

# weekly worker



**Politics and prospects:  
Alexis Tsipras and Syriza  
under the spotlight**

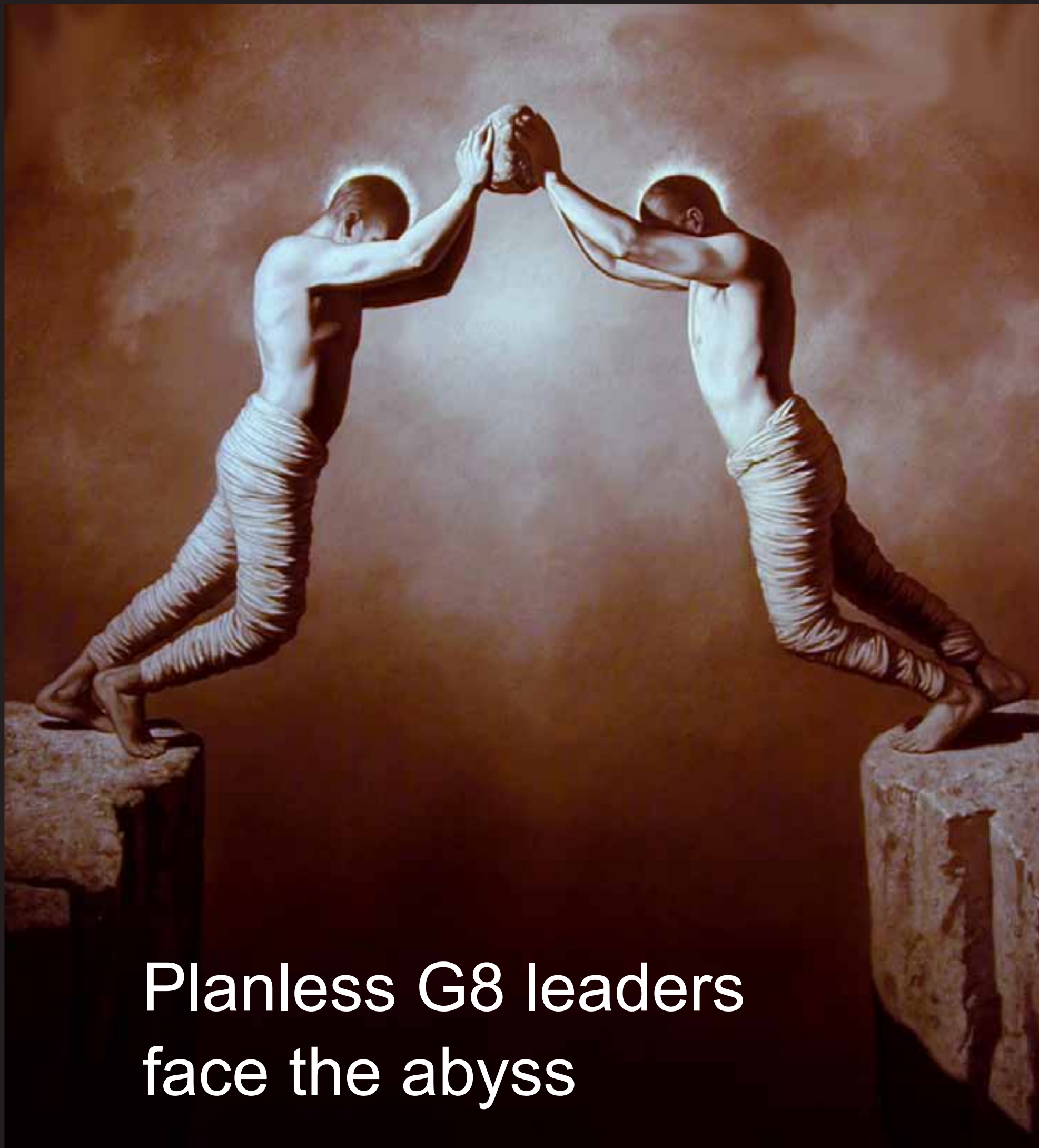
- Germany's Die Linke
- Tommy Sheridan's downfall
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- Why the left splits

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# LETTERS



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

## Confusion

Paul B Smith, in his letter (April 26) taking issue with my view that capitalism is not in decline, provides no facts to back up his argument, no logical argument to counter the view I have given, and instead relies on his confused, half-understood interpretation of Marxist ideas, and a dogmatic assertion of Lenin's theory of imperialism (his version) from 90 years ago, as though it was applicable today.

On top of that, his argument against me (aside from the gratuitous comments querying whether I am a Marxist!) relies on establishing a series of straw men to be knocked down, and some of the worst misrepresentation of an opponent's views I have ever seen. Because there is so much wrong in his presentation of Marxist economic theory, such as his interpretation of the law of value, I will leave this aside, maybe to be dealt with elsewhere, at some other time. Instead I will deal with only the point at hand - ie, whether capitalism is in decline.

1. Comrade Smith says that the test of whether capitalism is in decline is whether there "is a weakening of the hold that the value form has over social relations. It is marked by a growth of forms of capital and labour-power unproductive of value and surplus value, and a disintegration of the source of value - abstract labour."

The last sentence is economically illiterate in Marxist terms for a variety of reasons. The most obvious one is that there cannot be a "disintegration" of abstract labour, because abstract labour does not exist as a concrete entity. It is merely a means of measurement of labour-time, an abstraction from all concrete labour, in the same way that a 'foot' is a measurement based upon an abstraction of human feet in general. So it cannot disintegrate any more than the unit of measurement known as the foot can disintegrate. Moreover, it is not abstract labour that creates value, which comrade Smith confuses with exchange value, but real concrete labour.

But, most obviously, the main problem with comrade Smith's argument here is that he provides no evidence whatsoever to support the contention that there is a "weakening of the hold that the value form has over social relations." And no wonder he does not, because the facts show quite the opposite. Of all the goods and services produced in man's entire history, nearly 25% have been produced in the last 10 years, and they have been produced not as use values, which was the case with all of the production in human history prior to capitalism, but as exchange values.

And he provides no evidence that "forms of capital and labour-power unproductive of value and surplus value" have predominated either. Once again, no wonder, because the most rapid growth of capital on a global basis has been of productive capital, and that has fuelled the massive increase in the size of the global working class, which now, for the first time in history, has become the largest class on the planet. Given Marx says capital is a social relation, that is hardly an indication of capital in decline.

2. He then claims that "Some of the consequences of decline are the domination of capital by finance capital; the tendency to monopoly; the emergence of institutions trying to organise and manage the global economy; nationalised and regulated

entities; increased bureaucracy; state provision of welfare; and the socialisation and politicisation of economic relations generally." But there is nothing in Marx's writing to suggest that any of these things are an indication of decline. On the contrary, there is every reason, on the basis of what Marx and Engels wrote, to see in all these things not the decline of capitalism, but its rise out of its more primitive forms. For comrade Smith, it appears, a dialectical analysis of capitalism only has two stages - birth followed by degeneration and death.

In fact, what he gives us is just a dogmatic, half-understood recantation of Lenin's *Imperialism*, as though it removes the need to question or analyse the nature of modern capitalism, not to mention whether this work, in what was a pretty rushed and, for Lenin, shoddy piece of analysis that rested largely on the writings of the liberal Hobson, was even accurate back then. Largely, it wasn't, and Lenin seems to have realised its inadequacy by the fact that he hedges most of his statements in the book to such an extent as to make them almost meaningless.

