worth noting that, unlike *A critique of political economy*, it did get widely noticed. It was eagerly read and had a real impact: before the Edward Aveling translation into English there were editions not only in German, but in Russian and French too. For example, the founder of the Social Democratic Federation, Henry Hyndman, read it while sailing from America on board an ocean liner. Once he returned to Britain this former Tory declared himself to be a Marxist. In Russia, even before the formation of a working class party, *Capital* exerted a considerable influence amongst intellectuals.

Marx, of course, died in 1883 and *Capital* was left incomplete. Towards the end of his life Marx had been



Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: in their shadow

concentrating on what were later called the *Ethnographic notebooks of Karl Marx*. Eg, he busied himself in studying Lewis Henry Morgan and his work on the Iroquois. He also learnt Russian and was particularly interested in the peasant *mir* and the land question in Russia. Some have argued that this was because Marx had given up on *Capital* and that he was preparing his own version of Engels' *Origin of the family, private property and the state* (which he persuaded Engels to write). Others claim that Marx was formulating a theory on the state. Either way, I think it is highly unlikely that he had simply given up on *Capital*.

Unfinished

Marx had set himself a vast project and was intending to produce not one, but six books - of which *Capital* was just one. In the original plan his first book was to cover capital itself; the second landed property; the third wage labour; the fourth the state; the fifth foreign trade; and the sixth the world market. So Marx did not even complete his first book. In fact volumes 2 and 3 of *Capital* were compiled in some part by Engels, who could almost count as the co-author in the case of the third volume. *Theories of surplus value* - which, as I have said, is arranged in three volumes - came out between 1905 and 1910, and was edited (badly) by Karl Kautsky. So we have just the first book of Marx's original plan ... with first Engels and then Kautsky acting as posthumous midwives.

Marx's project is to analyse the capitalist mode of production: its origins, laws and tendencies. In other words, where it came from and how it functioned. That required a comprehensive analysis of all the existing literature and approaching the system from every angle. Roman Rosdolsky, in his *The making of Marx's Capital*, suggests that we have much of this in *Capital* itself. Eg, he

believes that much of the projected book on wage labour has in fact been incorporated into volume 1 of *Capital*. In part this is true, but, on the other hand, Michael Lebowitz argues - and, I think, persuasively - that *Capital* bases itself on the point of view of capital itself, and that Marx did not fully develop his theory from the other point of view: the collectivist political economy of wage labour.

Anyway, it is clearly the case that *Capital* is an unfinished work. Perhaps, if we consider Marx's original six-book plan, it is *unfinishable*, not least because capitalism is continually developing, being made and remade. Certainly, given an unfinished *Capital* - and the extraordinary complexities of the capitalist system - there are numerous arguments amongst Marxists. What does Marx mean when he talks about the declining rate of profit? What about disproportionality and the question of underconsumption? Are these three rival theories of capitalist crisis? This and much more has been argued over fiercely among Marxists.

Anyhow, I would say that anyone who seriously wants to understand where we are now and where we are going really has to begin with *Capital*. It is no outdated critique of 19th century capitalism. Rather what we have contained within the cover of *Capital* are the tools needed to get to grips with 21st century capitalism ... along with why communism should be the expected outcome of a capitalism that is both visibly malfunctioning and ever more unpopular.

Bourgeois commentators generally either seek to naturalise capitalism or celebrate it as the pinnacle of human achievement. Capitalism is therefore seen as being innate, locked into our very genes - that or it brings unprecedented wealth, freedom and happiness. Hence, on the one hand, we are told that it is natural to buy and sell and to be greedy. On the other hand, we are told that, while

capitalism might have begun with the slave trade, the enclosure acts, the forcible removal of people from the land and the dark, satanic mills, it has brought democracy, free speech and unparalleled prosperity.

Some defenders of capitalism will grudgingly admit that Marx is relevant because he emphasised that crises were endemic to the system. However, his main conclusion - that the ever deepening contradictions of capitalism can only be positively resolved internationally by working class power and a new, communist mode of production - are, of course, dismissed, discounted or declared to be a failure. True, national socialism ended in failure. But national socialism was always going to end that way ... according to Marx.

