



# weekly **worker**

**How Lenin's party became  
(Bolshevik): Lars T Lih and  
the politics of names**

- Anti-capitalist dishonesty
- Rochdale abuse case
- Labour Party polemics
- Defending Des Warren

No 914 Thursday May 17 2012

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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# The masses refuse to be ruled in the old way





# LETTERS



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

## Power up

Whilst last-ditch negotiations to get Democratic Left into coalition with New Democracy and Pasok are still going on as I am writing, the probability is that Greece will have a second general election on June 10 or 17. If, as is likely, Syriza emerges as the largest single party and gains the 50-seat bonus, it has an obligation to try and form a united left government with the KKE, Democratic Left and any other left group that might hypothetically cross the threshold and obtain parliamentary representation.

To argue, as the *Weekly Worker* does ('Electors in France and Greece strike a blow against austerity', May 10), that it should remain a party of extreme opposition until it has the support of over 50% of the population and could implement whatever the CPGB regards as the full programme makes no sense in these circumstances of extreme crisis. A failure of leadership on the part of the left could open the way to Golden Dawn, Laos, the Independent Greeks or the military coming up with some form of extreme-right, nationalist, authoritarian solution in the event of Greece leaving or being expelled from the euro zone.

Obviously, a left government - what some call a 'workers' government' on the basis of the theory adopted by the Fourth Congress of the Comintern - would find itself in a very difficult position (under attack from both domestic and international reaction) as a result of a repudiation of the memorandum and its austerity policies and a refusal to pay the debt. It would have to appeal to the labour movement elsewhere in the EU - in the first instance, the labour movement in Spain, Portugal and Italy, where there is a greater awareness of what is at stake - for support. But, if Syriza failed to make such an attempt, large numbers of those Greeks disgusted with the troika and its austerity policies would lose all confidence in the left and turn to the nationalist right.

If historical comparisons with

Germany are to be made, they are with 1923 or 1929-33, not the position of Kautsky and the SPD before 1914, as you seem to be suggesting. In practice, whilst you are not adopting the more blatantly third period position of the KKE in its post-election statement, which in effect regards Syriza as the last card of the bourgeoisie, your position is a form of ultra-leftism too.

Whatever the differences amongst the rest of the British left, everybody I have come across in recent days - whether in the Socialist Alliance, the Alliance for Green Socialism or the Anti-Capitalist Initiative, Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Party or Alliance for Workers' Liberty - would broadly support my position and not yours. If a second election gives Syriza a lead over ND, we should be urging Syriza: take the power!

**Toby Abse**  
email

## Not our baby

Simon Hardy and Chris Strafford say of the new Anti-Capitalist Initiative meeting, on which we reported negatively, that, "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" (Letters, May 10).

This response is just to clarify that the Campaign for a Marxist Party was never the CPGB's "baby". It was the initiative of the Glasgow *Critique* Supporters Group, with the support of the Democratic Socialist Alliance of John Pearson, the late Dave Spencer and others. We were from the very outset critical of the call issued by *Critique* for the conference which set up the new formation - among other reasons because we thought the project of simply planting a flag for a new Marxist party was unrealistic: see, for example, my own article, 'Fight where Marxists are' (July 11 2006).

We decided initially to participate on a minority basis in the experiment, and later blocked with Hillel Ticktin and other comrades when the DSA leadership seemed to go mad; but at no point did we abandon our fundamental criticism that the creation of what we would call a Marxist party requires the unity of the *existing organised far left*

on an open and principled basis, not the setting up of a wholly new group without its participation; and, at the end, comrades outside the DSA came to agree with us that the experiment had failed.

The history is summarised in Mark Fischer's December 4 2008 article, 'Time to move', explaining the decision to propose closure of the CMP. It can be traced in more detail in articles in this paper in the intervening period.

There is a sense in which the decision of the French Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire to launch the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste displayed on a much larger scale the same problem of attempting to go *round* the existing organised left and appeal directly to 'newly radicalising forces'. This project had a brief success, but is now reduced to something of around the same size as the Ligue at the time of its launch: it turned out that the NPA's appeal to new forces of activists could not bypass and marginalise either Lutte Ouvrière or the periphery of the Lambertistes in the Socialist Party who are reflected in Mélenchon's Parti de Gauche.

The Anti-Capitalist Initiative manages to combine this problem with the Brit far left's usual fetish of covering up comrades' own politics in the name of 'breadth'.

**Mike Macnair**  
email

## Joy of sects

Pham Binh is correct when he writes that making the fundamentals of Marxism the precondition for any party-building project guarantees that our efforts never get beyond the conceptual stage of abstractions (Letters, May 10).

There are those who believe that, if we are going to form a party, or win over the Labour Party, we should do this on the basis of Marxism. Such individuals are not only living in the past, but they are also demonstrating their sect mentality. Does the ruling class make believing in Adam Smith a precondition for membership of the Conservative Party? Like the ruling class, we should seek to win over people on the basis of our core values rather than ideological dogmas.

The communist movement needs to grow up and move beyond the stage of infantile doctrinarism. We can all agree with the aims of Marx - a communist society. This should not oblige anyone to agree with Marx's theories as a precondition for forming a party. For instance, I am a communist, but I follow Marx's own position of not calling myself a Marxist. One reason for this is that I no longer believe in the Marxist teaching that whether or not people exploit each other depends on the degree of development of society's productive forces. Marxism also teaches that it is overproduction which would most likely lead to the downfall of capitalism. Neither Marx nor any of his followers anticipated that an energy shortage could trigger a crisis which ends in the downfall of capitalism.

Forming a new party or winning over the Labour Party on the basis of 'Marxism' is today the height of sectism.

**Tony Clark**  
email

## Pecking off

What a series of exchanges the past couple of weeks! From economic overtones on the part of Chris Strafford to responses by Pham Binh, I'll try to respond to each as concisely as I can.

First, Chris Strafford's move to the Anti-Capitalist Initiative seems to be a move with economic and especially

trade unionist overtones, yet I don't know what to make of his concerning statement of "collapsing into the Labour Representation Committee" in light of polemics for working inside and outside the Labour Party. I have made my case in past letters that three kinds of parties need to exist on the British left to supplant Labourism: communist worker parties, proletocratic or proletarian-not-necessarily-communist parties, and continental 'bourgeois worker' parties. Strafford's concerns about CPGB relations with some left Labourites are at least somewhat valid, because of the *Weekly Worker*'s straw man of equating all left-reformist projects in the UK with 'Labour mark two'. Continental 'bourgeois worker' parties didn't start out as somewhat political projects by a country's trade unions, but were formed independently of trade union activity.

Second, in all the exchanges between Lars Lih, Paul Le Blanc, Pham Binh and Mike Macnair on 'liquidationism', for some reason nobody mentioned the German precedent historically or currently (the four participants I just mentioned). Even if the liquidationists succeeded, their amateurism would have been less damaging than, say, the SAPD of Germany liquidating its illegal underground during the anti-socialist laws - the illegal underground apparatus of the Gotha programme party was simply much larger. Contemporarily speaking, if a mass party organisation had a wing for legal activity and a wing for mass civil disobedience campaigns and other 'extra-legal' but not bomb-throwing-style illegal activity, trying to wrap up the latter through party mechanisms would be tantamount to liquidationism.

Third, Pham Binh's concluding remarks are mixed, in my opinion. There's too much attachment to unions; the main problem isn't that they're reformist (which most of them certainly are), but that they're rarely political in the first place. The comrade mentions the Eisenacher-Lassallean unity of 1875, but the Lassalleans pointed to problems with union activism more accurately than any left communist ever did (which almost circles back to my statement above on Strafford).

Also, conflated as one are programme, strategy and 'theory'. Programmatic unity is paramount, for without a revolutionary programme there can be no revolutionary movement. Next in line is strategic unity, around the revolutionary strategy that adapts orthodox Marxism to modern circumstances (alternative culture and an independent but nonetheless institutional approach, refusal of non-proletocratic coalitions, of strike and council fetishes, of popular and other fronts that aren't both communitarian and populist, etc). Way, way down the pecking order is 'theory' (whether historical *à la* state capitalism vs bureaucratic collectivism vs degenerated/deformed workers' state, or contemporary *à la* inclusive democracy, power theory of value, etc).

**Jacob Richter**  
email

## No slander

A brief comment at the end of a report of a CPGB aggregate has prompted Chris Stratford to write a letter claiming victimisation and making accusations of lack of democracy in the CPGB (Letters, May 10). As far as I know, the CPGB Provisional Central Committee had consciously decided not to press the issue of Chris's irregular payment of dues or his frequent absence from party events when he was a member precisely so

that he did not feel he was being victimised for his political differences.

Chris is well aware that Hands Off the People of Iran has its own budget, which is used for travel, booking rooms, etc. Any Hopi expenses he incurred should have been raised with Hopi itself, not paid in lieu of CPGB dues. The question of lack of commitment was raised in the week before Chris's resignation as a criticism of his decision not to attend the Hopi weekend school, an event he had helped organise. For all his excellent work in Hopi, Chris should realise that serious political commitment, a level of self-discipline and perseverance in convincing others is essential for anyone who wants to be taken seriously, and he is no exception to this rule.

Those of us who keep reminding him of this are not using this as slander or to undermine his politics.

**Soheil Frazad**  
email

## Impossiblism

In view of your comradely inclusion of the Socialist Party of Great Britain in a pre-election article, it was slightly disappointing that in the round-up of results the SPGB vote was omitted ('Same old failings', May 10). Under our usual manifesto of socialism and nothing but socialism, declining to present a wish-list of palliatives, the two Socialist Party candidates acquired a total of 4,281 votes. In Lambeth and Southwark, Daniel Lambert achieved 2,938 votes or 1.9% (up from 1,588 votes and 1.0% in the 2008 election). In Merton and Wandsworth, James Martin achieved 1,343 votes or 0.9%.

It is interesting that the list vote for the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition was smaller than the constituency vote for ourselves (1,047 less in Lambeth and Southwark and 439 less in Merton and Wandsworth), since Tusc was offering a programme of attractive reforms ("jobs with a living wage for all", "cheap, efficient and safe public transport", "affordable homes for all") while we just advocate socialism. We also succeeded in gaining more votes than the BNP for both wards.

Who says impossiblism doesn't hold an appeal to voters?

**Alan Johnstone**  
email

## Unambiguous

It is not just the *Weekly Worker* which overlooks the electoral result of the SPGB. Simon Hardy and Chris Strafford write: "... we cannot simply slap down a Marxist programme and rally thousands to our banner" (Letters, May 10). While you could dispute the motives of the 4,281 people who voted SPGB, the election literature is unambiguous. 'Don't vote for us unless you understand and want socialism' is a principled position that any new fronts would do well to consider.

**Jon D White**  
SPGB

## Willie exposed

Under the guise of finding an explanation for Anders Breivik's behaviour, Willie Hunter introduces some dubious propositions (Letters, May 10). He sets up, in opposition, those he terms blue-eyed, blond, Christian Norwegians against others who are not - ie, Muslim Norwegians. He takes the latter to be an intrusive, sudden and surprising constituency, which he labels a problem.

Just because a sociopathic racist went on a murder spree, there is no call for an examination, 'careful' or otherwise, of Islam in Norway. Overwhelmingly, Norwegians live at peace with each other. Yet

## Fighting fund

# Acceleration

**T**hanks very much to all those comrades subscribing to the *Weekly Worker* by standing order who have responded so promptly to my request last week to increase their payments. Because of Royal Mail's price hike the cost of a sub is now £12 a quarter - still pretty good value, mind you.

Thanks in particular to the two who decided to increase it by a bit more on top - GW, who is throwing in an extra £3, and TG, who will now pay £20 every three months. And, as well as paying this extra £8 a quarter, TG enclosed a cheque for £100 - half for the *Weekly Worker* and half to be forwarded to the Hands Off the People of Iran campaign. Double generosity!