In *Imperialism*, Lenin writes: "Nevertheless, like all monopoly, it inevitably engenders a tendency of stagnation and decay." But, he goes on to say: "Certainly, the possibility of reducing the cost of production and increasing profits by introducing technical improvements operates in the direction of change. But the tendency to stagnation and decay, which is characteristic of monopoly, continues to operate, and in some branches of industry, in some countries, for certain periods of time, it gains the upper hand."

Just one instance of Lenin introducing those hedges, which make the general statement meaningless. In fact, what have we seen is not "stagnation and decay", but that very process of "reducing the cost of production and increasing profits by introducing technical improvements", and that process has been further stimulated precisely because of the fact that capitalism and industrialisation have been spread across the entire globe, creating, if anything, a period of the most intensive competition we have seen, and of the most rapid development of the productive forces ever seen.

The main area where the claims of decay and stagnation apply have, in fact, been in those areas where something approaching a true monopoly exists: that is, where the capitalist state has taken over the production and provision of goods and services, and where, as a result, bureaucracy has increased, and innovation has been sluggish.

Nor is there anything to suggest that "the emergence of institutions trying to organise and manage the global economy" is in any sense an indication of a decline of capitalism. On the contrary. Just as the capitalist state developed on a national basis to perform those functions, so the development of international state bodies is a reflection not of the decline of capitalism, but its breaking out of the restrictions of those national borders via the development of multinational and transnational firms, and the establishment of a global capitalist economy.

In what sense is "state provision of welfare" an indication of decline? The first elements of a welfare state were established in Prussia in the early 1800s. It provided a basis for the development of the German welfare state provision by Bismarck later in the 19th century, which was a fundamental element in the driving forward of a dynamic German capitalism, which required the efficient reproduction of

labour-power.

3. Having failed to provide any facts or evidence to make his case, comrade Smith then turns to trying to deal with my arguments by use of the old Stalinist tactic of misrepresentation and the use of the amalgam. He accuses me of taking my arguments not from Marx, but from "three non-Marxist sources. The first is Stalinism, the second bourgeois economics and the third is the Soviet economist, Kondratiev." But, in fact, although I have referred to all of the sources he mentions, the basis of my view that capitalism is not in decline rests entirely on Marx's method of analysis, and on the idea that a mode of production cannot be said to be in decline if it continues to revolutionise the productive forces and continues, in the case of capitalism, to extend the domain of exchange value.

The reason for referring to the sources comrade Smith mentions is that it is rather difficult to demonstrate either that the productive forces are being revolutionised or that the domain of exchange value is being extended, unless you can refer to the facts and demonstrate that there is no "terminal crisis". It is rather difficult to do it also without referring to whether global growth is rising or falling, or whether the development of technology is advancing, stagnant or declining. Of course, comrade Smith has no such problems because he fails to provide even one shred of a fact, one piece of data to support his dogma.

4. His response to facts, where I have presented them, is to grossly misrepresent what has been said. For example, he writes: "Denial of decline drives him to defend some absurd positions. These include that the export of finance capital abroad has not been a source of revenue for imperialist countries." But I have said no such thing. What I did say was that his claim that welfarism was only possible because of the superexploitation of the colonies through the export of capital was nonsense. The vast majority of capital exported from developed capitalist economies went not to the colonies, but to other developed capitalist economies, which themselves had welfarist regimes.

Comrade Smith himself stated that the biggest expansion of welfarism by far was in the post-war period, when the colonial empires were being disbanded. The 'welfarism' introduced by Ford at the beginning of the 20th century was not financed by colonial exploitation, but by the massive increase in surplus value generated by Fordist mass production and Taylorist scientific management methods. Comrade Smith cannot admit that fact, precisely because it would mean accepting the fact that capitalism continues to revolutionise the forces of production.

5. He writes: "He argues that, despite falling growth in the US and major European economies, capitalism has generated growth in some developing countries. He cites - as evidence of a tendency - the 2007 pre-crash growth rates of Mauritania (18%) and Angola (26%). He thinks these figures prove that capitalism as a whole is not in decline."

This is a gross distortion of what I said, and can easily be seen by reference to the article of mine to which he refers ('The crisis is financial, it is not economic', October 13 2011). Far from claiming that the growth rates in Mauritania and Angola were a sufficient basis for establishing that capitalism is not in decline, I set out a series of facts to demonstrate there was no such decline. For example: "Between 1980 and 1990 global trade rose from \$4,000 billion

to \$6,000 billion, remaining flat until 1994. Between 1994 and 2000 it rose from \$6,000 billion to \$12,000 billion. But the sharpest rise has most notably been since 2002, rising from \$12,000 billion to \$28,000 billion by 2007."

Comrade Smith may easily write off Mauritania and Angola, but China is the world's second largest economy, likely to become the largest within the next 10 years. How does his view of a capitalism in decline fit with the fact of such an economy growing at around 10% per annum? Moreover, it is not the case, as comrade Smith says, that "contrary to appearances the global economy is now experiencing an upturn". The appearances too - ie, the facts of the actual rates of growth - demonstrate that the global economy is in a period of upturn.

6. I did not at all dismiss Trotsky's criticisms of Kondratiev as "undialectical". I pointed out that Trotsky himself talks about long waves of capitalist development in a way that is clearly at odds with both Mike Macnair and comrade Smith's positions. Trotsky's position was far more subtle and dialectical than comrade Smith's dogmatic assertion of Lenin's provisional comments in *Imperialism* and the Stalinist economism drawn from it.

7. As for me claiming "that Stalinism did not influence bureaucratic forms of control over workers during the cold war; and that no distinction can be made between productive and unproductive labour", what can I say? Where exactly am I supposed to have made the last statement?

8. Having failed to provide any facts or data to support his dogma, comrade Smith asks: "If he is a Marxist and thinks that capitalism is still in a healthy, mature phase, then he has a responsibility to outline the conditions that would precipitate its decline. I doubt whether he is capable of doing this."

Of course I am capable of doing that. It would require that capitalism has developed to such a stage that it is no longer capable of revolutionising the forces of production, that it has expanded so that it finds itself no longer able to find sources of labour-power to be profitably exploited, that it can no longer develop new use values for which a market can be found.

In fact, all the evidence demonstrates that, currently, none of those things are true. On the contrary, the exact opposite is the case. The development of the microchip has not just revolutionised production: it has revolutionised human capacity to bring about further such development, as the revolutions in genetics, biotechnology and a range of other sciences have demonstrated. Not only has this development created conditions where the production of a relative surplus population has been massively transformed - robots are now even being introduced in medical procedures as well as industrial production - but the development of a global capitalist economy is drawing in millions of new workers every year. The fact that under such conditions, and even during a recession, unemployment has risen only marginally is itself an indication of the fact that a powerful capitalist boom is soaking up this available labour at a remarkable rate as capital expands.

But socialism is not predicated upon the decline of capitalism. Capitalism developed within the womb of feudalism long before the latter had entered a stage of terminal decline. The death of feudalism was predicated upon the rise of capitalism, and the increasing strength and dominance of the latter within it. As all Marxists have argued, no new mode of

production can become dominant until it has proved its superiority over that which exists.