Method

Capitalism remains and by definition so does the working class. And it is precisely because of Marx's method, which is historical, logical and dialectical, that it retains its breadth, power and freshness, and goes far, far beyond the banalities of present-day bourgeois thought when it comes to capitalism and its gravedigger. To get an idea about Marx's method let us think for a moment about how Marx went about studying capitalism and how he presents his results. Of course, he famously read more or less everything classical political economy had produced. He was perhaps in his days the world's leading expert on Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Thomas Malthus, the French physiocrats, etc. He also thoroughly studied the history of capitalism and its origins in feudalism.

However, his method of presentation goes against all notions of common sense. In volume 1 Marx begins not by attempting to give the reader a history of capitalism, nor telling the reader what Adam Smith, etc, got wrong. Interestingly, before giving *Capital* its final shape Marx can be found writing to Engels telling him that he has been rereading *The science of logic* and that he was going to present his own argument in *Capital* in the manner recommended by Hegel. In other words, get rid of all that is unnecessary, all that is surplus, begin with the essential and logically proceed to how contradictions arise and are resolved.

As everyone knows, in *Capital* Marx takes as his point of departure the commodity in its simplest form, at its absolutely elemental level. From here, from this abstraction, Marx moves things, slowly, painstakingly, unanswerably, forward, step by step, towards the concrete. In order to take the reader with him, Marx often makes the same point over and over again, albeit from a different direction or using a different example. But the logic is as remorseless as it is palpable. We follow the commodity through its ever more complex forms of development and see how every barrier to that development seems to be overcome, as new heights are reached. And what needs emphasising is that we are dealing with not only logic. We are simultaneously gaining an insight into the actual historical movement of capitalism.

I do not think it is an exaggeration to say that the commodity is the key to understanding the whole of capitalism. For example, if you want to understand the present-day crisis, you will find the root of the answer within the first chapter of *Capital*.

Marx explains that a commodity must have use-value - it must be useful to someone or else no-one would want it. But, once we go beyond mere barter, it must be exchangeable for money ... and realise a profit. Here lies the possibility of crisis. If production is solely undertaken for the resulting exchange-value of the commodity, to get more money than was originally laid out, then there will be a withdrawal from production if, for one reason or another, commodities fail to sell. Profit is thus simultaneously a huge stimulant to production and a constantly recurring and damaging brake.

For the movement

Harold Wilson once claimed (boasted?) that he got to page 40 of *Capital* volume 1 and then given up. Perhaps we can understand this from a Labour prime minister during the heyday of Keynesianism and social democracy. Why would he read it? Indeed, *Capital* volume 1 can seem very intimidating, given its hundreds of pages, many formulas, conversions of one category to another, absolutes, relatives, general laws, etc. But it should never be forgotten that Marx was not writing for the delight of future Marxist professors. His aim was quite straightforward: Marx wanted to equip the working class movement with a rounded knowledge of the system within which it lives and fights against daily. That is why *Capital* was written. Therefore, any red professor who looks down their nose at so-called ordinary people and says that they cannot hope to get to grips with and master it is talking absolute nonsense. *Capital* is a difficult book that takes much effort, but it is perfectly readable. Marx wrote it for the intelligent worker. He wrote it for the emerging movement of the working class, in order to equip it with the demystifying theory it needed if it was going to organise itself into a class to replace capitalism with communism.

Within any extensive body of work you can find mistakes. Go through *Capital* and one might conclude that perhaps Marx was wrong here or there on this or that question. One can do the same with Charles Darwin, Isaac Newton or any other paradigm-shifting thinker. But only a fool, or a charlatan, would use quibbles to dismiss what is the greatest work of political economy produced by any age. That is surely why most Marxists approach *Capital* with a certain humility ... and I think that they are quite right to do so.