I also received a further £123 in standing order donations - that is, not for subscriptions, but regular gifts to support this paper. There were also three further cheques, from PL (£25) TH and SD (£10 each). And two

PayPal donations made via the website - thank you, SM, for your brilliant £50 and EJ, who paid his usual monthly £35. That comes to £303 received all told, taking our running total for May's fighting fund to £725 - exactly half of our £1,500 target. But we are now more than halfway through the month, so a degree of acceleration is called for.

Once again I must point out that the proportion of our web readers who actually make a donation is tiny. Our web readership now seems to be hovering at just under 10,000 - last week there were 9,352 of them. But just two donors out of all those thousand leads me to ask, aren't there more of you who'd like to show your appreciation?

**Robbie Rix**

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



apparently Hunter knows which is the “dominant Nordic population” and it does not include that small fraction of Norwegians who, in Hunter’s view, fail these essential racial qualities. His lurid dichotomies are reminiscent of a Nazi ideology that saw the blond, blue-eyed *Volks* under threat from the Jewish bacillus in their midst.

Hunter is puzzled that Norway, which is not in the European Union, should “suffer from ... ethnic minority migration”, presumably because he believes that Norway should restrict itself to ethnically similar migrants. Or perhaps he thinks that non-EU countries shouldn’t accept migrants at all. Perhaps he believes the EU shouldn’t either, given the threat to its “traditional populations”. In the end, who cares? The *Weekly Worker* had the courage to expose Hunter’s rant and is suitably rewarded, with his description of the newspaper’s opposition to Islamophobia as “rotten”.

**René Gimpel**  
email

## Chicago school

Over the weekend of March 30-April 1 I was invited to speak at the Platypus International Convention in Chicago, USA. I must thank the Platypus comrades for the invitation and for their hospitality. Equally, I must apologise for taking so long in writing up my impressions of the event.

The convention, entitled ‘What just happened?’, was attended by about 90 people over the course of the three days. The aim was to work through some of the theoretical and political problems of the “1990s and 2000s left” as a way of understanding contemporary far-left practice.

To this end, the convention hosted a number of political organisations, groups and networks from several countries, with several competing agendas and outlooks. There were speakers from groups as diverse as the International Bolshevik Tendency, the International Marxist Tendency, News and Letters Collective and anarchist groups like Crimethinc.

This aspect of Platypus’s approach - “hosting the conversation” - is to be welcomed. We on the left as a whole cannot move forward without serious and rigorous political debate and discussion, or without closely scrutinising our collective history. It was therefore encouraging to see most of the small, fragmented US left come together for the event (one notable exception was the International Socialist Organization, which, despite a strong presence in Chicago, did not attend).

However, the conference often felt less like a “conversation” and more like a monologue. The workshops saw comrades give a short talk outlining the case for their particular group, and matters of controversy were only broached in the rather restricted Q and A session. While I was able to listen to some interesting presentations from comrades like Peter Hudis (US Marxist Humanists) and Josh Dekker of the IBT, I missed out on other groups’ workshops running at the same time. In my opinion, if the groups had discussed particularly contentious or dividing issues with each other, that would have made for a far better introduction to their politics.

Yet some of the panel discussions that were held were disappointing. The one on the 1990s and 2000s left featured a smattering of far-left groups, but speakers seemed to go out of their way *not* to discuss their differences. That was a shame, and several other comrades made comments to that effect. The debate between the IBT’s Tom Riley and myself was certainly not characterised by diplomacy or skirting around differences, however, and I think

many of the conference attendees took a lot from it as a result.

There was one particularly worrying aspect of “hosting the conversation”. For example, when one speaker from the journal *Phase II* repeatedly conflated the terms ‘anti-Zionist’ and ‘anti-Semitic’ in his talk on anti-fascism in Germany, I was the only one who challenged him on this typically protean *anti-Deutsch* method of debate. Whatever the merits of “hosting” such views, they should certainly not go unchallenged.

Having only met a few of the Platypus leading cadre in the past, the convention allowed me to gain more of an impression of the organisation and its dynamics. I was impressed that the project has been able to draw together a number of quite serious young people on the American left looking for a rigorous engagement with Marxist theory. The Platypus comrades are often, though not always, students who have simply had enough of mindless, demoralising, ‘headless-chicken’ activism. The comrades are often fairly up to speed with the nuances and shades of far-left opinion.

The level at which many engaged with the politics of the CPGB and the *Weekly Worker* was certainly a refreshing change from the usual ‘They’re Stalinists/Kautskyites/Trotskyites’ response with which we CPGBers are all too familiar. The Platypus people had lots of questions for me, and this led to lengthy, engaging and indeed exhausting discussions - in the meetings, in the breaks and at the social on Saturday evening (I have to admit that I missed the session on anarchism due to a very long argument on Lenin with Platypus co-founder Richard Rubin and several IBT and Platypus members).

I cannot say that I fully understand where Platypus is going or what it is trying to achieve. This is perhaps because it self-defines as a “pre-political” project, summed up by one comrade when he said: “The question of whether to act means asking whether it is possible to act.” It would indeed be difficult for Platypus to act politically at all in its present form. It has no programme, and its ‘theoretical heritage’ is a complex, even eclectic, mix of Moishe Postone, Karl Korsch, Theodor Adorno and the Spartacism of Joseph Seymour. The latter’s *Lenin and the vanguard party* (in my opinion, a résumé of essentially everything that is wrong with the left’s understanding of Bolshevism) is still a Platypus-recommended text.

During the Lenin debate, I made the point that, for all our significant differences, the CPGB and the IBT are, for example, probably ‘closer’ as a project than the CPGB and Platypus. Some of the Platypus comrades, and indeed the IBTers, were surprised by this, but I still think it is true. Formally speaking, the CPGB and IBT project is the same: ie to form an international revolutionary party that can lead a revolution. As far as I can see, that is not true of the current Platypus project, because it actually questions *whether* it is possible to forge such an organisation in light of the defeats that Marxism has endured. Perhaps my belief that it *is* possible is premised on some historical naivety.

But, to repeat the basic point I made at the school, we certainly will not be able to make moves in the direction of Marxist partyism and regroupment by basing ourselves on Seymour’s Stalinoid version of Bolshevism. That is the tried and tested road to sectdom.

**Ben Lewis**  
London

## Communist University 2012 August 20-26



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

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

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

## Places are limited, so book now!

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# ACTION

## CPGB podcasts

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

## London Communist Forum

**Sunday May 20, 5pm:** Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by open discussion and *Capital* reading group. This week: Vol 1, section 3. Caxton House, 129 St John’s Way, London N19. Organised by CPGB: [www.cpgb.org.uk](http://www.cpgb.org.uk).

## Radical Anthropology Group

**Tuesday May 22, 6.15pm:** ‘Noam Chomsky’s “cognitive revolution”’. 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](http://radicalanthropologygroup.org).

## 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](http://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](mailto:teachingandlearning4socialism@gmail.com).

## Chartist insurrection

**Friday May 18, 6pm:** Book launch, Workers’ Educational Association, 96-100 Clifton Street, London EC2. *1839: The Chartist insurrection* by David Black and Chris Ford, with the authors and John McDonnell MP. Information: [cfordcpford@aol.com](mailto:cfordcpford@aol.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](mailto: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](mailto: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](http://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>.

## Rank and file fightback

**Saturday May 26, 12 noon to 4pm:** National meeting, Casa Club, 29 Hope Street, Liverpool L1 (nearest station: Liverpool Lime Street). Organised by Unite Construction Rank and File (*Siteworker*): [siteworkers@virginmedia.com](mailto:siteworkers@virginmedia.com).

## 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>.

## No to La Colosa mine

**Friday June 1, 3pm:** Picket, Colombian embassy, Hans Crescent, London SW1 (nearest tube: Knightsbridge). Solidarity with the people of Cajamarca, Colombia. Organised by Colombia Solidarity Campaign: [www.colombiasolidarity.org.uk](http://www.colombiasolidarity.org.uk).

## National Shop Stewards Network

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

## 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.



**POLEMIC**

# Small rooms and the politics of dishonesty

The Anti-Capitalist Initiative represents a further liquidationist retreat, writes **Peter Manson**

**R**ichard Brenner of Workers Power is not too keen on the *Weekly Worker's* characterisation of the aim of his organisation in its sponsorship of the Anti-Capitalist Initiative: to create yet another halfway house formation as a 'stepping stone' to the revolutionary party our class really needs.

Responding to Ben Lewis's article, 'Ditch sects and fronts' (May 3), which reported on the April 28 launch of the ACI, comrade Brenner writes: "It is ... a distortion for Ben Lewis of the *Weekly Worker* to write that we promoted 'an open, unashamed halfway house party' on some kind of incoherent programme intermediate between parliamentary reforms and revolution. We are simply practical enough to recognise that a programmatic discussion cannot be successfully concluded before it has begun."

So, in the meantime, why call for the ACI to put forward any programmatic demands at all? Comrade Brenner has an answer to that one: "... we are very clear that our proposals were just a few starting principles at the beginning of a discussion, not a systematic political programme, let alone the revolutionary programme we will need if we are to create a unified new organisation that will survive the blows of the class struggle over the years ahead and that will distinguish itself in the movement by promoting a far-sighted and coherent strategy to the resistance, to connect it in practical ways to the fight for revolution."

In other words, the "starting principles" which WP wants the ACI to adopt as a basis for discussing its programme are not those of revolutionary Marxism, but a series of demands for the movement of resistance to capital's austerity assault. It is, of course, an excellent thing to equip our movement with such a series of demands, but should they be used to establish the political parameters upon which a party should be based? Surely a revolutionary workers' party, of the type WP says it will fight for within the ACI, must attempt to unite working class militants around a programme for a socialist society.

Back in September 2009, when WP launched its 'Call for an Anti-Capitalist Party', it was presented as an "appeal to all the trade unions and socialist organisations, to all activists fighting for resistance from below, to anti-racist and anti-fascist campaigners confronting the BNP, to the trade union leaders and members: let's unite and build a new anti-capitalist party".<sup>2</sup>

Is it likely that all those "trade union leaders" looking to found a new party would accept revolutionary Marxism as its basis? As recently as last month in fact, comrade Brenner confirmed that such a Labour-type party remains WP's aim. Writing on Louis Proyect's blog on April 14, he stated: "In Britain we are campaigning for a rank-and-file movement in the trade unions, for the unification of the anti-cuts campaigns, for a new mass working class party based on the unions and



**Two-faced**

the left. It is in close connection with all three of those projects that we are promoting the new anti-capitalist initiative".<sup>3</sup>

So why deny that the proposed party would be a halfway house? At a WP weekend school in November 2009 comrade Brenner declared that the new formation would "not be an alternative to the revolutionary party of the working class" - it would be "a way of getting there".<sup>4</sup> And that is exactly how advocates of halfway house formations envisage them. In reality, however, they end up seeking approval from the right and represent

a retreat from revolutionary politics.

## Liquidationism

It goes without saying that if such a formation really could open the road to a Marxist party then it would be crazy to oppose it. But the problem is that a halfway house set up by revolutionaries cannot but lead in the opposite direction. They must water down their revolutionism to stand any chance of attracting the non-revolutionary union leaders and members - not to mention the libertarian/anarchistic Occupy partisans in the ACI's sights. After all,

none of them are exactly rushing to join the existing revolutionary groups, are they? That is why we say that to campaign for a halfway house is a form of liquidationism, whereby the left contents itself with platitudinous "starting principles" and restricts its Marxism to its own internal events and the pages of its little-read journals.

Simon Hardy and Chris Strafford in their joint letter to the *Weekly Worker* confirm this approach when they write: "No-one has renounced Marxist politics, but we are realistic that we simply cannot slap down a Marxist programme and rally

thousands to our banner."<sup>5</sup> Neither comrade is a WP member, of course - Hardy recently led a small split from that organisation, while Strafford has just abandoned the CPGB in favour of the ACI - but, rest assured, like WP they retain "the aim of launching a revolutionary organisation in the future".