The victory of socialism, as with the victory of capitalism before it, will depend upon workers developing socialist forms of production, based on workers' ownership and control, and the demonstration of the superiority of such forms. If instead we wait for capitalism to collapse, we may wait for a long time. The task of Marxists is to be the drivers of history, not the observers and catastrophists of comrade Smith's type.

**Arthur Bough**  
email

## Poor ending

Eddie Ford's piece, 'Masses refuse to be ruled in old way' (May 17), is excellent until it ends in these two purely opportunist paragraphs:

"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 the 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."

For a revolutionary party to eschew the taking of power when the taking of power is possible is not just stupid, but absolutely criminal. Revolutionary situations are very rare indeed and the consequences of missing one are nearly always massive repression and defeat for the labour movement.

That is not to say that what we have in Greece is a revolutionary situation. Europe is in a pre-revolutionary situation which could transmute into a revolutionary situation tomorrow or, equally, extend for several years before doing so. Ford gives us the opportunist position, which marshals the correct idea that you cannot have socialism in one country, to promote the utterly bogus and counterrevolutionary idea that the working class should not or cannot take power in their individual nations, but must or can only wait until the whole of the European working class is ready to coordinate a joint revolution. Its dichotomous opposite, the adventurist position, is that Syriza should join forces with the KKE and immediately form a revolutionary workers' government, as if these ephemeral centrists and Stalinist outfits were capable or desirous of such a thing. If they were to try it, of course, they would be leading the vanguard into a bloody mess.

Leaving aside the utter undesirability of ever having the Stalinist KKE in power, between Ford and this latter position, we have, as usual, the excluded middle, where the dialectical truth usually hides out. The grey area, if you will. Syriza should have been demanding that Pasok form a minority government and it should have demanded that this government be a workers' government. It would have pledged its representatives to vote for all its pro-working class



measures and against all its anti-working class measures, but it would also have eschewed any notion of bringing this government down by vote of no confidence unless, of course, it had gathered sufficient forces to its banner to be absolutely sure of seizing power for itself.

The other thing about Syriza’s sectarian attitude towards the rank and file of Pasok and the workers that still vote for it and their flirtation with the anti-European Stalinist isolationists of the KKE is to turn the next general election into a referendum on the euro, which Syriza should have been pledging tooth and nail to stay in whilst still, of course, opposing austerity measures on the working classes and proposing their imposition on the Greek elites. This may well reduce Syriza’s vote, when they might initially have looked like they could increase it - 70% of Greeks want to stay in the euro, as they don’t want to see the value of their wages, welfare and public spending devalued by 90% overnight. Let the austerity fascists kick them out, but don’t volunteer. It is not, of course, too late for them to rectify the situation, but not too much breath should be held. It depends on the strength and seriousness of the Marxist elements within it.

Eddie Ford puts the opportunist position perfectly, whilst on the blogs a bloke called Prianikoff has managed to promote the adventurist position with equal clarity.

**David Ellis**  
 via Facebook

## Left fail

It is unfortunate that your article on the Rochdale ‘grooming’ trial relied on the perpetuation of some extremely reactionary ideas (‘The abuse of abuse’, May 17). The comments made by Julie Bindel on the widespread, organised sexual abuse of girls and young women are dismissed as hysterical media exaggeration. Her claim that such assaults are rarely reported is described as being unsupported by any real evidence. Any problems of social and cultural degeneration, including sexual exploitation, can be solved by the powerful traditions of the workers’ movement. You indicate your opinion that feminism (of any variety) has made no valid contribution to our understanding of sexual violence by conducting academic research or providing practical support. Do you really believe this?

WT Stead (a noted socialist journalist) followed the lead of feminist campaigners in the 19th century to expose the sexual exploitation of children. Others have supported more recent campaigns with varying degrees of enthusiasm, but it remains a matter of historical fact that sexual violence has been addressed almost exclusively by feminists. The most cursory investigation of this issue would have informed you that one of the main problems is that, while one in five girls and one in four women are sexually assaulted, most sexual violence is never reported (in many cases not even to close friends) and, when it is reported, offenders are not effectively prosecuted. The causes of this rest, in large part, on a series of myths around sexual violence, including the quaint notion that women and girls lie about being raped. Extensive work has been done to counter this damaging nonsense and establish the true extent of rape, including that on which Julie Bindel based her article. It is, therefore, most unhelpful that you chose to perpetuate the same misogyny by accusing her of making false allegations.

Your blithe dismissal of even the possibility that there is enormous under-reporting of sexual violence is unjustified. This misguided approach leads many on the left to deny the fact of, for example, trafficking into the sex industry. So who were the almost 2,000 (about five a week) women who

contacted the specialist support Poppy Project before Con-Dem cuts closed it? Who are the anonymous survivors of sexual violence who consistently disclose in surveys that around 90% of us do not report it to the police? I am unaware of any specifically socialist organisation collating statistics in parallel to (feminist) Rape Crisis. If such an organisation does exist, please enlighten us. I am sure it could be very useful.

**Heather Downs**  
 Medway

## Politicise

Laurie Smith gives a good account of left coverage of the May 10 strike day in last week’s paper and criticism of what appears to be strike for strike’s sake (‘Strikes are not the be-all and end-all’, May 17). However, it is a little short on detail about the London rally to mark the strike.

My understanding of the position of union general secretaries Bob Crow, Len McCluskey and Mark Serwotka is that they are fighting the TUC over the action required to politicise the strike. In his platform speech, Crow was strident calling for a TUC-wide strike - not just over pensions, but against the whole anti-austerity policy of this coalition government. And the speakers saw this strike action as providing hope and confidence to the workers who are struggling in the public and private sectors and a signal to the coalition that the battle is not over. They also took confidence from the outcome of the French presidential elections. By implication they were supporting workers across the channel. Whether anything concrete will come of that remains to be seen.

While on the picket line, we were visited by Socialist Party and Socialist Workers Party comrades selling their new newspapers. When I mentioned the demonstration by off-duty policemen the same day, the SWP comrades were less inclined to support the Police Federation. But I agree with Smith that as communists we should support this action.

**Simon Wells**  
 email

## Trotskyists?

Peter Manson’s otherwise solid critique of the liquidationist trajectory of the recent Workers Power youth split around Simon Hardy, Luke Cooper and others missed an opportunity to highlight how *at odds* their approach is with that of the tradition they claim (‘Small rooms and the politics of dishonesty’, May 17).

We should bear in mind that Trotskyism as a political tendency was born of *factional* struggle, occasioned by the bureaucratic silencing and expulsion of Leon Trotsky, Grigory Zinoviev and other leading Bolshevik figures. In my opinion, Trotsky made several mistakes in his brave struggle against the Stalinist degeneration of the Bolshevik Party. But he did, at least, put up a fight. He broke the rules.

It is not, as comrades Hardy and Chris Trafford state, “unprincipled” to break rules that are undemocratic or allow for the continuation of bureaucratic regimes (Letters, May 10). It is actually a *duty* to fight - a duty to their former comrades in WP and the advanced sections of our class more generally. Moreover, the fight against bureaucracy is integral to rebuilding the working class movement at all levels. The tools and methods of the labour bureaucracy - from the trade unions and the Labour Party down to the Stalinoid organisational norms that define the far left’s ‘Bolshevism’ - need to be challenged head on.