There have been many books written by Marxists over the last hundred years or so. Some have usefully added to what is an ever-expanding body of theory - eg, Hilferding's *Finance capital* - but none can seriously claim to have produced the equal of *Capital*. We still live in the intellectual shadow of Marx and *Capital*, just as we still live in the shadow of Newton, Darwin and Einstein •

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LENIN

Convergence and questions

What did Lenin *expect* to arise from the 1912 Prague conference? **Paul Le Blanc** responds to Lars T Lih on Bolshevism and party-building



Lenin: no Vienna

Revolutionary upheavals are made possible by the coming together of a number of diverse factors, one of which is the organisation, accumulation of experience, and proliferating influence of conscious revolutionaries. “Did the Bolshevik Party become the leading party of the Russian proletariat, and hence the Russian nation, by chance?” asked Italian revolutionary Antonio Gramsci in 1924. A brilliant and knowledgeable analyst, he answered his own question: “The selection process lasted 30 years; it was extremely arduous; it often assumed what appeared to be the strangest and most absurd forms.” He added that the process involved “struggles of factions and small groups ... it meant splits and fusions ...”¹

Would-be revolutionaries of later years, sometimes hoping to make sense of their own ‘absurdities’ and small-group struggles, have often looked for insights into the tangled history of this Bolshevik Party that was led by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. Of course, when Gramsci referred to a selection process of 30 years, he was factoring in the experiences of the late 19th century before the Bolshevik

Party actually came into being. In a recent article,² I have made the case - supporting the assertion of many others - for 1912 being the year that Bolshevism crystallised as a distinct party.

The Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) that emerged from the January 1912 ‘all-Russia’ conference in Prague, under the auspices of Lenin and his co-thinkers, did not present itself as ‘the Bolshevik Party’ - but it provides important clues as to the party-building perspectives associated with the Bolshevik tradition. This is an important question historically, and it is also of interest to would-be revolutionaries of today. It is hardly surprising that a debate has erupted³ around this historical question, as revolutionary struggle appears to have forced its way, once again, onto the global agenda.

Convergence

It seems to me that a useful and clarifying convergence has developed in the online debate on the development of the Leninist conception of the revolutionary party - at least between Lars Lih and myself - with some issues still tantalisingly left

up in the air. Lars has just published the first of a promised three-part series on Lenin’s views on the party in 1912, 1917 and 1920.⁴ I want, first of all, to bask in what strikes me as the areas of agreement, then brood over some possible disagreement, and finally turn to the up-in-the-air issues.

It seems to me that there are three broad areas of agreement between Lars and myself.

1. *For all practical purposes*, an independent Bolshevik party emerged from the Prague RSDLP conference of January 1912 (a fact codified by the Vienna RSDLP conference of August 1912). At the time it was not projected, by Lenin and his Bolshevik co-thinkers, as the creation of a Bolshevik party - but this is what it turned out to be.

2. This development did not represent some pre-conceived notion on Lenin’s part of creating any kind of ‘party of a new type’ - for Lenin and his Bolshevik co-thinkers it represented, instead, the healthy realisation of what they perceived to be the social democratic organisational model.

3. For Lenin and his Bolshevik co-thinkers, the organisational principles of *democratic centralism*

definitely allowed for, even assumed, the existence of tendencies and sometimes even more hardened factions within the same organisation, so long as majority decisions were respected by all - ‘Freedom of discussion, unity in action’. (The term ‘democratic centralism’ was first introduced and embraced by the Mensheviks in the RSDLP, but was also taken up and embraced even more consistently by the Leninist Bolsheviks.)

These three points are essential, it seems to me, for providing a coherent history of pre-1917 Bolshevism that does not ride roughshod over the known and documented facts. Our convergence around them constitutes a genuine forward movement in this discussion.

Critical questions

There are, however, certain critical questions raised by Lars that bring clouds into this sunny reality - but clouds are not always a bad thing. First there is a methodological issue, but then something more substantive.

The methodological issue has to do with a certain kind of *primary source* material - memoirs or recollections. Here is a critical comment Lars makes about one aspect of my use of such 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 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.

First of all, I want to acknowledge what seems to me the partial validity of Lars’s point. Even setting aside the possibility of conscious distortion, the mind often plays tricks. Our memories of past thoughts or perceptions from ‘way back when’ are sometimes coloured, or even seriously distorted, by what came after. Of course, what people say or write *in the midst of the actual past events* might also prove to be misleading - especially in a situation such as that existing in 1911 and 1912, when, as Lars so aptly puts it, “the internal party situation ... was insanely complicated”.