For their part the comrades of Permanent Revolution, an earlier split from WP, reject the idea that the ACI should even adopt the aim of a party (of any type): "... the remaining members of WP, who are helping to build the project, have a schema that sees the ACI in terms of 'building a workers' party' as an alternative to Labour, replete with programme, democratic centralism, directing centre, etc. This is not how we, the comrades who recently left WP or the majority of people involved see this initiative.

"Most of the people involved ... don't see this as some Leninist or Trotskyist project, but an initiative to link up and work with quite divergent movements and activists - from libertarian, syndicalist, horizontalist and even anarchist traditions, alongside those from none of the above. It means we are going to have to move outside our comfort zones, work with people from UK Uncut, Occupy, climate change activists, in ways that are new, and go beyond 'selling the paper and building the party'. But it also means trying to build some sort of local and national anti-capitalist coordination that overcomes the traditional divisions and sectarianism on the left; one that aims to link the new radical movements into the struggle to transform the trade unions into fighting allies of anti-capitalism."

OK, so let us suspend our disbelief and assume that a few hundred people from the "libertarian, syndicalist, horizontalist and even anarchist traditions" are won over to the idea of linking up with the WP milieu in a loose network. Continuing the fantasy, let us imagine that the left "overcomes the traditional divisions and sectarianism" and does the same. Where does that lead? To a nice, big anti-cuts movement? It goes without saying that a single anti-cuts movement would be an advance on the current divisions, but can you really see it happening as a result of the ACI, which in its own peculiar way embodies the disorientation and fragmentation of the left?

Wait a minute, though. This "coordination" will not just be against the cuts, will it? It will be "anti-capitalist", presumably campaigning against the system as a whole. Yet it will not set itself the aim of fighting for the socialist alternative to that system, let alone of establishing the only force that can lead that fight: a single, united Marxist party. So what is the point of it all?

Comrades Hardy and Strafford stress another laudable aim: the ACI can help "organise a genuine rank-and-file initiative" and "link up existing forces fighting for this". The problem with this is that class-conscious workers are very thin on the ground and where they exist they are often aligned to, or are members



of, one of the existing left groups. True, there will be groups of workers who are prepared to use very militant tactics to defend their own terms and conditions. But that hardly adds up to a *class* viewpoint. The key question today, therefore, is how to unite the left in a way (a) that can work, (b) that is principled, (c) that can dig deep social roots, and (d) that has a realistic prospect of equipping the working class with the kind of programme needed for it to come to power not only in this country, but globally: ie, it must have correct orientation to the existing state and its constitution, the Labour Party, the trade unions, the European Union.

So it is not a case of “deriding the meeting as small”, as comrades Hardy and Trafford allege we have done. Small meetings are certainly needed if we are to work towards meaningful unity and thrash out our differences. Nor is it a case of our being “too bitter to take part”. We actually wrote to WP asking about its proposals for the ACI. But we got no reply. Perhaps this was because the comrades were too busy splitting. But we did send an observer to the ACI national launch. From the report-back we received it is clear that what we have is yet another of those fundamentally dishonest and usually totally futile front projects. Therefore we have no intention of turning our back on the fight for party in favour of the ACI illusion.

But “Do we really want another small left meeting declaring a revolutionary programme and party?” the two comrades ask. “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?”

No, we do not want to see yet another sect - we have always shunned all such nonsense. Comrade Trafford seems to have already forgotten that, while we have the name of a party, that party needs to be made real. Hence the title of our leading committee and the first clause of our ‘What we fight for’ column published each week in our paper. Ditto the programme. We call it a *draft* programme precisely because there is no party.

But do you really think that “discussing and debating out what should be done with activists from across the unions and social movements” is the way to unite the forces of Marxism? No, actually in the name of unity with forces to the right, we have yet further divisions on the left and a further watering down of basic Marxist principles.

Comrades Hardy and Trafford write: “Arguing for an open process of unity and then dismissing such a process is hypocrisy.” It depends what you mean by an “open process”, comrades. We say that Marxist unification would involve an “open process” in the sense that it would require honest debate and long, hard negotiations, where the outcome was not guaranteed. But in the case of the ACI none of the participants are even aiming to begin any such undertaking.

## Whose unity?

Comrade Pham Binh takes another approach in his letter in last week’s *Weekly Worker*: “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”.<sup>7</sup>

The comrade seems to be committed to the ‘what was, had to be’ school of history. Of course, we cannot rerun events. Marx was

certainly against the Gotha unification with the Lassalleans. He thought that the Marxist Eisenachers should cooperate with them, but not unify with them. Instead of agreeing an eclectic programme, they should have stuck to their guns and fought for mass influence. I do not know of any historical law which says they were bound to be unsuccessful if Marx had won out. Indeed there is every reason to believe that they would have succeeded (and in the process they would have politically destroyed the Lassalleans).

However, in our assessment circumstances today require us to *go through* the existing left. Take the example of Arthur Scargill’s Socialist Labour Party, formed in 1996. We in the CPGB threw ourselves into this left split from the Labour Party, which brought sections of the left together with miners and other militant workers looking to found a new political force. In fact we faced an instant witch-hunt and specially selected ‘gatekeepers’ employed by the former leader of the National Union of Mineworkers to bureaucratically exclude us. The SLP was quickly destroyed by Scargill’s control-freakery and dictatorship, but it would have been sectarian to stand aside from such a development.

The Socialist Alliance, formed at the end of the same decade, was rather different. It did not include masses of militant workers, but did bring together all the main far-left organisations, as well as scores of former members of those organisations. Its problem was the insistence of most of the other groups that the SA should present itself as a mainly electoral alliance standing on an old Labour-type platform. Nevertheless, we participated enthusiastically, because here was an opportunity to work with the other groups in an organisation that could *potentially* have formed the basis of a Marxist party. Even Respect - especially in its initial stages, with the participation of the Socialist Workers Party - allowed us space to make propaganda for such a formation.

Pham Binh continues: “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.”

I am sorry, comrade, but our criticisms are concerned with practicalities - and very important ones at that. *How* can the working class arm itself with the party it needs? How is such a party to be formed and on what basis? ‘Forget your differences and get on with the action’ has always been the cry of opportunists. It can never lead to anything worthwhile and *permanent*.

Taking issue with comrade Lewis, Pham Binh writes: “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.”

And Pham Binh wonders why we describe ACI supporters as liquidationist. Because the left is hopelessly divided and marginalised, he says, let us give up on trying to

provide political leadership and hope that we can somehow magic into existence a “powerful worker-socialist movement” that will reduce the bourgeoisie to trembling ineptitude. Not very likely.

## Fundamentals

He does, however, raise an interesting question when he writes: “... 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.”

Comrade King (the author of the Permanent Revolution piece quoted above) takes a different view in his letter to this paper. Referring to the CPGB leaflet handed out at the ACI launch, he states: “We find no mention of revolution, overthrowing the state, worker council democracy, the need for a revolutionary party - that is, ideas that most of us understand to be ‘Marxist fundamentals’. When it comes down to it, the CPGB offers only its minimum democratic programme as a basis for anti-capitalist regroupment.”<sup>8</sup>

In other words, he is saying that there is agreement on the fundamentals - although, for some reason he does not follow this through with any advocacy of unity on the basis of such agreement. He prefers instead to offer his disingenuous criticisms over what the leaflet did not say. For example, it is true that it did not use the words, “revolutionary party”, but it did state: “We in the CPGB argue that ... this meeting should take the first steps towards a fight for *principled* left unity around the *acceptance* of (not full-scale *agreement* with) a political programme that commits itself to the fundamentals of Marxist political strategy.” I am sorry if comrade King did not understand from this that we were talking about a party.

It is also true that the leaflet was incomplete in its description of our understanding of Marxist fundamentals, so I will restate what I believe them to be, as comrades Hardy and Trafford also touch on this when they write: “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.” Leaving aside the nonsense about the LRC (if you can work out what they are talking about you are more astute than I am), what is the CPGB “version of Marxism”, as the comrades put it?

The ‘fundamentals’ - or fundamental principles, if you prefer - upon which Marxists ought to unite within a single party are these:

1. *Working class independence*. First and foremost we promote the interest of our class, which alone has the power to open the way to the emancipation of humanity. We reject all *strategic* alliances with other classes, and especially governmental ones. The working class party will not administer capitalism - a key differentiation with Labourism.

2. *Internationalism*. The proletariat is an international class and its liberation cannot take place within a single country. Here too we find another sharp delineation that separates Marxists from Labourites and reformists.

3. *Democracy*. Full democracy, both within the state and within our own movement, is a precondition for the success of the struggle for communism. Over and over again we point to the bureaucratic failings of the left’s own internal regimes in the here and now. Yet there can surely be no Marxist unification without the acceptance of democracy.

Of course, the CPGB hugely

expands on these principles in our *Draft programme*.<sup>9</sup> But neither are set in stone. We believe that all Marxists should be able to accept the above principles as the basis for initial discussions on unification, but we are open to the possibility that they may be inadequate or incomplete. Similarly, if a unification process were to begin tomorrow, we would propose that the *Draft programme* (so called because it is the CPGB draft proposals for the Marxist movement to consider) be adopted as a starting point for debate.

In other words, we do not consider either the three fundamentals or the *Draft programme* as the specifically CPGB “version of Marxism”. They, or something like them, ought to be acceptable to all Marxists.

## Democracy

At first sight, there would appear to be much common ground between the CPGB and Workers Power. For example in a recent article WP states that the SWP and Socialist Party in England and Wales “repel generation after generation of activists through their bureaucratic regimes, in which members cannot organise within the party to change policy or hold their leaderships to account”. It also declares that “Workers Power has always recognised that the path to a revolutionary party will not come simply through individual recruitment to a small, mainly propaganda-focused, group like our own. We are always seeking avenues to work with other forces and to debate and agree revolutionary policy with them. We believe a revolutionary party will come into being not through recruiting ones and twos, but through ‘the fusion of communism and the working class movement’ (Lenin).”<sup>10</sup>

WP’s international grouping, the League for a Fifth International, states in its online article, ‘The method and principles of communist organisation’: “Where no revolutionary communist party exists, the first duty of communists is to fight for its formation. This obliges communists to unite their forces in a pre-party organisation of struggle.” To that end, as well as individual recruitment, there must be merger with other “propaganda societies”.<sup>11</sup>

However, it warns: “Where these organisations are propaganda societies without the masses, the strictest and most intransigent attitude is necessary on questions of programme.” In other words, only the Workers Power “version” of Marxism will do. It is not a question of agreement over the fundamentals, but the agreement, at least in public, to every dot and comma, take it or leave it, of every WP/LFI policy.

The same document rejects the “criminal abuse of the term ‘democratic centralism’ by the Stalinist bureaucracy, both in the former USSR and in contemporary capitalist China, to excuse a

totalitarian regime of bureaucratic centralism in which all democratic rights, all debate and discussion, all attempts to subordinate the actions of the leadership to the interests and wishes of the workers is choked off through police terror” (point 40).

Point 41 continues: “By contrast with this perversion, democratic centralism involves both the fullest internal democracy and debating of disputed questions, and disciplined common action in the implementation of party decisions.”

This too appears all very well - until you realise that one essential element is missing. WP openly states that internal democracy ought not to extend to the right to *publicly* criticise the leadership or *publicly* declare disagreement over policy. This, combined with its “intransigent attitude” towards any slight divergence from its programme, means in practice that no substantial unification can take place. No minority ought to be expected to accept that any views it holds in contradiction to those of the leadership will be permanently suppressed outside the narrow confines of the organisation.