However, that comrades Hardy and others simply walked without a fight actually betrays the lack of confidence they have in their own perspectives. Rather than engage in serious, open polemic as a way of thinking through their experiences - good, bad and ugly

- in Workers Power, the comrades frivolously split to chase the ‘next big thing’.

This replicates the bad, dishonest method they have acquired from their time in WP. As with so many other recent left splits, the comrades are now simply presenting themselves as something ‘new’ - ready and fighting fit for war, like Athena from the head of Zeus, in the name of going ‘to the masses’, this new split is - sadly - yet another manifestation of the far left’s political and organisational decline.

As to the need for a “debate” alluded to in the Hardy-Strafford letter, we in the *Weekly Worker* could not agree more. We do not simply want to set up another sect organisation with grand illusions in being the ‘advanced guard of the revolutionary proletariat’. That is a polemic against Workers Power, not us. We are for solid, rigorous debate and polemic on far-left perspectives, as evidenced by the pages of this paper over the last few weeks. But this is actually not what the comrades want at all: instead they are mainly concerned with tailoring their projects to chasing Occupy, UK Uncut, etc. How small do these ‘big rooms’ have to get, comrades?

**Ben Lewis**  
 London

## So what?

Jon White and Allan Johnstone - our two Socialist Party of Great Britain correspondents in last week’s paper - talk up the results of their group in the May 3 elections (Letters, May 17). Their brace of candidates stood on the SPGB’s “usual manifesto of socialism and nothing but socialism”, comrade Johnstone tells us. Given this implacable position - “we just advocate socialism,” he shrugs, in case we’ve missed it - he seems to think it is politically significant that the SPGB out-performed the list of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition in the same areas, as Tusc simply stood on a mild-mannered “programme of attractive reforms”.

True, the SPGB did marginally better than Tusc in Lambeth and Southwark (1.9%) and Merton and Wandsworth (0.9%). However, it is absurdly overblown for comrade Johnstone to finish his letter with the flourish - “who says impossiblism doesn’t hold an appeal to votes?” Er, well for a start how about the 98-99% of voters in both constituencies who managed to resist the blandishments of the SPGB’s quaintly eccentric brand of “impossiblism”? A more politically salient point is that the SPGB comrades and Tusc scored very similar results because both picked up the normal, baseline percentage of votes that left candidates - whatever the details of their individual programmes - can expect to gather. I recall the *Weekly Worker* reporting in the past on very similar results for CPGB candidates standing on an explicitly revolutionary platform (perhaps comrade Johnstone might like to flick through Jack Conrad’s book *In the enemy camp* to check out the soft soap “wish-list of palliatives” the comrades stood on in the 1992 general election).

There is something slightly sad about the left’s ability to delude itself (the Socialist Party in England and Wales, for example, is blaming its uninspiring May 3 performance on a media blackout - as if Marxists should rely on the BBC to build them a social/electoral base!). We urgently need a reality check, here. Group A may be marginally bigger than group B; sect X may scramble together a few more votes that sect Y - so what? We are all pathetically small and uninfleuntial: it’s time we recognised that brutal fact and squared up to our tasks seriously - revolutionary unity and building a mass audience for Marxism.

**John Galt**  
 email

# ACTION

### CPGB podcasts

Every Monday we upload a podcast commenting 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 27, 5pm:** Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by open discussion and *Capital* reading group. This week: continuing Vol 1, part 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 29, 6.15pm:** ‘The origins of symbolic culture in Africa’. Speaker: Ian Watts. 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).

### Edward W Said Lecture

**Thursday May 24, 6.30pm:** Lecture, BP lecture theatre, British Museum, Great Russell Street, London WC1. ‘Mina’s banner: Edward Said and the Egyptian revolution’. Speaker: Ahdaf Soueif. Tickets £12. Organised by AM Qattan Foundation: [www.qattanfoundation.org/en](http://www.qattanfoundation.org/en).

### 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>.

### Break workfare

**Saturday May 26, 11am to 5pm:** Conference, Brighton Railway Club, 4 Belmont, Brighton. Organised by Brighton Benefits Campaign: [brightonbenefitscampaign@gmail.com](mailto:brightonbenefitscampaign@gmail.com)

### 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>.

### Resisting austerity

**Thursday May 31, 7pm:** Meeting, Friends Meeting House, Lower Goat Lane, Norwich. Organised by Norfolk Coalition Against the Cuts: <http://norfolkcoalitionagainstcuts.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).

### European unity

**Saturday June 9, 3pm:** Meeting, ‘The fragmentation of the euro zone and the unification of the peoples’, North London Community Centre, 22 Moorfield Road, Tottenham, London N17. More in formation: [vasacan@yahoo.com](mailto:vasacan@yahoo.com).

### Defend our pensions

**Sunday June 17, 5.15pm:** Fringe meeting, Trouville Hotel, Priory Road, Bournemouth. During Unison’s local government service group conference. Sponsored by Tower Hamlets Unison: [john.mcloughlin@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto:john.mcloughlin@towerhamlets.gov.uk).

### Austerity and resistance

**Saturday June 23, 11am to 4.30pm:** Conference, Bloomsbury Baptist Church, 235 Shaftesbury Avenue, London WC2. Speakers include Mark Serwotka, John McDonnell MP. Organised by Unite the Resistance: <http://uniteresist.org>.

### Keep Our NHS Public

**Saturday June 23, 9.15am to 4pm:** AGM, followed by conference for NHS supporters: ‘Reclaiming our NHS’, Friends Meeting House, Euston Road, London NW1. Organised by Keep Our NHS Public: [www.keeppournhspublic.com](http://www.keeppournhspublic.com).

### Resisting austerity

**Wednesday June 27, lunch break:** Fringe at Unite policy conference, restaurant, Brighton Centre, Kings Road, Brighton BN1. Organised by United Left: [unitedleft.org.uk](http://unitedleft.org.uk).

### 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.



## GREECE

# Syriza in the spotlight

For a long time it was almost unknown outside Greece - but now the world's eyes are on Syriza. Paul Demarty examines the new thorn in the troika's side

Nobody was surprised to see a strong showing in Greece's recent parliamentary elections for parties to the left (and to the right) of the mainstream, in a poll understandably considered by many to be a referendum on submission to the programme of social devastation demanded by Brussels and Berlin.

The main beneficiary of this, however, turned out to be a group with a relatively low international profile - the Coalition of the Radical Left (Syriza) took 17% of the vote and a narrow second place overall. Its leader, Alexis Tsipras, has become the face of anti-austerity politics in Greece. The political history and make-up of this odd coalition, then, has suddenly assumed something like global importance.

Syriza is not a party, but, as its name suggests, a coalition of different left organisations. These include the Internationalist Workers Left, a split from the Socialist Workers Party's Greek section, as well as Maoists and social democratic splits from Pasok. The largest and most influential currents, however, have their roots in the Greek 'official communist' movement. Syriza's history is tortuously complicated and allegiances are fluid; yet it is crucial to understanding what is going on in Greece today.

## History

The roots of this odd formation lie ultimately in a split in the Communist Party of Greece (KKE), which took place in 1968, at the sharp end of the regime of the colonels. Despite the 'exceptional' circumstances pertaining at that time, the split followed an international pattern, squaring off a Moscow-loyal majority with an increasingly anti-Soviet minority, which came to identify closely with Eurocommunism. The minority regrouped as the Communist Party of Greece (Interior), or KKE(E), the implication being that the Moscow loyalists were taking their political lead from the 'exterior'.