Sometimes, however, after-the-fact recollections have the advantage of helping us see the forest from the trees, making some retrospective sense of the welter of contemporary detail. It seems to me, in such a situation, that one must draw from a diverse set of recollections and also weigh the reliability of the various memoirists. (I think, for example, that Krupskaya’s *Reminiscences of Lenin* generally proves to be more reliable than *Stormy passage* by the Bolshevik-turned-Menshevik, Vladimir Woytinsky, on what Lenin thought and said). If the same event is recalled and the same point made by several Bolshevik witnesses, several Menshevik witnesses, plus Trotsky,

and if these can be harmonised with the documents of the time (including Lenin’s writings), then it seems to me one can conclude - to use the example of this particular case - that for all practical purposes a Bolshevik party came into existence in 1912. (One could add that if a scholar’s interpretation of what happened in 1912 happens to be totally at variance with how all or most participants later described it, that interpretation is, to put it mildly, problematical.)

Lars goes on to say: “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.” I agree with the point that the Bolshevik outlook of 1912 is not necessarily consistent with the actual outcome - so I am happy that Lars would choose to focus attention on something that I have not sufficiently emphasised, especially when he adds: “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).”

What follows in Lars’s essay are a number of good and valid points. There is a problem, however, with what he says about Zinoviev’s 1920s account. Lars writes: “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).” In fact (on pages 170-71 of the English-language New Park edition) we find Zinoviev saying: “Present at the conference, incidentally, were two or three delegates who were supporters of Plekhanov and had arrived straight from party activity in Russia.”

These Mensheviks, of course, were not associated with the liquidator current, headed by Potresov, nor the Menshevik current conciliatory to the liquidators, headed by Martov and Dan - these were excluded from the Prague conference (as indicated in Lenin’s letter to GL Shklovsky of March 12 1912),⁵ unlike the “party-Mensheviks” associated with Plekhanov. Lars is quite reasonable when he asserts: “Lenin really believed in the possibility of such a cross-factional bloc.”

But then an ambiguity creeps in: “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 quite clear from Lenin’s writings at the time (quoted extensively in my earlier contribution) that Lenin *did* equate liquidationism with the Menshevism represented by Martov and Dan - only the party Mensheviks associated with Plekhanov were exonerated. One can argue that this was unfair to Martov and Dan, who did not subscribe to all the tenets of liquidationism, and were certainly more leftwing than Potresov. But Lenin’s point, expressed in his August 1911 introduction to Kamenev’s pamphlet *Two parties*, was that they tolerated and were in alliance with the liquidators, that they were politically “trailing behind” the liquidators and consequently had no place in an

RSDLP that rejected liquidationism. After the Prague conference Lenin was even more emphatic. In March 1912, explaining matters to German comrades, he asserted that “the nucleus” of liquidationism was “made up of the majority of Menshevik writers (Potresov, Levitsky, Larin, Martov, Dan, Martynov, etc),” approvingly noting that Plekhanov “broke off relations with Martov and Axelrod”. In a communication to Camille Huysmans, secretary of the Second International, Lenin characterised *Golos*, the publication of Martov and Dan, as representing “the liquidationist press”.⁶

What this adds up to is excluding the majority of the Mensheviks from the RSDLP (unless the bulk of the rank-and-file Mensheviks were prepared to renounce their own leaders and newspapers). Of course, if Martov, Dan and their followers would break from the liquidators in the way that Plekhanov and his party Mensheviks had done, they would be more than welcome in the Prague-initiated RSDLP. From Lenin’s writings at the time, it seems clear that he had no expectation that such a thing would happen.

Tantalising Issues

This brings us to tantalising issues that remain to be resolved - in part, I think, through more serious engagement with Russian-language sources that, for now, most of us English-speakers do not have access to. Here is how Lars frames it:

Paul Le Blanc ... 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.

I think the reality of the “vexed question” with which Lars and the rest of us are

wrestling is even more complex than he allows. I do not believe Lenin was “deceptive, disloyal, destructive”. At the same time, he was (a) not at all naive about the realities inside the RSDLP, and (b) absolutely committed to the triumph of revolutionary Marxist perspectives within the RSDLP and within the Second International. I will discuss each of these points in turn.