This is not only wrong in principle, but antithetical to the entire communist project. Socialism must be the act of the class itself, yet the proletariat cannot rule unless it is able to grasp every shade of opinion and has knowledge of every possible weakness in the leadership line.

That brings me to my final criticism of comrades Hardy and Trafford, who write: “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. Advocating breaking party rules just because you don’t agree with them strikes the ex-WP members as unprincipled.”

*Undemocratic* rules are there to be broken, comrades. Surely that is ABC for revolutionaries ●

## Notes

1. www.workerspower.co.uk/2012/05/a-new-anti-capitalist-initiative.
2. Quoted in ‘Rival CNWP launched’ *Weekly Worker* November 19 2009. The ‘Call for an Anti-Capitalist Party’ has now disappeared without trace from the WP website.
3. http://louisproject.wordpress.com/2012/04/14/a-simple-proposal-for-a-new-anti-capitalist-left.
4. ‘Rival CNWP launched’ *Weekly Worker* November 19 2009.
5. Letters *Weekly Worker* May 10.
6. ‘New anti-capitalist initiative: a hopeful start’: www.permanentrevolution.net/entry/3400.
7. Letters *Weekly Worker* May 10.
8. *Ibid*.
9. www.cpgb.org.uk/pdf/draft\_programme\_2010.pdf.
10. www.workerspower.co.uk/2012/05/a-new-anticapitalist-initiative.
11. www.fifthinternational.org/content/method-and-principles-communist-organisation.

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## OUR HISTORY

# How Lenin's party became (Bolshevik)

Did Lenin seek to exclude Mensheviks from Russia's revolutionary organisation in order to forge a 'party of a new type'? **Lars T Lih** looks at the reality

**F**rom 1898 on, there existed a political party called the *Rossiiskaia sotsial-demokraticheskaia rabochaia partiia* (RSDRP), or Russian Social Democratic Worker Party. *Rossiiskaia* means "Russian" in the sense of citizens of the Russian state, as opposed to *rusaskaia*, which refers to ethnic Russians. Of course, the party title made no reference to either of its two later factions, Mensheviks and Bolsheviks.

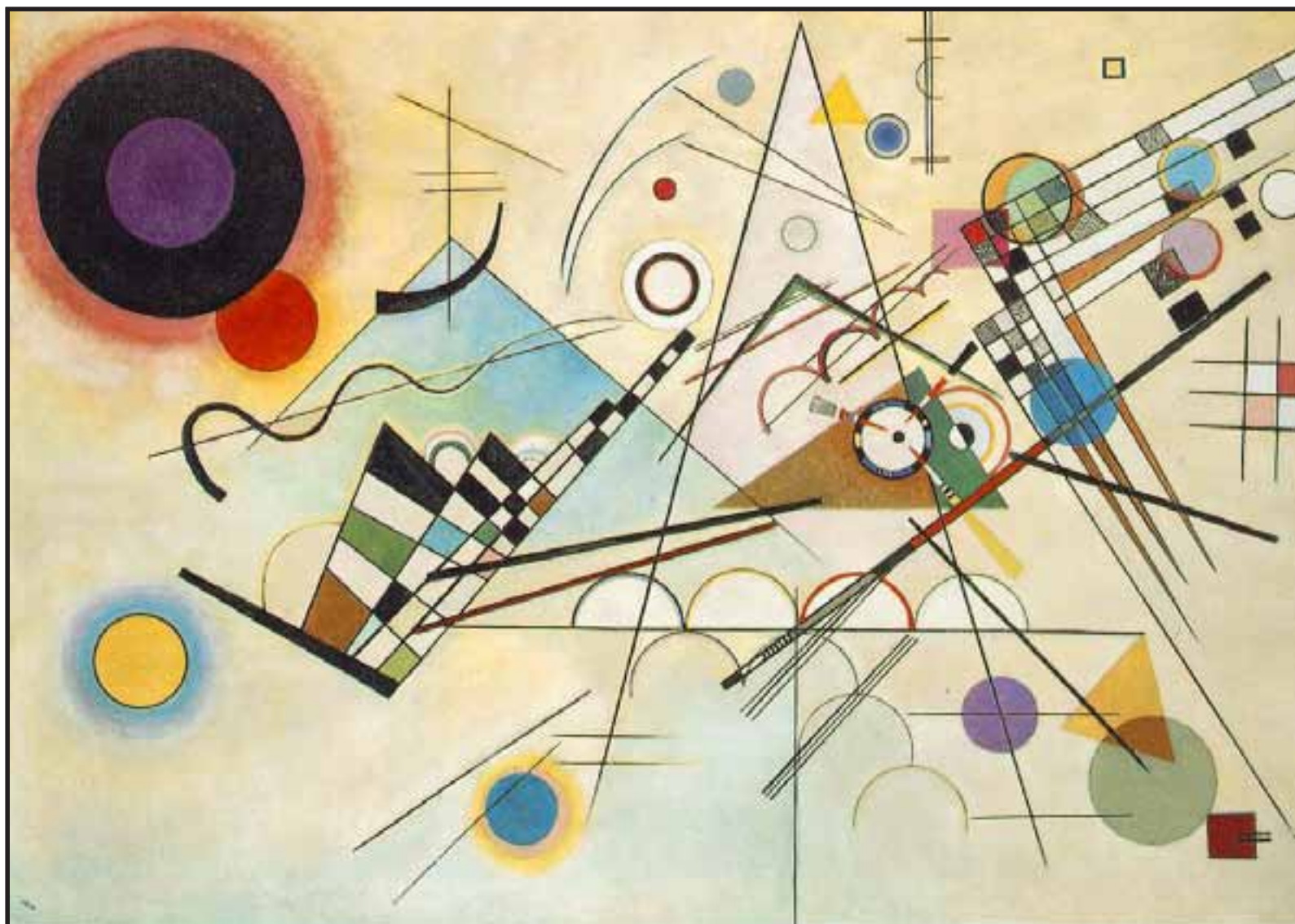
At its 7th Congress in March 1918, this party officially changed its name to *Rossiiskaia kommunisticheskaia partiia* (*bol'shevikov*) or RKP(B). The party now referred to itself as 'Bolshevik', even if only in parentheses. The question arises: did the party ever have an intermediate title such as RSDRP(B) - for example, during the period from April 1917 to March 1918?

No. The label 'RSDRP(B)' was occasionally used informally in 1917 (for reasons to be discussed later), along with other improvised labels. Nevertheless, a party with the name 'RSDRP(B)' never existed.

The widespread impression to the contrary is due to some energetic camouflage by the Soviet editors and their presentation of Lenin's works, of the records of party meetings, and the like. The prevailing Soviet historical orthodoxy wanted the party to be officially Bolshevik as early as possible, as a mark of its status as a 'party of a new type'. Whenever they got a chance, therefore, Soviet editors used 'RSDRP(B)' in the titles they provided to historical documents. For example, the book containing the records of the 6th Party Congress in August 1917 has the title *Proceedings of the 6th Congress of the RSDRP(B)*. Yet an examination of the documents themselves shows that the name of the party - the one used by all participants - was still plain old 'RSDRP'.<sup>1</sup>

This demi-falsification by Soviet editors creates a challenge for any investigation of how and why the name of the party was changed. In what follows, I have ignored the titles provided by Soviet editors, but I still rely on their usual conscientiousness about the texts of the documents themselves. I also recognise that making generalisations about what people did *not* say is always rather tricky. Therefore, the following remarks are somewhat provisional.

When Lenin returned to Russia at the beginning of April 1917 (I am using the old Russian calendar here), he carefully avoided using 'Bolshevik' to refer to the party. Several reasons led to this reluctance. First, he had long-standing views about the essential difference between a *faction* and a *party* (as explained in my first instalment<sup>2</sup>). A faction was more homogeneous in outlook than a party, since it was composed of people who 'thought the same' (*edinomyshlenniki*) about important tactical issues. In one of his first statements after arriving



The complexities of name changing

in Russia, Lenin emphasised this distinction (the Soviet-era English translation charmingly renders *edinomyshlenniki* as "comrades-in-ideas"):

On April 4 1917, I had occasion to make a report in Petrograd on the subject indicated in the title [tactics], first, at a meeting of Bolsheviks. These were delegates to the All-Russia Conference of Soviets of Worker and Soldier Deputies, who had to leave for their homes and therefore could not allow me to postpone it. After the meeting the chairman, comrade G Zinoviev, asked me on behalf of the whole assembly to repeat my report immediately at a joint meeting of Bolshevik and Menshevik delegates, who wished to discuss the question of unifying the RSDR Party.

Difficult though it was for me immediately to repeat my report, I felt that I had no right to refuse once this was demanded of me both by my *edinomyshlenniki* and the Mensheviks, who, because of their impending departure, really could not grant me a delay.<sup>3</sup>

Further, Lenin had been accused a few years earlier, at the time of the Prague conference in 1912, of having carried out a coup d'état within the party and of declaring his

own faction to be the party. He had vehemently denied the charges back then and he was not disposed to give them *ex post facto* credit in 1917 by referring to the party as 'Bolshevik'.

In Lenin's mind, Bolshevism in the strict sense was a tactical view about the Russian revolution, consisting of a scenario that described the alliance between the socialist proletariat and the peasantry as a whole. After the February revolution and the fall of the tsar, he had serious doubts about the continued applicability of this scenario. In this context - that is, in debates about the correct tactical attitude toward the peasantry - Lenin was willing to talk about Bolshevism, but his comments were rather critical. In fact, he stated that "Old Bolshevism needs to be discarded." So perhaps Bolshevism in the strict sense was already really a thing of the past - in which case 'Bolshevik' was not such a good label for the party.<sup>4</sup> (Lenin later changed his attitude toward the old Bolshevik scenario.)

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Lenin had his own plans for a renaming of the party: he wanted to abandon 'Social Democratic' and replace it with 'Communist'. The reasoning behind this name change was based on developments in Europe as a whole. The official social democratic

parties had disgraced themselves by their support of their respective governments' war effort. The banner of 'revolutionary social democracy' had been sullied beyond repair and had to be replaced. The whole logic of this gesture would be obscured if the Russian social democratic party was known by the extremely Russian name of 'Bolshevik'.

### In a bind

As a result, the appearance of the words 'Bolshevik' or 'Bolshevism' are few and far between for the first month or so after Lenin's arrival in Russia. For example, Lenin's contributions to the 'all-Russian conference' of the party held in late April takes up 90 pages or so in volume 24 of his *Collected works*, yet I have not discovered a single use of 'Bolshevik' or related terms in these pages.

Indeed, Lenin found himself in something of a bind when talking about the party. He was extremely reluctant to call it 'Bolshevik', he was openly scornful about 'Social Democratic', yet the name 'Communist' could not be used until a party congress officially made the change. Lenin did occasionally refer to the party as the RSDRP. But for the most part, he relied on euphemisms such as "revolutionary social democracy", "party of the proletariat" or simply "our party" -

the vaguest and most common label.

Such were Lenin's views - but he soon discovered that the name of the party was not up to him, or even up to the party! People outside the party, both friends and foes, knew it as the party of the Bolsheviks, and - especially in the new context of open politics and electoral competition - their outlook was decisive. We soon find Lenin is talking more and more about "the Bolsheviks" - first, to distinguish the party from its rivals in the eyes of potential supporters and, second, to respond to attacks on "Bolshevik extremism" made by political enemies. Indeed, during April-May 1917, when we find "Bolshevik" or "Bolshevism" in Lenin's writings, we can bet on finding either "electoral" or "attack" somewhere nearby.

The most revealing statement on this topic was published in May in a pamphlet explaining the differences between the parties.<sup>5</sup> Lenin was writing for a popular audience and he needed to distinguish the party from "the Social Democrats, the Socialist-Revolutionaries and kindred groups" (NB: he avoids the term 'party' for this grouping). In the listing of the various parties, we find the following:

"D. ('Bolsheviks'). The party which properly should be called the *Communist Party*, but which at present is named the Russian



Social Democratic Worker Party, as united by the central committee, or, colloquially, the ‘Bolsheviks’.”