In the mid-1980s, the KKE(E) split again on basically left-right lines. Here, the picture starts to get complicated. The rightwing faction - Greek Left (EAP) - comprised the most 'hardened' Eurocommunists, while the remainder (which has operated since under variations of the name, 'Renewing Left') retained the KKE(E)'s flirtation with the new left. In 1989, Pasok was hit by an enormous corruption scandal, and the subsequent election resulted in a 'grand coalition' of the rightwing New Democracy party, the KKE and EAP (these two 'official communist' strands had ironically come together in an alliance with other, trivial, left forces, called Synaspismós).

Predictably, this coalition ended in disaster, as did a subsequent one with Pasok on board too. Synaspismós collapsed immediately, with the rump around EAP carrying on with the name. The KKE, meanwhile, was thrown into crisis. Its 'hard-line' faction purged its competitors ruthlessly, and some of its best and brightest members opted in any case to stay with Synaspismós. One such individual was Alexis Tsipras.

In the subsequent decade, the KKE - while retaining considerable influence in the labour movement - politically ossified, rediscovering the virtues of Joseph Stalin and deepening its Greek chauvinism in



Alexis Tsipras: from high to high

the process. Synaspismós, meanwhile, travelled in the opposite direction, becoming a somewhat diffuse regroupment of various far-left platforms and the rightward-drifting former Eurocommunists, as well as disaffected social democrats. It later launched the Syriza alliance, before splitting again - with the old EAP hard core leaving to form Democratic Left.

Syriza, then, is something like those rock bands from an earlier era who continue to tour with no original members in the line-up. Unlike such bands, it has come to its most spectacular level of success in this condition, with a real chance of coming first in the next election outright. The picture is somewhat complicated by the 50-MP 'top-up' rule, which it turns out is only available to *parties* rather than coalitions. Syriza must therefore turn itself into at least the Greek state's definition of a party in double-quick time. Surely none of Synaspismós's coalition partners would be stupid enough to turn that offer down.

## Politics

Of course, exactly what *politics* Syriza represents at this time is hard to tell. Partly this is 'good news' - the departure of the Democratic Left has removed the most intransigent faction of the right of the coalition. The dynamic at this moment is to the left; and the reigning tendency in Synaspismós itself comprises various platforms which at least consciously identify themselves as Marxist and of the radical left.

Yet these are, after all, offshoots of 'official communism'. Syriza is happy to peddle illusions in the

prospect of a Keynesian stimulus policy, and many look to Hugo Chávez for inspiration (not much of a model, unless somebody discovers vast oil reserves off the coast of the Peloponnese). On top of that, there are somewhat significant forces on board at present who will not be happy with Marxist politics at all, a motley collection of left-populist initiatives and splits from Pasok - and it is clear that the 'Marxists' will not do without them.

Far-left critics are keen to point out this slipperiness on the question of reform and revolution, but in a sense that is not the point. An explicit commitment to revolutionary socialism does not stop the British SWP from touting exactly the same sub-Keynesian silliness in Britain, for instance.

In fact, on some matters Tsipras is *better* than the far left: the latter uniformly demand unilateral withdrawal from the EU with callous disregard for the consequences of such a move, and indeed internationalist principle. Tsipras's tough talk on the memorandum is combined with an appeal for common action against austerity throughout Europe - though the sub-Keynesianism he promotes is a radically inadequate programme for such action, it would hardly be a bad thing if his appeal were heeded in Frankfurt or Paris (or, for that matter, London).

## Cometh the hour ...?

The question that is most likely to bring Syriza to grief is the question of

government. Here, Tsipras and the far left are basically united - all about us, we hear the demand for a 'workers' government' in Greece to face down the troika. The bitter, intransigent hostility of the KKE to Syriza has thus far kept it off the table, but no doubt pressure is building on the former to start playing ball, on the basis that to do otherwise would be to abdicate responsibility in the Greek masses' hour of need.

The reasoning is seductive. One refutation among many comes from these formations' own history - the disastrous coalitions with New Democracy *et al* of 1989-90. No sensible analysis of this history can call the entry of Synaspismós into government as anything other than a severe setback.

A left government in Greece, and Greece alone, will be unable to solve the problems put before it to anyone's satisfaction. It will end up carrying the can for the consequences - exactly what those consequences are will depend on the outcome of a pretty chaotic situation among the international bourgeois establishment. Syriza's vote will drop right down to single figures almost as quickly as it shot up in recent months.

There is an element of brinkmanship in Tsipras's attitude to Germany and the troika. He senses, not unreasonably, cracks in the austerity consensus. The message he would like the Greeks to send Merkel and co is simple: 'We will not put up with this, whether or not you kick us out of the euro.' This message may be enough to get the EU back to the negotiating table - after all, a

disorderly Greek exit would cause all kinds of problems, trite talk of 'firewalls' notwithstanding.

Expecting much more than that is probably fanciful. Merkel cannot simply cave in - that would be political suicide. Should Tsipras be propelled to power, the choice will be between a Greek exit and whatever the troika is prepared to concede: which is unlikely to be much. Either way, the left will have to preside over grinding poverty and social devastation. That would hardly be a great advertisement for socialism.

In truth, it would be better by far simply to render the bourgeoisie unable to rule. Such an outcome would cause the same kind of headaches for the troika as a left government, without forcing the left into administering austerity. The Marxist position is clear - we ought not to take power unless we can implement our minimum programme - disbanding the standing army and giving power to the masses through extreme democracy (including, of course, abolishing the absurd 50-MP top-up). We should take responsibility for *our* programme, not anyone else's. That means building a working class movement across Europe - a goal that seems tantalisingly close at the moment, but still beyond the reach of a left poisoned by nationalism.

Syriza does not share this view - unfortunately, that will leave it at the mercy of a historical process which has not been kind to either the left or to Greeks in recent decades ●

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## GERMANY

# Split looming in Die Linke

The success of the gimmicky Piratenpartei has strengthened the right within the German Left Party, says Tina Becker

Looking at Germany through the distorted spectacles of the British bourgeois media, you could be forgiven for believing that the country whose government is imposing harsh austerity measures on the rest of Europe has itself somehow managed to escape the capitalist crisis unharmed. The secret, according to an edition of *BBC Breakfast* on May 17, for example, was “that Germany has gone through its own austerity measures 10 years ago” and has “come out smiling”.

And business is certainly booming, at least compared to the rest of Europe. In 2011, the German economy grew by 3%; in the first quarter of 2012 by another 0.5% (this helped the overall European economy to just about reach 0% growth - ie, avoid another official recession).<sup>1</sup> Unemployment has gone down from a high of 5.2 million in 2005 (12.6% of the workforce) to just over three million (7.2%). Especially compared to Spain or Greece, this sounds pretty healthy.

But scratch beneath the surface. The reputable news programme *Panorama* reported in March that 8.2 million people are currently employed in so-called “precarious jobs” - ie, they are in temporary employment or work in “mini-jobs” - earning less than €400 a month.<sup>2</sup> Many people have become officially self-employed in order to save some tax on their increasingly irregular income. According to the programme, a staggering “75% of all new jobs” are non-permanent. If you fall ill, you do not get sick pay. There is no contribution towards your pension. And if your boss wants to get rid of you, he can do so without any interference by those troublesome trade unions, which are effectively banned from more and more workplaces. This is illegal, of course, but who on a temporary contract would want to challenge it?