By 1912 it was clear to Lenin that the bulk of the Mensheviks (even Plekhanov himself), as well as Trotsky, had no intention of attending the Prague conference. It was no less clear that they would not adhere to the decisions of the Prague conference and would not become part of the version of the RSDLP emerging from that conference. Nor (except for Plekhanov and his party-Menshevik co-thinkers) was Lenin inclined to make the newly reorganised RSDLP an entity to which they would feel they belonged. He showed no desire whatsoever to reverse course in order to gather together any of these comrades into the Prague version of the RSDLP. He had no inclination to attend the Vienna conference (which Trotsky had apparently hoped he would). Lenin and his Bolshevik co-thinkers simply forged ahead as the RSDLP.

Lars tells us: “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.” The fact is, as Lars insists, that Lenin and his co-thinkers viewed the Prague conference, which they organised and dominated, as representing a split of the first kind - a split with liquidationism. Their reorganised version of the RSDLP remained opened to all comrades of the earlier, now disorganised version of the RSDLP who would join them in splitting from liquidationism. They were honest and sincere about this, and were perhaps cautiously hopeful that a significant section of the Menshevik rank and file (perhaps even a leader here and there) would become part of their version of the RSDLP. But after 1912 they were not inclined to have high expectations that this would be so - Lenin least of all.

Then there is the other point to consider, one that - as push came to shove - may have separated Lenin from some of his co-thinkers. It is worth asking to what extent Lenin anticipated this in 1911 and 1912.

Lenin took revolutionary Marxism very

seriously. He believed that the purpose of the RSDLP (and the purpose of all the parties of the Second International) was not to be a resting place or an affinity group for diverse congregations of those who considered socialism to be a nice idea. The purpose of the revolutionary party was, instead, to educate, agitate and organise a working class majority around the perspectives of revolutionary Marxism and socialist revolution. The reformist perspectives of Eduard Bernstein, and the class-collaborationist orientation of Pavel Axelrod, could be tolerated in the party if and only if they were not allowed to dominate and disorganise the revolutionary work of the party.

The heroically revolutionary role of the working class, Lenin felt, was built into the social-economic realities of capitalism. This would enable intelligent revolutionary Marxists to win a majority in the workers’ movement - and if one-time reformists and class-collaborationists, after finally losing the debate and the vote, chose to go along with the revolutionary will of the majority, all well and good. And if not - if they flouted the democratic decisions of the party (as the liquidators had done) - they would sooner or later have to be excluded from the party. Since revolutionary Marxism was, in fact, the programme and perspective of the Second International and of the RSDLP, Lenin was optimistic and confident, but hardly passive. There was neither deception nor disloyalty nor destructiveness in his intentions, his theory or his practice. He was determined to build a unified but also scrupulously democratic workers’ party, one which would (as Krupskaya put it) end up following “the Bolshevik line”.

Lenin was neither tactful nor “deceitful” about what he thought - he was “shouting it from the housetops” (to quote Deutscher), in public writings as well as correspondence.

Work to be done

Among the questions up in the air are: (1) How conscious was Lenin beforehand that few non-Bolsheviks would be likely to be part of the Prague RSDLP? (2) How conscious were other Leninist Bolsheviks of the same likelihood? (3) To what extent did Lenin and/or his co-thinkers hope or expect that significant numbers of their RSDLP factional opponents would eventually come over to a party following the Bolshevik line? (4) To what extent did Lenin perceive similar dynamics developing in the Second International? And (5) to what extent did any of this impact on how revolutionary-minded working-class activists on the ground, inside Russia, thought and functioned from 1912 through 1917?

I have already indicated my own hunch regarding question 1 - that Lenin believed the RSDLP emerging from the Prague conference would and should be an entity following the Bolshevik line, repellent to the great majority of Mensheviks influenced by Axelrod, Potresov, Martov, Dan (with party Mensheviks around Plekhanov possibly being a partial exception). But there are certainly different interpretations of this issue that can be advanced and defended.

More research is required on all of these questions. What they all added up to, it seems to me, is fruitfully suggested by interpretations to be found in the later recollections of participants (especially Krupskaya, Zinoviev and Trotsky, in my opinion) - but our understanding is certain to be enriched by the kind of research that Lars and other scholars with access to Russian-language sources will be able to produce.

How Marxist activists are able to make use of all this in the struggles of today and tomorrow is perhaps the biggest challenge of all ●

Notes

1. A Gramsci *Selections from political writings 1921-1926* Minneapolis 1990, p210.
2. <http://links.org.au/node/2832>.
3. Gathered in *Links* - <http://links.org.au/taxonomy/term/121>.
4. ‘A faction is not a party’ *Weekly Worker* May 3.
5. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 35, Moscow 1972, pp25-26.
6. See VI Lenin *CW* Vol 17, Moscow 1972, pp225-228, 539-40, 548.