The clumsy expression “as united under the central committee” was an earlier coinage used to distinguish Lenin’s group from other social democratic claimants. This circumlocution was adopted precisely to avoid identifying the party with the Bolshevik faction. Clearly, it was inadequate as a political brand name in the rough-and-tumble of electoral competition in 1917. The word I have translated as “colloquially” is *prostorechie*, which has connotations of substandard usage. Lenin is almost saying that only uneducated people label the party as ‘Bolshevik’. Of course, he is referring not to genuinely uneducated people, but rather to political rivals and journalists who refuse to follow the subtleties of correct party usage. Throughout this pamphlet, ‘Bolshevik’ is always found within quotation marks - a typographical manifestation of Lenin’s reluctance.

An illustration of the other main motive for using ‘Bolshevik’ is a passage in a polemical newspaper article published in mid-May.<sup>6</sup> Here Lenin considers various accusations against the “terrible Bolsheviks” made not only by the capitalist newspapers but by the moderate socialists. He then claims that the programme of economic regulation put forward by the moderate socialists was in actuality identical with the “programme of ‘terrible’ Bolshevism” - only, of course, the moderate socialists could not carry it out in practice as long as they continued to make pacts with the bourgeois parties.

Lenin perforce had to become more comfortable using ‘Bolshevik’ when making appeals for support and responding to attacks. But he still seems to have regarded it as an imposition and a distraction from more principled considerations about the party name. The change of party name was so important to him that in March 1918, at a special congress that otherwise was devoted solely to the highly urgent topic of the Brest-Litovsk treaty, he gave an extensive speech about why the name should be changed from ‘Social Democratic’ to ‘Communist’.

At the beginning of this speech, he adds foreigners to the list of people who would insist on using ‘Bolshevik’ as a label for the party: “The central committee proposes to change the name of our party to Russian Communist Party, with ‘Bolsheviks’ in parentheses. We considered this addition to be necessary, because the word ‘Bolshevik’ has acquired a right of citizenship not only in the political life of Russia, but in the entire foreign press that follows the development of events in general outline.”

This curt comment constitutes Lenin’s entire discussion about the inclusion of ‘Bolshevik’ in the party name, even if only in the humble garb of a parenthesis. No references to the glorious past of the Bolsheviks, to the necessity of creating a homogenous party or to the alleged inauguration of a Bolshevik Party back in 1912. My impression is that Lenin was still rather annoyed that ill-informed people’s insistence on using the purely Russian label of ‘Bolshevik’ was getting in the way of his grand and principled gesture of rejecting ‘Social Democracy’ in favour of ‘Communist’.

## Internationalists

Turning from Lenin to more general usage, we may observe that within the party in 1917 the fundamental political choice was *not* viewed as

‘Bolshevik vs non-Bolshevik’. The fundamental dividing line was rather the one between ‘internationalist vs defencist’. In the Russian context, an internationalist was someone who wanted to overthrow the provisional government and replace it with a *narodnaia vlast*: that is, a sovereign authority based on the workers and peasants and expressing itself institutionally through the soviets. An internationalist was also committed to “breaking with the defencists”: that is, refusing to stay in parties that engaged in coalition governments and otherwise indulged in “pact-making” (*soglashatelstvo*).

The ‘internationalist/defencist’ split was strictly analogous to, although not identical with, the ‘anti-liquidationist/liquidationist’ split in 1910-14. Like the earlier split, it was taken for granted that, while all Bolsheviks were internationalists, not all internationalists were Bolsheviks. In other words, the dividing line between those who were in and those who were out of the party did not run between Bolshevik and Menshevik, but rather somewhere among the Mensheviks.

Thus the consistent official attitude of the RSDRP in 1917 was that it wanted to work with internationalists in other parties and that it welcomed internationalist Social Democrats in the party. As Lenin put in April, “... in regard to various local groups of workers who are aligned with the Mensheviks and the like, but who strive to uphold the position of internationalism against ‘revolutionary defencism’ ..., the policy of our party must be to support such workers and groups, to seek closer relations with them, and support unification with them on the basis of a definite break with the petty bourgeois betrayal of socialism.”

The 6th Party Congress was held in August 1917, at a time when the relations between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks who were in the government and the official Soviet leadership were in a very bad way. Governmental repression after the confusion of the July Days meant that Lenin and other top leaders could not attend. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the congress, the delegates enthusiastically received Iurii Larin, formerly a prominent liquidationist and now a spokesman for ‘Menshevik Internationalists’. Larin got special applause when he promised “an immediate break with the defencists” In the name of the party, Bukharin welcomed Larin’s initiative:

I greet with special warmth his declaration about the necessity of a break with the defencists, that ulcer that is eating into not only the party, but all the democratic forces of the country. In order to combat this ulcer, it is necessary to unite all social democrat internationalists. In this hall there is not a single individual that does not feel the necessity of uniting all the living forces of social democracy. Comrades! I am not going to dwell on the differences of opinion mentioned by comrade Larin, but rather I will express the hope that these differences will be outgrown and that social democrat internationalists will be united in one overall party.

Larin admitted the difficulties of overcoming “nine years of disunity”. Thus he dated the party split from 1908, presumably because the last more or less united party congress had been in 1907. Worth noting is the fact that Larin made no references to the Prague conference of 1912 as a significant date in the history of the split. The same could be said of remarks by Mikhail Olminsky, who

opened the 6th Congress by looking back at earlier party congresses in relation to the split. More generally, I found not the slightest hint in any of the materials I looked at from 1917-18 that anybody saw the Prague conference as marking the inauguration of a new Bolshevik Party.

Larin promised that Martov himself, the leader of the Menshevik Internationalists, would address the party congress. This visit never materialised, and the mood at the end of the congress was much sourer on this issue than it had been when Larin was applauded. KK Iurenev (a member of the ‘Interregional Group’ to which Trotsky belonged that was now joining the RSDRP) grimly remarked that only “a minority of a minority of the Mensheviks” would end up entering the RSDRP. Nevertheless, he proposed a resolution, accepted by the congress, that contained the following language:

While opposing the dangerous slogan of uniting everybody, social democracy puts forward the class-revolutionary slogan of the unity of all internationalists who break in practice with the Menshevik-Imperialists.

Since it sees this kind of unity as necessary and inevitable, the congress calls on all the revolutionary elements of social democracy to immediately break organisational ties with the defencists and unite around the RSDRP.

## View on the ground

A more direct look at the realities on the ground comes from results of a questionnaire circulated among local party organisations and included in the records of the 6th Party Congress. The questions of interest to us are: what is the name of your organisation? Does your organisation contain both Bolsheviks and internationalists, or are you purely Bolshevik? The very existence of these questions indicates that as of August 1917 the party was viewed not as an exclusively Bolshevik party, but as a party in which Bolsheviks dominated.

When we look at the answers, we find a large majority simply called themselves by the name of their locality plus “RSDRP”. A number of local organisations did refer to themselves as “RSDRP (Bolsheviks)”. On the other hand, some had titles such as the following: “Cheliabinsk committee of the RSDRP (internationalists)”.

When asked to describe their factional content, most committees had something similar to the party organisation in the Vyborg district of Petrograd: “Our organisation is a united one, including only internationalists in principle, but in fact consisting almost exclusively of Bolsheviks.”

Or, as the “Odessa committee of the RSDRP” put it, “We unite Bolsheviks as well as uniters (Trotskyists, former partyists) and Menshevik-Internationalists who accept the platform of the Bolsheviks: all internationalists.” (‘Uniters’ and ‘partyists’ are labels from the intra-party squabbles of 1912, so that ‘Trotskyist’ means someone who supported Trotsky’s bid for all-factional unity at that time.)

Usage had not yet settled down, so we find a variety of ways of talking about party organisations and factions. Even though some labels did not continue into the future, we should remember the way, for example, the local soviet

in the Vyborg district greeted the 6th Congress - as “the all-Russian congress of the internationalists” and as “the representatives of thorough-going revolutionary social democracy”.

In 1918, as we have seen, the hastily called 7th Congress officially changed the party name and called for substantial programme revisions. The new party programme was adopted in the following year by the 8th Congress. There were extensive debates over the programme at these two congresses, but very little attention was paid to the name change as such. In 1918, proposals to keep ‘Worker’ in the title and to remove ‘Russian’ were quickly dismissed.

One delegate did object to dropping ‘Social Democratic’ from the party’s name. Iurii Steklov felt that the best course was to take steps to end the “political masquerade” of Menshevik groups who called themselves social democratic, even though they had lost all moral right to use this title. He argued that a great deal of political good will would be thrown away if the old name was dropped: “I make bold to assure you that you won’t create any enthusiasm among anybody but Martov and friends by changing this glorious title of the party. We will have to re-educate all the masses who are accustomed to see this word [Social Democrat] as the expression of their own party.”

Steklov therefore suggested that ‘Bolshevik’ be dropped from the parenthesis and ‘Communist’ placed there instead, so that the new name would be ‘RSDRP (Communists)’. He asserted that the word ‘Bolshevik’ had only historical meaning that arose from the “happenstance” that the Bolsheviks had a majority (in Russian *bol’shinstvo*) at the 2nd Party Congress in 1903.

In response, Bukharin said that by now the masses saw the Bolsheviks as their champions and the Mensheviks as traitors. He followed this argument up with the following remarkable comment: “The issue is that the *word* ‘Bolshevik’ is a silly one that that has lost all meaning and there is no reason to retain this word. We need to keep it for the present, so that the masses, not being initiated into all the subtleties of the issue, are not puzzled by trying to figure out which party this is, since not everybody is going to read the resolutions of our congress.”

Shortly after the 7th Congress, Bukharin wrote a small book entitled *Programma Kommunistov (Programme of the communists)*.<sup>7</sup> At the very end of this work, he provided an explanation of “why we are called communists”. No mention is made of the presence of the parenthetical ‘Bolshevik’ in the party’s new name. According to Bukharin, the split between communists and social democrats was one that ran through the socialist movement in all countries. As an example of such a split, he mentioned the armed conflict between Mensheviks and Bolsheviks *after* the October revolution: “Blood marked a boundary line between us. Such a thing cannot and never will be forgotten.”

Some people at the 7th Party Congress saw the parenthetical ‘Bolshevik’ as temporary and proposed that the issue be reconsidered at the next congress in 1919. Although there were extensive debates over the programme at the 8th Party Congress in 1919, the issue of the party’s official name was not mentioned and the party remained ‘RKP(B)’.

When we look back at how and why the party became officially ‘Bolshevik’, we see that it did not really decide to give itself this name

- rather, it accepted the fact that outsiders insisted on using it. The party took on the Bolshevik label in 1917-18 as the result of an objective process of political competition fuelled by the imperatives of political branding.

Let us consider the case of Iurii Larin, the Menshevik Internationalist who addressed the 6th Party Congress. Larin went to join the party and played a prominent role in the economic policy of the Bolshevik government. Indeed, his daughter later married Bukharin, the Bolshevik leader who greeted his remarks at the 6th Congress. In 1917 Larin still considered himself a Menshevik, and old party hands such as he and Lenin would be aware of traditional conflicts over tactical issues. Nevertheless, as soon as he joined the RSDRP, everybody else would refer to him as a Bolshevik.

This example illustrates the nature of the process. The party did not *shrink* so that it became only one of the former factions of the RSDRP. Rather, the word ‘Bolshevik’ *expanded* so that it included everyone in the party, regardless of their former factional affiliation.

In so doing, the impressionistic meaning of ‘Bolshevism’ used by outsiders prevailed over the more precise definition of those versed in internal party affairs. This impressionistic meaning might be paraphrased as the radical movement of the lower classes to take over political power and use it for world revolution and extensive social transformation of Russia - to the horror of some and the enthusiasm of others. Those of us who are interested in party history might ask ourselves: is this more impressionistic definition perhaps the most useful one?