This is all thanks to the Social Democratic Party (SPD) government of Gerhard Schröder, who in the late 1990s imposed a range of harsh measures: the so-called *Agenda 2010* made it easier for businesses to sack workers, imposed draconian measures against Germany’s unemployed, enforced a radical restructuring of the pensions system and carried out the *de facto* privatisation of the health service. At the same time, the government introduced unprecedented tax cuts for businesses and lowered the top rate of income tax from 56% in 1989 to 45%. Selective austerity.

Since Angela Merkel took over as chancellor in 2005, she has simply kept most of these measures ticking over - Schröder had done all the heavy lifting for her. Unsurprisingly then, the SPD has been finding it difficult to look like an effective alternative. Its top politicians might criticise this measure or that law brought in by Schröder. But the party is still firmly seen as having done the dirty on the German working class. In polls, it hovers around 28%, compared to the 35% that Merkel’s conservatives (CDU/CSU) poll.<sup>3</sup>

### Downward spiral

You might think that in these circumstances, the Left Party, Die Linke, would do very well. After the 2007 unification of the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS, the former ‘official communist’ party of East Germany) and the WASG (which was made up mainly of disappointed left social democrats, union officials

and the far left in the west of Germany), Die Linke had been going from strength to strength. In 2009, it stormed the *Bundestag* with a fantastic 11.9% of the vote, winning 78 seats. Membership rose to 80,000.

But things started to go downhill soon after that. According to most recent polls, the party would currently struggle to cross the undemocratic 5% threshold, which applies to all national and regional elections - it is enjoying only between 5% and 6% support. In early May, it lost all its seats in the two west German federal parliaments of Schleswig-Holstein (where its share of the vote was slashed from 6% to 2.2%) and North Rhine-Westphalia (where it went from 5.6% to 2.5%). Membership has dropped to under 70,000.

So where did it all go wrong for Die Linke?

The crisis of capitalism has certainly tested the organisation - and it has been found wanting. The unity between the two component parts has been shown to be extremely fragile. The party’s programme, adopted last year, was supposed to bring the two wings closer together. But instead of openly debating the different outlooks and political strategies, the programme tried to paper things over. Unsurprisingly, it turned out to be a semi-Keynesian hotchpotch of often contradictory ideas. For example, while in one part there is talk about “superseding” capitalism in order to establish “a society of democratic socialism”, other parts merely talk about managing the excesses of the “deregulated financial markets” and “unrestricted capitalism” (my emphasis).<sup>4</sup>

It clearly is the result of a compromise between the more radical forces in the west of Germany and the *Realos*, who dominate the organisation in the east. Such a programme could never serve as a “guide to action”. In reality, it is nothing but a guide to confusion, which the right wing has been able to use as a fig leaf in its attempts to form more coalition governments in the regions with the SPD. Especially as a minority partner in the Berlin coalition government, the organisation has over many years helped to enforce draconian cuts and closures - and has been severely punished by the electorate, many of whom have turned to the new Piratenpartei (Pirate Party).

### Pirating votes

In the latest polls, support for the Piratenpartei stands at an amazing 11%. In the May regional elections, it entered the west German federal parliaments of Schleswig-Holstein and North Rhine-Westphalia, which Die Linke was booted out of. To add insult to injury, the Pirates held their first press conference in the former conference room of Die Linke.

Compared to the bureaucratic set-up of most political parties, the Pirates seem fresh, young, open and democratic. In the last couple of years, their ranks have swollen to over 30,000 (though only 16,000 have paid the annual membership fee of €48 and are therefore allowed to vote).<sup>5</sup> Most of their meetings are held openly and are transmitted to all members via Skype or Mumble. Many policy proposals are initiated online, via the software ‘Liquid Democracy’: a member puts up a motion, discusses it with others who might put forward amendments and, if enough support

has been gathered, the motion goes to the party’s regional or national bodies for ratification (most motions coming through this way are being accepted). There are no Napoleon-like leaders demanding special rules for themselves.

That is the attractive side of the organisation. The less pretty one looks like this: apart from fighting for absolute freedom on the internet, the organisation has no programme to speak of. This lack of a strategic outlook leads to the absurd situation where members and leaders of this political party are trying to avoid talking about ... politics.

“None of the candidates for the leadership made passionate or original speeches,” reports the German weekly *Die Zeit* on the April conference of the party. “Political statements were very rare. The contrast between the organisation’s commitment to freedom of speech and the fear of the strict grassroots, which are controlling every word, was pretty crass.”<sup>6</sup>

In the beginning, many people thought it refreshing when a Pirate confessed in one of the many talk shows on German TV that “we don’t have a position on this particular issue yet”. After a couple of years though, this is starting to wear quite thin. Some of its members are self-confessed socialists, some are anarchists, a few have been exposed as ex-members of the neo-fascist NPD - but the majority could probably be described as out-and-out liberals.

One of their main placards in the May regional elections read, “We stick to the *Grundgesetz* [the constitution]. That’s where we are conservative”. The party’s new leader, Bernd Schlömer, is a director in the German defence ministry, where he is in charge of the curriculum of the universities run by the German army. He considers the *Bundeswehr*’s deployment in Kosovo and Afghanistan “positive”.<sup>7</sup>

He is indicative of the membership base: the vast majority of Pirates are between 25 and 35 years old; many are students, self-employed or run small businesses - the classic petty bourgeoisie. Stuck between the two major classes, it can be pulled either way, depending on the class struggle. The jury is still out which way this one will go, but Die Linke is certainly not pulling it to the left at the moment.

### Split looming

In fact, the right wing in Die Linke has been strengthened by the success of the Pirates, who are doing particularly well in the west. The *Realos* have used the recent humiliating election results to come out fighting: they demand that the party gives up its “desire to stay in opposition” (which is very half-hearted in any case). The party should openly declare its intention to seek participation in all levels of government, especially with its “natural coalition partner”, the SPD.

For the first time, the *Realos* now also claim the leadership of the party. The constitution stipulates that there have to be two party leaders: one from the east, one from the west. And at least one of the two has to be a woman. To find two suitable candidates has in the past been an arithmetic feat of the highest order, involving weeks and weeks of negotiations between the two wings. Predictably, this type of election has

promoted mediocre politicians who might have been born with the correct gender and on the correct side of the Berlin wall, but who have very little to contribute politically.

But now the real *Realos* are demanding the crown: Dietmar Bartsch, one of their main spokespeople, is supported by the party in all five federal states in the east. He - quite correctly - points out that the organisation has far more members in the east and claims that this should be reflected in the political direction of the organisation.

But so far, the left within Die Linke is refusing to accept him or the change of direction. Instead, after recovering from cancer, Oskar Lafontaine has just declared his own desire for the top job - which in reality he has been doing for many years. A former leading member of the SPD, he stepped down from his post as finance minister of Germany in 1999 in protest against Gerhard Schröder’s ‘reforms’ and is the most well-known Die Linke politician. He has continuously moved to the left of the party and is now something of a spokesperson of the more radical forces. The German section of the Socialist Workers Party, for example, has been supporting him uncritically for many years - and has been rewarded with a number of jobs and promising positions. Lafontaine’s relationship with the charismatic Sahra Wagenknecht, leader of the Stalinist Kommunistische Plattform, has further cemented his position as the ‘leader of the left’.