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.**

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Fighting fund

Vital function

Comrade LC is one of those who have been paying over and above the minimum standing order for his *Weekly Worker*. Emailing this week, he writes: “Enjoying the paper and reportage as ever - fulfilling a vital function. Despite being a social chauvinist, I hope you can accept this as praise.”

I’m not quite sure which of us is the social chauvinist, LC, but your praise - not to mention your donations - are gratefully received.

As I pointed out last week, we have had no alternative but to raise the minimum quarterly subscription payment to £12 in view of this month’s increase in postal rates. But that is still a good deal and I am hoping many more comrades will take a leaf out of LC’s book and add a regular donation. Those paying by standing order at the previous rate of £10 are receiving a form with their paper this week informing them of the new minimum, which just covers the increased cost for stamps. But it is a minimum, so please feel free to exceed £12!

And what about all those online readers, who don’t pay anything for the most part, of course? There were 9,335

of them last week, for instance. Well, they too can help us out either with a one-off donation or by organising a standing order. The form is available to download from the website (at the bottom of this column!) or else you can arrange it directly with your bank. It’s particularly straightforward to do that if you have an online account.

The standing order donations (as opposed to subscriptions!) received over the last week amounted to £120 - thank you, SM, ERK, GD, SWS, DV, CG and SM. Then there were two PayPal donations made via the website from comrades TG and FL (£20 each), plus a nice little cheque from PJ for £50. All that comes to £210 and takes our total for May to £422. But we need £1,500 every month. And then there’s that matter of the £142 shortfall in April.

Please help us in whatever way you can.

Robbie Rix

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May Day protests erupt

Imperialism finds new pretext for threats

A week can be a long time in politics, but in Iran it can seem more like a year.

Last week, as news agencies were reporting rumours of the regime's possible retreat over its nuclear programme, the price of gold dropped on the Tehran exchange market - a clear sign of reduced tensions between western powers and Iran. The factional fighting of recent years also seemed to belong to the distant past, as figureheads of various factions of the regime, including those arch enemies, former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and the current incumbent, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, attended the meetings of the National Expediency Council. They even managed to smile for the cameras in a pre-arranged photo-shoot.

However, then came news of another conflict in the Persian Gulf - this time between Iran on the one side and Saudi Arabia and Gulf Cooperation Council countries on the other. Arab and US media reported that the Peninsula Shield Force, the military coordinating army of the GCC, had been carrying out military manoeuvres to "test harmony and coordination among ground, air and naval forces and their readiness".

The military exercise was seen as a response to Iran's continued occupation of three islands in the Gulf - the tiny Abu Musa and Greater and Lesser Tumb islets, near the mouth of the Straits of Hormuz, that was seized in 1971 by the shah after British forces left the region. Abu Musa, the only inhabited island of the three, was placed under joint administration in a deal with Sharjah, now part of the United Arab Emirates. They have since been a bone of contention with the UAE, which claims sovereignty over them.

While the dispute seemed to have been forgotten for most of the decades since, in the last two months the UAE has been mounting increasingly vocal demands for the return of their territory - with the backing of the GCC and the Arab League. This, of course, has brought an angry response from the Iranians, who vowed to "crush any act of aggression" and prompted a visit to Abu Musa by Ahmadinejad a few weeks ago. In Tehran the rumour is that even the supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, was not aware of the trip before it took place - on the eve of the international nuclear talks.

After Ahmadinejad's trip to Abu Musa, the foreign minister of the UAE recalled its ambassador to Iran, claiming that it amounted to "flagrant violation" and an "occupation". But things did not end there. The UAE succeeded in convincing the other Persian Gulf states to support it and the GCC issued a statement condemning the visit.

No-one can be in any doubt that the renewal of this dispute after 41 years is a pretext for a much wider conflict between Iran and the leaders of the Persian Gulf states, who nowadays are taking a prominent role in opposition to the Islamic Republic. The Gulf emirs are convinced that Iran is seeking to harness the forces unleashed by the Arab uprisings in order to destabilise their own internal control and, rather than wait for events to overtake them,



Ahmadinejad: travelling

have clearly decided to use the dispute over the islands as a lever to ramp up their hostility towards Tehran.