**The third and final instalment in this series of articles will look at how ‘Bolshevism’ was used in 1920 ●**

## Notes

1. All material from party congresses can be found at this site: [http://publ.lib.ru/ARCHIVES/K/KPSS/\\_KPSS.html](http://publ.lib.ru/ARCHIVES/K/KPSS/_KPSS.html).
2. ‘A faction is not a party’ *Weekly Worker* May
3. VI Lenin *Polno sobranie sochinenii* (Complete works), Vol 31, p131.
4. There are many misunderstandings about the debate between Lenin and the ‘old Bolsheviks’ in April 1917, but this problem is not relevant to the issue under discussion. For my views, see ‘The ironic triumph of old Bolshevism: the debates of April 1917 in context’ in *Russian History* 38 (2011), pp199-242.
5. This pamphlet was published in mid-May. Lenin says he wrote it in early April, and it is so placed in the *Collected works*. Lenin does not say he made no editorial changes before publication, and it seems quite likely that the choice of a label for the party was such a change. Compare the very similar passage in another pamphlet issued around the same time in which Lenin introduced the resolutions of the April conference of the party (*Polno sobranie sochinenii* Vol 31, p454).
6. VI Lenin *Polno sobranie sochinenii* Vol 32, pp74-76.
7. An English translation of this fascinating work can be found at [www.marxists.org/archive/bukharin/works/1918/worldrev/index.html](http://www.marxists.org/archive/bukharin/works/1918/worldrev/index.html).

## Second edition: it’s coming





## GREECE

# Masses refuse to be ruled in old way

As support for left anti-austerity parties grows in Greece, writes **Eddie Ford**, the temptation of office must be avoided

**B**efore our very eyes, we are seeing the collapse of the institutionally corrupt Tweedledum-Tweedledee two-party system that has operated in Greece since the fall of the military junta in 1974. This 'post-fascist' regime was perfectly symbolised by the 50-seat 'bonus' awarded to the winning party in the parliamentary elections - designed, of course, to keep the revolving door of New Democracy and Pasok spinning round forever.

But no more. The May election delivered a profound shock to the moribund system, with two-thirds of the electorate rejecting the mainstream parties in favour of those - whether on the left or right - that have come out in open opposition to the vicious programme of cuts and austerity demanded by the EU Commission, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund troika as part of the bailout deal.

Blinking before the oncoming headlights, on May 15 Pasok leader Evangelos Venizelos - one of the key collaborators with the hated troika - finally admitted defeat in his attempts to cobble together a government of 'national salvation', following the failure of both ND and Syriza, the Coalition of the Radical Left, before him. Venizelos hypocritically attributed the breakdown in negotiations to "petty party interests" - not something Pasok has ever been guilty of itself, naturally. To achieve a majority of MPs ND and Pasok needed the support of one of the smaller parties, but both the Democratic Left and the stridently rightwing Independent Greeks refused to play ball. Doubtlessly, their calculation was extremely simple - why risk committing electoral and political suicide by becoming associated in any way whatsoever with such detested figures?

The next day it was declared that the new elections would be held on June 17 and that the supreme court judge, Panagiotis Pikramenos, would be in charge of the caretaker administration. A disastrous outcome for the Greek establishment and its supporters abroad in the Euro-establishment and elsewhere, given the near certain fact that the June election will produce even worse results - *much* worse in all likelihood. ND and Pasok can expect to see their combined vote reduced even further and in turn the anti-austerity parties will come out stronger. Having said that, this 'bloc' of votes will be highly fragmentary - going to all manner of organisations, including some that previously failed to reach the 3% threshold necessary to enter parliament but this time round might be more lucky. It is very hard to see a stable coalition government emerging. Then what? History repeats itself and there is another military coup?

In this way, the crisis in Greece is beginning to resemble Lenin's famous dictum about a revolutionary situation - whereby the masses refuse to be ruled in the old way and the ruling class is unable to rule in the old way.

## Nightmare

Admittedly, the establishment certainly did try to stitch things up at the 11th hour. Hence the supposedly 'non-political' president, Karolos Papoulias - who just so happens to be a Pasok founder member - bust a gut trying to form a "government of personalities". This "non-political" government - please do not laugh

too loudly - would be composed of "distinguished" and "respectable" figures that could embody the best qualities of the motherland. A technocratic government writ large, in other words.

In reality, obviously, Papoulias, Venizelos and Antonis Samaras (who will probably not be ND leader for much longer) were engaged in an almost comic effort to tempt Syriza into government - and by extension all those who voted for it and other anti-austerity/bailout parties of the left. Obviously a doomed venture.

Sounding like the patriarch he is, Venizelos rebuked the majority of Greeks who had 'incorrectly' voted for anti-austerity parties on May 6 by imploring them to make a "mature decision" next time round and "go towards the better" and "not go to the worse" - ie, return to the centre/mainstream on June 17. Some chance. More luridly, Michael Chrysohoidis, the rather ironically named (outgoing) minister for citizen protection, prophesied that unless the Greek voters re-legitimise Pasok/ND the country will "end up in civil war" - plagued by "armed gangs with Kalashnikovs".

However, their hopes look set to be cruelly dashed. Civil war or not, the latest opinion polls show that Syriza will significantly *increase* its percentage of the vote. For example, an extensive poll conducted by Marc/Alpha has Syriza on 27.7%. It also seems unlikely that the vote for the far-right Golden Dawn will go down in the next election, however.

When you then factor in the large number of *uncast* votes in the last election - 34.8% of the registered electorate - and also the 19.03% who voted for parties that did not make the 3% threshold, such as the Ecologist Greens (2.9%) or the Anti-capitalist Left (1.2%), then the prospects look bleak indeed for the establishment politicians, as communists are delighted to report. Indeed, it is far from psephological science fiction to envisage the left parties gaining a *majority* in parliament if Syriza were indeed to come first in the next election, as widely predicted, and thus - by a wonderful historical and constitutional irony - qualify for the 50-seat 'top-up' originally reserved purely for ND or Pasok. Seeing that Syriza, DL and the KKE got enough votes between them to gain 97 seats in the last election, an increased share of the vote come June plus the 50-seat bonus would see them securing parliamentary predominance.

The nightmare scenario looms for the establishment. However, we are now hearing noises that Syriza might not be eligible for the 50-seat reward on the grounds that it is a *coalition* as opposed to a single party. What a surprise! Such legalistic manoeuvres just show how desperate the ruling class are, their political legitimacy draining away with almost each day that passes. But if even if they did manage to deny Syriza its 'rightful' parliamentary bonus, assuming that the worst - or best - happens on June 17, that would only act to further discredit them in the eyes of the masses.

The escalating turmoil in Greece sharpened fears in the financial markets over May 15-16, especially after the comments by Christine Lagarde - the IMF's director general - that the 'international community' had to be "technically prepared" for everything, including a "messy"



Alexis Tsipras: "fuck off"

Greek exit from the euro. On the stock markets, the Eurostoxx 600 fell 0.7% to a one-year low, Germany's Dax dropped to 1.4% and the French CAC went down 1.1%. Meanwhile, Spain's Ibex was down 1.6% and shares in Athens tumbled by 5.2% - 10% in the case of banks.

As for the FTSE 100, it was down to its lowest level since December 20, having lost 10% of its value in the last two months alone. Most critically of all, the interest rates paid by the Italian and Spanish governments for their 10-year borrowing were both above the key 6% level. Spanish bond yields climbed to 6.52%, very close to the 7% 'danger zone' at which a country's debts start to become unsustainable. Significantly, the 'spread' between French and German bond yields hit its widest level since early January, a sign that traders are treating France's debt as increasingly risky compared to Germany's (the benchmark). A fear of contagion. The yield on government bonds issued by Greece, needless to say, was above 30% at one point - suggesting, to put it mildly, a high risk of default. Whatever the exact political composition of any future government, Greece seems to be heading for the euro exit door.

## Accomplice

Alex Tsipras, Syriza's leader, stated that during coalition negotiations his presence was sought by the establishment, pro-bailout parties so as to make him into a "leftwing accomplice" to austerity and "barbaric" measures that nearly 70% of Greeks had quite explicitly voted against. Tsipras, though, would not countenance being part of any such anti-working class government and to use earthy Anglo-Saxon language, told them to fuck off. A stance to be applauded. Syriza wants to withdraw from Nato and close its bases,

"halt" debt repayment, "reverse" privatisations, "seize" banks, impose a 75% top rate of tax on the rich, etc. All well and good, but to get an idea of what sort of political formation we are dealing with it is worth noting Tsipras's professed admiration for "heroes" like Hugo Chávez and Evo Morales, the respective presidents of *capitalist* Venezuela and *capitalist* Bolivia.

We in the CPGB counsel in the strongest possible terms that Syriza - and the Greek left as a whole - should *stay clear of all coalition governments with bourgeois parties*, whatever the result of the elections in June. Eg, to enter into a coalition with Pasok would represent a disastrous *setback* for the movement. Under no circumstances should left parties take *any responsibility* for capitalism or austerity, whether in Greece or anywhere else. No "renegotiation" or "rewriting" of the memorandum (the austerity bill passed by the Greek parliament) or, for that matter, the European Union fiscal pact that seeks to institutionalise the "barbaric" austerity economics. Nor should the left fall for the temptation of forming a workers' government which sets its sights on managing capitalism. The only government we should countenance is one that represented the coming to power of the working class under circumstances where there is a realistic prospect of carrying out the full minimum programme of Marxism. In other words the *smashing* of the old bureaucratic bourgeois state and replacing it with a semi-state, and the beginning of the transition to *genuine* human freedom. By definition, that means transcending wage-slavery, commodity production and all rest of the old exploitative crap.

It would be impossible to carry out such a programme in Greece alone. Capitalism cannot be overcome in

one country acting on its own: the doctrine of socialism is one country, and all its variants, was always a monstrous Stalinist negation of the Marxist programme. A workers' government in Greece would mean some form of coalition government between Syriza, DL and possibly the KKE - and/or other much smaller parties that might emerge from future elections. None of these parties are unambiguously committed to the rule of the working class and the destruction of the old bureaucratic state apparatus. The KKE envisages a Greek Stalinism, while Syriza dreams of a left nationalism and the DL would settle for a reformed capitalism.

Yet the problem does not end there. Let us not mince our words. Were such a workers' government ever formed, then Greece would be *immediately* kicked out of euro/EU - assuming it had not been already. Without a shadow of doubt, the 'new' drachma would be massively devalued, there would be a catastrophic economic slump and more likely than not hyperinflation - and that is before things got really bad.

What then? Such a government would have absolutely no choice but to preside over its own austerity regime. To keep itself in power and the workers in line, our 'workers' government' would have to resort to authoritarian rule or a *military socialism* if it wanted to stave off counterrevolution and external intervention/invasion. And in this way they would turn into their opposite. Marxist revolutionaries in Greece must build up the organisational and political strength of the working class, fight to massively extend democracy, including into the army, and take the lead in constructing an all-European working class movement ●

eddie.ford@weeklyworker.org.uk



## ROCHDALE

# The abuse of abuse

It is the most tantalising myth to circulate around the far right in the last decade - the notion that there exist gangs of Muslims who groom and sexually abuse vulnerable young white women. It is the perfect combination of suspicion of 'outsiders', on the one hand, and that neurotic obsession with the sexual innocence of children, which fills the other half of the *Daily Mail* mind, on the other. No enraged petty bourgeois could fail to be seduced.