This is all relative, of course. While he is no revolutionary, he is certainly to the left of those power-hungry elements in the east. His Keynesian politics are typical of the social democrats who have turned their backs on the right-marching SPD. Like many trade unionists and traditional SPD supporters, he believes in some kind of nationally restricted social welfare state. Back to the 1970s. That puts him on the left of German politics, although not so much in Die Linke, of course.

He was never against taking the party into ruling coalitions - quite the opposite. But he and his supporters keep formulating ‘principles’ or ‘conditions’ which would have to be met before they would agree to government participation. Putting conditions is generally

not a bad tactic, but it should not apply to participation in a bourgeois government, where Die Linke would always be forced to take responsibility for attacks on the working class. That is in the nature of the system.

Also, Lafontaine’s commitment to democracy leaves much to be desired. A politician in the mould of George Galloway, he makes up party policy as he goes along. Like Galloway, he is a great asset to his party - and a great burden. For example, he let it be known through interviews in the bourgeois media that he would refuse to stand against Bartsch (or anybody else, for that matter): “I want the party to want me,” he declared. He knows that he probably would lose against Bartsch, so he is demanding that the June 2-3 party conference be presented with only one candidate for the top job: him.

This is developing into the biggest crisis of the young Die Linke. Not a few commentators are musing that this might well be a pre-split situation. The party is being pulled in (at least) two directions: in the west, the organisation is akin to the Socialist Alliance in Britain - sections of the scattered left got together to help found Die Linke here. Opposition to the pitfalls of “taking responsibility” by managing capitalism is still strong. But in the east, government participation is now becoming the norm and the party is well on the way to its aim of replacing the SPD as the ‘natural’ party for working class people, often pulling in around 25% of the vote.

Gregor Gysi, who likes to present himself as something of an unofficial, ‘impartial’ president of the organisation, has warned: “The victory of one side over the other is not a way to unity, but in the last instance will lead to a split. There are two ways to deal with internal differences: either we split or we unite on a higher level.”<sup>8</sup>

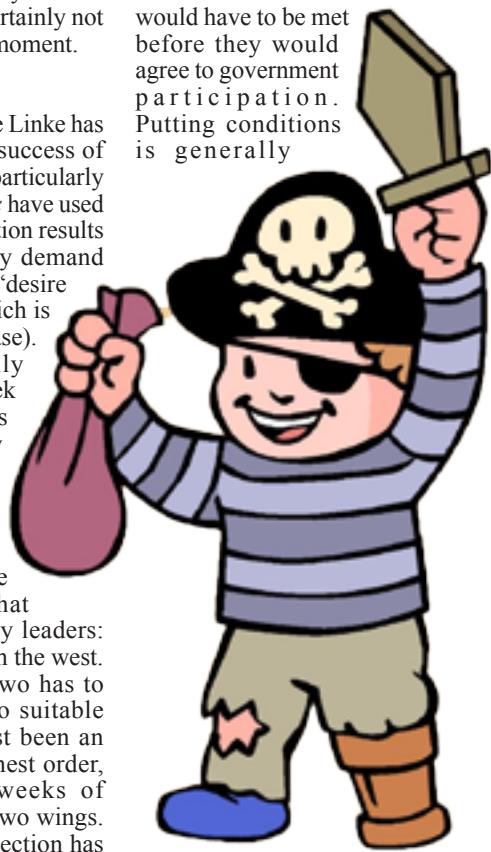
This was not so much a prophecy as an outright threat in order to keep the party together, particularly directed at the right (Gysi has come out in support of Lafontaine). And the two main wings will probably find a last-minute bureaucratic compromise when it comes to the new leadership. Bartsch might be persuaded to go for general secretary once more - if, for example, he is promised the top job in two years’ time (this worked so well for Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, didn’t it?). Or Lafontaine might be won to lead the party’s parliamentary fraction instead.

Such bureaucratic backroom deals will not resolve the long overdue strategic debate the party needs to conduct. But even if that debate takes place, it seems unlikely that the two wings can be kept together for much longer. There is now open hostility between the various leaders, which is often the precursor to a split ●

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### Notes

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## REVIEW

# The fall of an icon

Gregor Gall **Tommy Sheridan, from hero to zero: a political biography** Welsh Academic Press, 2012, pp384, £25

Given the still raw emotions, ongoing political bitterness and entrenched sectarian positions around Tommy Sheridan, this is a remarkably objective and balanced work. It is also extremely well written and presented.

The forces that would come to be centred on this rising star and his almost archetypal west Scottish working class persona could perhaps never have developed at all, had it not been for an ideological shift in perceptions towards the independence process by far-left groupings north of the border. This is, of course, a vexed question, however, and this review is not the place to restage the contesting positions.

Tommy's roots and political apprenticeship had been with the Militant Tendency, which developed his emerging talent for public speaking. Before the poll tax campaign - which really put Tommy in the right place with the right skills at just the right time - were a number of disputes, strikes and protests, which fine-tuned his talents for organisation, leadership and oratory. The poll tax gave rise to a truly mass community resistance movement of non-payment in the solid working class communities, and in 1990 there were huge demonstrations, with 40,000 marching in Glasgow and 200,000 in London.

It was the London demonstration rather than the mass community resistance which became the enduring memory of the campaign. Pitched battles raged in the centre of London - probably even more ferocious than anything the miners' strike of five years earlier had involved. It was following this demonstration that Tommy became notorious for his condemnation of protestors' violence and the implication that he would 'name names' - earning him the undying title of 'grass' among the anarchist left. Unhindered by such trifles in his Scottish base, he had become more and more publicly associated with resistance to warrant sales and bailiff actions and it was during this time that he was drawn towards left nationalism, and some of the people who would become his most reliable comrades.

Tommy's high media profile and identity with Militant had soon marked him out for expulsion from the Labour Party. He was expelled in October 1989 - all members of the large Pollock constituency party were suspended. The general witch-hunt and widespread expulsion of Militant leaders from Labour, together with general unease with the whole clandestine entrust tactic, led to the break from the party and the establishment of Militant Labour - later to become the Socialist Party (in England and Wales).

Tommy's star was rising. He was tireless and dynamic, a working class 'man of the people' filled with passion and charisma; instantly recognisable - groomed, tanned, always 'on'. Having been jailed for 'deforcement' and breach of the peace, as well as contravening the terms of an interdict, he had used in classic style the court as a platform for class denunciation of the 'war on the poor'.

In 1992 Sheridan stood twice for election while still in prison. In the April general election he came second to Labour, winning 19% of the votes cast (6,287) - on a platform that "Labour used to campaign on before



Tommy and Gail Sheridan: a giant conspiracy?

its heart and soul were ripped out". The following month he achieved a first by winning Pollok ward from his prison cell and becoming a Glasgow councillor.

In 1995 Alan McCombes, Tommy's close friend and comrade, floated the idea of a Scottish Socialist Alliance, which would bring together all the existing socialist groups and be able to contest the forthcoming Scottish parliamentary elections. They also appealed to the Communist Party, Labour left and even the Liberation group of the Scottish National Party. It is perhaps telling that this initiative came about because of the monolithic centralism of Arthur Scargill and his newly formed Socialist Labour Party. The emergent SLP had been seen as a catalyst which could act as a serious political pole to the left of the right-moving New Labour project. For a brief moment the SLP looked as though it might actually achieve something lasting and important, but it was not to be: it was conceived in the image of Scargill, and factions, rank-and-file control and democracy were not part of that image.