Of course, it is unlikely that the Gulf states will go to war with Iran. However, they have become an integral part of US plans for regime change in Damascus and Tehran. One option they are certainly taking up is increasing their support for groups opposing the Syrian and Iranian regimes. But, as the Saudis, Emiratis and Qataris try to vent their frustration with Tehran on Syria, they will almost certainly provoke Iran to adopt retaliatory measures. But over the last two weeks, without waiting for such a response, the US mainstream media have been portraying the dispute

as yet another example of Iran's 'irresponsible warmongering'.

Most Iranians believe the issue of the ownership of the islands has surfaced now as part of the campaign to put pressure on Iran over its nuclear programme. They do not believe the Emirates' claims to be acting independently in this matter.

Internal conflict

As most of the world was concentrating on elections in Europe, the second round of polling for the Islamic parliament, the majles, took place in Iran. Results declared on May 5 showed the Iranian president's support crumbling, with ultra-conservative

rivals consolidating their hold on the majles. Ahmadinejad's supporters won only 13 of the 65 seats contested in the May 4 vote, further reducing his power base in the 290-seat legislature. The president's opponents won 41 seats and this follows the victory of Khamenei loyalists in the first round of voting in March, when they had already secured an outright majority.

On the day the increase in that majority was announced, conflict between the president and the majles reached new heights, as the 'integration committee' rejected Ahmadinejad's proposal to increase revenues from subsidy cuts - a move which could effectively block the implementation of the second stage of the subsidy 'reform' plan.

Ahmadinejad had presented the draft of the national budget bill for the Iranian year beginning on March 20 on February 1, in which it was proposed that the revenues from subsidy savings would be increased from about \$44 billion to \$110 billion. And last week the government decided to suddenly remove controls on energy prices to complete the implementation of the subsidy 'reform'. The majlis voted to say this decision is illegal because it runs counter to the agreed 'reform', which allows for the subsidies on fuel, electricity and certain goods to be cut over the course of five years. Too deep, too fast. Majles speaker Ali Larijani started legal action against Ahmadinejad, at the same time as two complaints were sent to the judiciary, accusing the government of "incurring irreparable damage" to the economy by violating foreign exchange laws, "at a time when the country faces numerous sanctions".

Clearly the short-lived peace between various factions of the Islamic regime, forged by the supreme leader, has already broken down - with serious implications for the president.

Meanwhile, US secretary of state Hillary Clinton urged India to do "even more" to cut its purchases of oil from Iran to keep up the pressure on that country to prove its nuclear programme is peaceful. As a result of sanctions, drugs for cancer, heart disease and several other ailments

are now in short supply, according to the 'reformist' daily, *Shargh*. The shortage is the result of international sanctions against the Islamic republic, the implementation of subsidy cuts and foreign-currency exchange-rate fluctuations that Iran has experienced in recent months, claimed the newspaper. Supply of the affected drugs has reached "worrying levels", it said.

May Day

However, the conflict is not restricted to infighting within the regime. This year, Iranian workers participated in a surprisingly large number of May Day protests - some organised through activist networks, and many more occurring within industrial complexes. After hearing of similar protests elsewhere, workers demonstrated outside the gates of their workplaces demanding action over low wages, non-payment and lack of job security. All these issues have been compounded by sanctions. Many workers held up placards saying "We are hungry".

A small, impromptu gathering took place in the Kurdish city of Sanandaj. According to reports by the Free Union of Iranian Workers, on May 1 hundreds of workers congregated in that city chanting, "We are workers, we are hungry", and "Workers' solidarity". Other signs read: "Bread, housing, liberty" and "Imprisoned workers should be released".

May Day 2012 will be remembered as the day Iranian workers managed to raise their voice despite the difficult circumstances they face - not just in terms of the appalling economic conditions resulting from sanctions and the regime's attacks, but also under circumstances of an increasingly repressive religious capitalist dictatorship. For Hands Off the People of Iran this means redoubling our efforts in solidarity with Iranian workers, to make sure their voice is heard above all the talk of war, sanctions and territorial recriminations ●

Yassamine Mather

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