A TV documentary that incidentally referred to the practice 10 years ago was seized upon at the time by British National Party fuhrer Nick Griffin as a *de facto* party-political broadcast in the run-up to some election or other; the issue has lurked at the back of the far-right imagination for quite some time, recently resurfacing in more comic form as the "Muslimic rape gangs" YouTube meme.<sup>1</sup>

Nothing comical about the scenes at Liverpool Crown Court last week. Nine men were convicted of offences ranging from trafficking up to rape, concerning their treatment of a series of adolescent girls in Rochdale. Many of the girls were in vulnerable situations, having either run away from home or been taken into care. That was national news anyway - but the headline-grabber is that all the nine men are Asian, hailing from majority Muslim countries and communities, and all the women concerned are white.

The 'racial' or 'cultural' angle has been chucked around like the proverbial hot potato. Gerald Clifton, the judge, explicitly referred to it in his summing up: "I believe that one of the factors that led to [these crimes] was that [the victims] were not of your community or religion."<sup>2</sup>

This seems to have irked the police, who were very keen that this should *not* be seen as a racially motivated crime. Partly this is self-interest - the offenses were committed not only in Rochdale, but Oldham - the latter previously the site of race riots; the cops will not want a repeat due to heightened racial tensions. The police statements were also partly a defence against the idea, floated by some, that

prosecutions were not pursued earlier in deference to Muslim sensibilities.

### Hidden agendas

Of all the people in the world to dismiss that perspective, one might not expect Trevor Phillips - chairman of the Equality and Human Rights Commission quango - to step up. Yet he was widely reported as saying that ignoring the race angle was "fatuous".

Of the greater Manchester Asian community that produced the perpetrators, he said: "These are closed communities essentially and I worry that in these communities there are people who knew what was going on and didn't say anything, either because they're frightened or because they're so separated from the rest of the communities they think, 'Oh, that's just how white people let their children carry on. We don't need to do anything.'"<sup>3</sup>

Phillips, indeed, is a curious character. He is a Blairite of the old school, and has chaired the EHRC - and its principal predecessor, the Commission for Racial Equality - since 2003. This bloated bureaucracy is a gaping money-hole for the government, with many commissioners raking in six figures, and a hotbed of cronyism. Phillips, meanwhile, can hardly be said to be a bulwark against racism, repeatedly trotting out the hoary old 'multiculturalism has failed' line that has served British chauvinists of all hues for the last decade.

Multiculturalism is, indeed, worthy of forthright opposition (*contra* Socialist Workers Party comrades); but his is the reactionary critique of Tony Blair, David Cameron and the rest. Emphasising the race angle thus serves a double purpose for Phillips - it shores up his reactionary political agenda, and makes an implicit argument for feeding still more public money into his pathetic bureaucratic fiefdom.

Alas, most of the commentary on this case is of a similar type - it amounts to the cynical manipulation of truly disturbing crimes for the purposes of the limited, partial agendas of various sectional political and charitable causes, all competing for a limited supply of media attention and bourgeois largesse.

Thus we find the second major 'angle' on the affair. This can

be glimpsed, in the first instance, in the response of a certain sort of feminist, best exemplified by *The Guardian's* indefatigable Julie Bindel. She argues essentially that the organised grooming of young girls for rape is a widespread practice, of which the Rochdale Nine are simply the tip of the iceberg.<sup>4</sup>

Another variant of the same argument comes from children's charities. One Jacqui Montgomery-Devlin, a Belfast Barnardos bureaucrat, told the *Belfast Telegraph* that sexual exploitation is rife in "every town and city across Northern Ireland ... [Girls] are invited to houses, given drugs and alcohol, and then return home or to care homes intoxicated or under the influence of substances."<sup>5</sup> She cited cases involving girls as young as 10.<sup>6</sup>

It should be said that these viewpoints are not entirely without merit. Yet the behaviour of single-issue political lobbies should counsel caution against the general argument - that organised exploitation of young women is everywhere, right under our noses. We have already had years of horror stories about 'people-trafficking' - comprehensively rubbished by Nick Davies in *The Guardian* over two years ago,<sup>7</sup> which nonetheless *continues* to publish such scare stories. Before that, there was the now notorious international 'satanic ritual abuse' scare, which resulted only in *genuine* abuse of the purported victims by the quack psychotherapists who pushed the agenda.

### In perspective

The truth is most likely both less scandalous and more worrying than the various forms of hysteria that have built up around the Rochdale affair.

Less scandalous: the various 'angles' above *have not been shown* to

be substantial in any real way, and, as I have argued, should be treated with scepticism. There is little evidence that packs of men operate in this way on a mass basis; for the likes of Julie Bindel, that will only ever be because the crimes are not reported to police, but the more mundane truth may be that it simply does not happen all that much. (That it happens at all, of course, is quite bad enough.)

As for the racial politics of it: the nine men *may* have self-justified their activities on the basis of contempt for whites. That, however, is purely superficial. The more compelling drive is strictly libidinal - these damaged individuals get off on exploitative sexual intercourse, and such a twisted, unconscious relationship to women will always find a vocabulary and a particular contingent form for itself, be it religious, racial or whatever.

The truth is more worrying, indeed, precisely because the roots of this phenomenon are deeper, and more interconnected with other 'negative externalities' of contemporary society, than the superficial analyses on offer make out. There is, first of all, the fact that patriarchy is subject to (cautious) disapproval from official ideology these days, but persists as a social form nonetheless. The proprietorial attitude of men to women and children tends to become repressed - and the repressed returns in unpredictable and often horrific ways.

Then there is the matter that nobody wants to talk about at all - these crimes happened in Rochdale and Oldham, hardly the plushiest boroughs of Greater Manchester. While Manchester as a whole has, in recent years, weathered the widening of the north-south divide relatively well, the long-term processes of deindustrialisation and social decay have an impact there, too.

There are two consequences relevant here - a build-up, in the perpetrators, of a resentment of society in general, that may manifest itself as nihilistic violence; and also an expanding population of vulnerable individuals, ripe for abuse. The background here is more sharply visible in a previous case, which saw two children sadistically torture two others in the ex-mining village of Edlington, which led to yet another Janus-faced jeremiad about 'broken Britain' from David

Cameron,<sup>7</sup> but it provides an important part of the atmosphere here too.

This is why the various official perspectives on the Rochdale case are inadequate - they are partial, and lead only to worthless suggestions as to how to prevent such things happening in the future. The major clamour is for yet another shake-up in social services: *more* 'intervention', closer management of teenagers in care, and so on. Yet cooping people up permanently in halfway houses and watching them every second of the day is hardly conducive to their learning to lead a full, independent life. The problems here are tortuously complex, and resist simple bureaucratic 'corrections' of this kind.

The real solution - which is by no means an easy thing to achieve - is to halt and reverse the general social decay that is happening under capitalism, and dissipating the resultant social atmosphere, where lingering patriarchal structures and racial tensions can result in behaviour like that of the nine men. The workers' movement has powerful traditions of building a collective life through its organisations - economic, political and cultural - which could stand in stark contrast to the spiritual decrepitude of capitalism. These traditions, unfortunately, are in abeyance.

As long as class society persists, we can be certain: there will be more such horrors to come ●

**Paul Demarty**

paul.demarty@weeklyworker.org.uk

### Notes

1. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=aYd9qbRz2fc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aYd9qbRz2fc).
2. *Manchester Evening News* May 9.
3. *The Daily Telegraph* May 14.
4. *The Guardian* May 9.
5. *The Belfast Telegraph* May 14.
6. *The Guardian* October 20 2009.
7. See D Douglass, 'Who broke it, Cameron?' *Weekly Worker* January 28 2010.



Are Muslim men more prone to be abusers than Christians, Jews or Sikhs?



## LABOUR

# Overcoming the enemies within

The left must unite in order to change the relationship of forces both within and outside the Labour Party, argues **Mike Macnair**



**The Labour Party ended the old two-party system**

In a recent letter to the *Weekly Worker* Arthur Bough argues that “the best route to the majority of workers within the workplace, within the communities, remains the Labour Party” - though he considers Labour no different from the US Democratic Party except for the (relative) absence of millionaires (Letters, April 19).

The argument is in substance a dogmatic assertion of a one-sided version of Marx’s and Engels’ arguments in the middle and later 19th century, supported by some citation-grazing, without any attempt to relate the theoretical underpinnings to the course of events since then and the consequent present political conditions. Comrade Bough’s claims are, first, philosophical; second, political; and third, historical.

First, he claims that “Those who believe they can simply short-cut this reality by proclaiming their own new workers’ party essentially base themselves on idealism, not Marxist materialism. They do not see that the dominant ideas are based upon

material conditions within society. A workers’ party can act via a dynamic, dialectical interaction with the class to stimulate the class struggle, but it cannot substitute for it. To change the dominant ideas, it is necessary to change material conditions, which means addressing the immediate problems of ordinary workers on a daily basis, by encouraging and facilitating their own self-activity.”

The CPGB agrees with comrade Bough that a ‘new mass workers’ party’ cannot be conjured out of thin air when the large majority of the class continue to regard Labour as in some sense ‘their’ party. However, as comrade Bough presents his argument, it would make of Marxism both a vulgar determinism and at the same time, in relation to a workers’ party acting to “stimulate the class struggle”, a voluntarism.

Comrade Bough’s formulation that “the dominant ideas are based upon material conditions” is a vulgarisation of Marx’s and Engels’ “The ruling ideas of each age have ever been the

ideas of its ruling class. When people speak of the ideas that revolutionise society, they do but express that fact that within the old society the elements of a new one have been created, and that the dissolution of the old ideas keeps even pace with the dissolution of the old conditions of existence” (*Communist manifesto* chapter 2).

The quotation makes clear that comrade Bough’s inference does not follow. The *society* is in process of change, and in consequence the dominant ideas are themselves in process of change: the process of change raises up negations to them and they do not go unchallenged.

Within this framework, we approach the old problem of the relative significance of ‘structure’ (the material and social limits on our available choices) and ‘agency’ (the choices we actually make). Marx and Engels sometimes express themselves in violently deterministic ways, but it is clear from their political practice that they did not, in fact, hold a systematic determinism.

The political consequence comrade Bough draws from his argument is a variant form of economism. Both the original Russian economism and the ‘revolutionary economism’ (Reidar Larsson’s phrase) offered in different ways by Ryazanov and by the Trotsky of *Our political tasks* similarly drew economic conclusions from over-deterministic analyses of the relation of mass ideas and material conditions. With comrade Bough the version is close to the Proudhonists’ fetishism of cooperatives and ‘political indifferentism’.

He tells us that “Marxists do not believe in parliamentary socialism, and our perspective is not simply one of transforming the Labour Party ...”; and “The true function of a workers’ party in the parliamentary sphere - both at a local and national government level - is to act to legitimise the actions of the workers outside those parliamentary structures, to use them as a tribune to promote and organise the workers’ struggle.”

This is again a half-truth. In the first place, “Marxists do not believe in a parliamentary socialism” muddles the difference between, on the one hand, the belief in a socialism introduced *within the framework of the constitution*; and, on the other, the idea that communists winning an electoral (not necessarily a parliamentary) majority *might* be a decisive moment in the end of today’s ‘capitalist old regime’.

Secondly and more fundamentally, the problem is *how* to “legitimise the actions of the workers outside those parliamentary structures”. Under the existing regime, the actions of the workers outside the parliamentary structures are delegitimised not only, or even mainly, by parliamentary speeches against them and by statutes passed by parliament. They are also delegitimised by the operations of the corrupt, advertising-funded media and the corrupt, ‘free market in legal services’ judicial system. To the extent that they are delegitimised by parliamentary speeches and by statutes, the positive legitimacy asserted by (Tory, Labour or coalition) governments against strikers and against democracy in the workers’ movement (through statutory regulation and judicial review of the constitutions and actions of workers’ organisations) is based on these governments’ claims to represent the majority in the society via their electoral victories.

The task of “legitimising the actions of the workers” therefore involves efforts both to create workers’ press and media, and to delegitimise the existing constitutional order: the politicians’ false claim to a majority mandate, the corrupt press’s false claim to represent their readers, the judiciary’s false claims to represent unbiased justice or to ‘merely apply the law’.

## False history

If the Labour Party was a new movement created out of a recent mass shift to the consciousness of the need for a workers’ party independent of the capitalists, certainly the right way to go would be to agitate for these tasks exclusively, and patiently, inside the Labour Party. But it is not. It is a long-established institution controlled by a professional bureaucracy, deeply committed to the British constitution and hence *against* workers’ democracy, and a component of the capitalist two-party system which

generates fake ‘majorities’.

Now it might be that the history demonstrates that there is no route to a workers’ party which *does* attack the constitution, rather than backing constitutional attacks on the workers’ organisations, except through the existing mass party. This is what comrade Bough argues from the history: “Engels’ recommendation to Eleanor Marx and her comrades was to keep a distance from all of these sects, including those that called themselves Marxist, such as Hyndman’s Social Democratic Federation, as well as the Independent Labour Party, and instead to go directly to the mass of workers, who at the time were organised within the Liberal Party, and particularly the liberal clubs. In the end, it was this strategy and, from it, the decision of the trades unions to create their own political party, separate from the Liberals, which created the real mass movement for the creation of the Labour Party.”

The problem with this narrative is that it is flatly false history. Outside Britain, the German Social Democratic Party was created when the 1875 fusion of ‘Eisenachers’ and ‘Lassalleans’ which Marx and Engels opposed, gave the fused group the ‘critical mass’ to go beyond thousands to tens of thousands. Bebel and Liebknecht had proved themselves better judges of what was possible. The pattern was repeated in several other European countries, and in the US too (though the combination of the split after 1917 and the rise of the US to world dominance aborted the development of the US Socialist Party into a mass party). In contrast, the Georgist electoral movement Engels recommended to Florence Kelley Wischniewsky in the letter comrade Bough cites was a flash in the pan.

In Britain, Engels’ political judgment led him momentarily to side with William Morris and co’s Socialist League, which was soon captured by the anarchists and duly collapsed, while Hyndman’s Social Democratic Federation, though sect-like, obtained a real working class base in London and in the north-west. In Scotland and Yorkshire the Independent Labour Party was also until 1900 independent of the Lib-Lab trade union leaders. There is, indeed, no reason to suppose that the trade union leaders would have moved beyond Lib-Labism without the success of the socialist groups (SDF, ILP, etc) in local elections in the 1890s, which began to put pressure on the union leaders’ ability to deliver the working class vote to the Liberals.

Structure and agency again. The history shows that the outcomes are not only a matter of objective dynamics, but also of subjective choices. It is true that the left is not objectively in a position to replace Labour with a ‘new mass workers’ party’. But it *is* in a position to change the relationship of forces both within and outside the Labour Party by uniting itself to fight openly for Marxist politics. Its refusal to do so is a matter of the subjective choices made by small groups due to a false conception of the ‘revolutionary party’. Those subjective choices are made equally by ‘revolutionary Marxists’ inside the Labour Party - and as much by ‘independents’, actually sects of one member, like comrade Bough, as by the leaderships of the left groups ●

mike.macnair@weeklyworker.org.uk



## SHREWSBURY



Des Warren and Ricky Tomlinson

# Refuting the latest smears against Warren

The ideals fought for by Des Warren and his comrades during and after the 1972 building workers' strike need to be clearly restated. By far the best way to honour the memory of those who were surely amongst the foremost class warriors of the last century is not simply to legally 'clear the names' of the falsely criminalised and jailed Shrewsbury pickets, but to organise to finish the fight against the 'lump', which led them into sharp conflict not only with the building employers and Tory government of the day, but also with the Ucat union bureaucracy, the TUC cowards and their apologists.

Des is very clear in his book, *The key to my cell*, that it was these latter three who held that key, which they refused to turn in order to maintain their rotten, corrupt, class-compromise positions of defending capitalism as the source of their privilege.

Following divisions in the Justice for the Shrewsbury Pickets campaign, allies of these have attempted to undermine the authenticity of Des's book. A rumour has been spread that the book was not really Des's work at all or that in writing it he was 'spoon-fed' by the Workers Revolutionary Party, which organisation he joined after he was released from jail. Here, the record is set straight by Chris Corrigan, who assisted Des in the production of the book.

Gerry Downing

### Des and Des alone

I am a life member of the NUJ and have been a journalist for 48 years. For the past three I have been a contract sub-editor at *The Guardian* newspaper. Prior to that I was a staff sub-editor at *The Independent* for 22 years.

Previously I was a news reporter on the *Western Mail*, then the *Birmingham Post*, and then, from 1969 to 1974, in Fleet Street with the Press Association news agency,

where I was a high court and central criminal court/Old Bailey reporter. Needless to say, you require very high skills in shorthand for such tasks, in terms of accuracy and speed. In fact, I still have my Pitman's shorthand certificates from the 1960s.

It was these shorthand skills that led to me to cover the appeal court case in the Strand, where Des and Ricky Tomlinson were seeking to overturn their Shrewsbury convictions. I got talking to Des during the many lunch breaks and adjournments - they were temporarily out on bail - and liked him enormously. Any trade unionist would - he was an extremely impressive man with very high principles which he powerfully expressed. No wonder employers did *not* like him.

By this time I resigned from the PA, which was increasingly departing from its traditional role as an impartial national news agency and joining in the general rightwing media campaign: eg, against the early-70s miners' strikes and vilifying so-called dossing, card-playing, night-shift workers at Cowley and Longbridge. I worked freelance, and contributed news stories to various papers as well as, when possible, to the *Workers Press*, the WRP's paper. I eventually joined the WRP in early 1975, when the Americans had to leave Saigon in a hurry.

I also got to know Des's family, including Elsa, who worked tirelessly, speaking for the Shrewsbury campaign to free Des and his fellow defendants. As is known, their appeal was rejected.

After Des's eventual release from jail, I kept in touch. He was anxious to bring out a book about his experiences. I offered to put my shorthand skills at his disposal - it must be emphasised he was unable to hold a pen still for even a second, or use a typewriter, because of his continuous shakes from the onset of Parkinson's disease brought on by

prison authorities administering Largactil and other heavy tranquilisers. (Largactil was later superseded by drugs which did not cause the same level of side-effects, which continual large doses often brought about.)

So Des needed help to write his book. When he was ready, and when I was available, I spent six weeks with him, sometimes staying at his house in Buckley, North Wales, or travelling by moped each day from Runcorn.

It went like this. Des spoke - I recorded what he said. Each night I would transcribe my shorthand notes onto printed sheets. These proofs would be checked by Des. We eventually had a full manuscript. After about a fortnight, I returned and Des had gone through the manuscript and made additions and changes during the next two weeks. He was ill, but his mind was still sharp, as was his memory, and he had full control of the content - every sentence of it. Nobody else except Des contributed to, or had any control, over its content. *He wrote it* - even the title, *The key to my cell*.

My role was as shorthand writer and secretary, and also as a researcher when dates and times needed checking or court transcripts and newspaper cuttings needed finding. All of which Des collated and chose where to insert in the book.

Finally, if anyone wants to challenge the integrity of the above account they can face the consequences or I am willing to meet them to sensibly discuss it. This includes Mr Terry Renshaw - if he is able to absent himself from his work as a highly active member of the North Wales Police Authority, which, in a previous form, helped put Des, Ricky and others behind bars in the first place ●

To order copies of the book contact [justice4pickets@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:justice4pickets@yahoo.co.uk)

## What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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# weekly worker

Politics  
politics  
politics

## Strikes are not the be-all and end-all

Thursday May 10 saw around 400,000 public sector workers take strike action against the government's austerity programme. The immediate trigger for many being the attacks on pensions, which would see public sector workers working longer before being able to claim their pension, contributing more over their working life - and receiving less when they are finally eligible. The strikes have been (correctly) interpreted, however, as being against austerity in general rather than purely sectional demands.

But, while the strike got good support from members of the main civil service union, PCS, and some smaller unions (it was patchier among Unite healthworkers and the UCU lecturers), negative comparisons with the much larger action on November 10 last year, when about two million workers from 29 trade unions were out, are inevitable. There was not the same reactionary media firestorm - even Jeremy Clarkson managed to keep his mouth shut - and in many places the fact that a major strike was happening could have escaped notice. What really grabbed the media's attention was the unofficial walkout by members of the Prison Officer's Association - until the government threatened the union with an injunction - and the demonstration in London of 20,000 off-duty police officers against cuts. While never losing sight of the role that the 'screws' and the police play in capitalist society, communists can only welcome this. The rhetoric of 'We're all in this together' is impossible to uphold when even the state's key servants are protesting.

It is unlikely that anger over the cuts has gone away; if anything it has increased, as the breadth and depth of the coalition's austerity programme has become clear for all to see. So what lies behind the scaling down of the protests? Simply put, while there is a great deal of anger, the majority of trade unionists are not confident in their ability to win this fight, while the bureaucrats use this as an excuse for not giving a lead. And the left bears a large share of responsibility, for failing to put forward any sort of strategy beyond more strikes, let alone a viable political alternative. The Socialist Workers Party's 'live blog' of the day's action ended on a predictably hyperbolic note: "Today's magnificent strike showed the level of anger against the Tories' attacks in workplaces across Britain ... [and] showed what can be achieved. Workers have the power to beat the Tories, and more strikes should now be called to finish them off."<sup>1</sup> This simplistic analysis begs far more questions than it answers. Not least, what would replace the coalition, should the government be toppled, which the SWP seems to think is only

a matter of a few more strikes, even though this one was much smaller than the last?

In the issue of *Socialist Worker* sold on the day, its editor, Judith Orr, writes that "Votes in the unions have shown that there is a mood among workers to keep fighting ... We need a sustained programme of strikes to force the Tories to back down. That means more workers striking and for more than one day."<sup>2</sup> Once again there is no strategic meat here. The SWP's previous 'All out, stay out' slogan has long since been quietly withdrawn by an embarrassed central committee, and now what we have is a strike "for more than one day". But will the union bureaucracy really facilitate the sort of project that is needed, given its often quite cosy positions as mediator between capital and labour?

The strike issue of *Solidarity*, paper of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, at least has the virtue of being more concrete, but is similarly lacking in perspective. The editorial calls on the PCS to start a recruitment drive, fund selective action by union branches, and develop "a meaningful plan to hurt the employer through the use of national, selective and other action on a rapid tempo".<sup>3</sup> But where are the politics? PSC general secretary, Mark Serwotka, who is unusually principled as far as trade union leaders go, seems to be embracing the selective tactics advocated by his former AWL comrades. Serwotka has little confidence that strikes of "more than one day" will bring about a government change of direction. In an interview with *The Guardian* his cautious perspective is that "Periodically we will have these national set-piece days ... but in between there will be ongoing days of action by individual employee groups,



Police march

related to the government's austerity measures."<sup>4</sup> As the interviewer points out, "His main challenge is getting other unions to join in."

For Marxists the question of whether workers will resist attacks on their working conditions and living standards is like asking if night will follow day: the very nature of capitalism, and of the working class's role within it, makes this inevitable. The class struggle goes on all the time. The most important thing we

can do in that regard is to bring our politics to the table. It is clear from the left's reportage of the May 10 action that it needs a double dose of realism; firstly recognising the parlous state of our own divided forces, and the debilitating effect that sectarianism has even on the ability of the working class to fight back through a united anti-cuts campaign (let alone the effect on the unity of Marxists). Secondly, our programme and strategy for the anti-austerity movement must, to actually

be *realistic*, set its sights much higher: for workers' organisation and action on at least a European scale, which would prevent the bourgeoisie destroying isolated national movements. That is a perspective with which we may be able to win ●

Laurie Smith

### Notes

1. [www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=28447](http://www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=28447).
2. *Socialist Worker* May 12.
3. *Solidarity* May 9.
4. *The Guardian* May 10.

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