Tommy had brought SML and many others to the table, but Scargill refused any idea of an autonomous Scottish section, self-determination for Scotland or recognition of political factions within the SLP. Tommy had commented: "When Scargill threw down the gauntlet of a new socialist Labour Party we were excited. We wore Scottish socialist spectacles, but we took them off to see the broader picture and were keen to be involved with Arthur." It was in Tommy's words a "lost opportunity" - and not just for the Scottish working class.

But Scargill's bureaucratic myopicism led to the foundation of the SSA, which in turn led to the creation of the Scottish Socialist Party. Had the SLP not been so afflicted, its Scottish section would have boasted a united platform, with Tommy at its

head. Maybe it would have also kept Tommy's feet more firmly on the ground. The total of 101,867 votes for the SLP and SSP in the 1999 Scottish parliamentary election ought to have produced two more MSPs in addition to Tommy.

The decision of SML to more or less wind up and transfer its resources over to the SSA was a bold and principled move, and marked for a time a healthy alternative to the SLP, already fully operating its regime of witch-hunts and membership 'voiding'.

Tommy's significance to the SSA was that he was a well known public figurehead, around which much of the Scottish left could unite in the same manner as the left might have been able to rally around Arthur Britain-wide. The SSA resolved that its candidates would not stand against other socialists or in marginal seats against Labour, where they could allow in the Tory. From the word 'go' it would recognise political tendencies and factions. The Scottish Socialist Alliance was formally launched on April 20 1996, with *The Scotsman* predicting that "such a rainbow coalition could dissolve in the sunlight".

1999-2003 marked a great revival of radical socialist politics and growth in Scotland; it began with the election of Sheridan and concluded with him being joined by another five other Scottish Socialist Party MSPs. Election results and MSPs are not the only criteria of judgment, of course, but on any other yardstick too this period marked a high tide, and Tommy was central within it. He fully came of age when he was elected to the Scottish parliament. The iconic image which went across Scotland was of Tommy, fist clenched, taking the oath of allegiance under protest and duress.

Tommy saw himself as the mouthpiece of the movement. He used parliament to raise questions

on particular strikes, and even the wages of parliamentary workers, and was a welcome guest at innumerable strike rallies and picket lines - often in the teeth of hostility from the union leadership.

The attitude of the press to Tommy started to sour around 2000 with his further arrest at Faslane during anti-Trident protests - the *Daily Record* labelled him "pillock no1" and first coined the phrase "working class zero" in relation to the SSP policy for the legalisation of cannabis. It was around this time too that the press started to dub him the "sun-tanned designer MSP". He was, though, still writing articles for *The Sunday Times*, the *Record* and *Evening Times*, as well as for the *Morning Star*.

But it was becoming clear Tommy liked being centre stage. According to Felicity Garvie, Sheridan's parliamentary office manager from 1999-2006 and a member of the SSP executive, "A fundamental weakness is that he is not a team player ... when the other five were elected, I think it was a severe dent to his personal profile and position as leader of the party - the only SSP MSP and so on. You can call it personal pride or vanity, but I think he enjoyed being in that position" (p140).

## 'Defamation'

Where did it all go wrong? It was a question of personal morality, tactics and judgment of principle. Tommy won a spectacular victory against the *News of the World* and News International for defamation in 2006, and probably became the most famous Scot in the world after Sean Connery. The whole 'Tommygate' affair ran from November 2004 to January 2011, ending with the demise of the champion of the underdog and the collapse of the SSP.

Essentially the *NOTW* had 'exposed' Tommy's attendance at sex clubs - something he swore had

not happened. He decided to play a huge game of bluff in the courts, believing "they've got fuck all on me" in the way of hard evidence. He had a choice - either face it down ('So what? That's my business' being one possible response. This was a private matter for himself and his partner to sort out) or go for broke. And, because he believed the revelations, left unchallenged, would destroy him, he went for option two.

The biggest flaw in this strategy was that it was not just himself who stood to be broke if someone called his bluff or broke ranks. He obviously had not been alone in the 'swingers' clubs - loads of other punters had been there, people who recognised him and saw him on more than one occasion. The EC of the SSP, as soon the accusations surface, calls a special meeting to discuss the crisis on November 9 2004. Since members of the EC *know* he is a regular attendee at the Cupids club in Manchester, he comes clean and owns up to them, while announcing his belief that the *NOTW* has no evidence and they will settle at the door of the court. Very reluctantly the EC goes along with this and agrees to stay shtum, on the grounds that Tommy resigns his post as SSP convenor for "personal reasons". The meeting is, of course, minuted.

In late 2001 Tommy had attended Cupids with a *freelance journalist*, who went on to try and sell what looked like an ace scoop. News of this got back to the EC and Alan McCombes confronted him over it. Although at first he denied it, he later confirmed within the organisation that it was true. Stories also started to circulate about an orgy at the Moat House Hotel in Glasgow.

The advice of the NEC was to admit it and fight the attacks on him as a private matter rather than an issue of personal morality. Tommy disagreed, but 21 members of the SSP EC had attended the four-hour meeting, where he recited all the facts. Then there was George McNeillage, who just for the record makes a secret tape of what is essentially a confession. When the full minutes were written up they read:

"... The meeting began with an introduction by Tommy Sheridan. He responded to a recent article in the *News of the World* which alleged a married MSP had visited a swingers/sex club in Manchester in company of a female journalist who had now written a book about her lifestyle. Tommy admitted to the meeting that he had in fact visited the club on two occasions, in 1996 and 2002, with close friends ... He reported that he had met with Keith B and Alan Mc and asked them for the opportunity to fight this on his own and for other party members if questioned about it to either give no comment or refer all questions to himself. He said he was confident there was no proof in existence he had visited the club, Tommy said he was not prepared to resign as convenor unless proof was revealed to exist. His strategy was to deny the allegations and in this regard he had already taken advice from NUJ solicitors ..."

The minutes record without exception (other than Tommy, who left the meeting before any votes were taken) that all contributors disagreed with the strategy of denying the allegations: "All felt this would be most damaging for the party... All



agreed it would be better if Tommy changed his mind about denying the allegations.”

Tommy then resigns as convenor of the party after further deputations from the EC failed to persuade him against fighting a defamation action. In a press statement the SSP comments: “We understand that recent allegations in a Murdoch newspaper may be the subject of a future libel action by Tommy Sheridan and consequently the Scottish Socialist Party does not wish to comment on matters concerning the allegation.” Tommy requests that the minutes of the EC meeting at which he admits the visits should not be distributed. This was agreed.

From here on in Tommy begins to play out the perfectly aggrieved and outraged innocent, fighting the anti-union, anti-socialist press monolith. The subterfuge could never be publicly admitted despite it being almost widespread knowledge within the SSP. What also clearly starts to happen is Tommy and later his supporters get so deeply into the role that they clearly forget they are playing a bluff and that the allegations are actually true. As things turned out, regardless of Sheridan’s victory in the defamation action, the SSP was split. Many thought it unprincipled in the extreme to risk the political reputation of the organisation to effectively save the political skin of one its MSPs. The majority of the EC decided to tell the truth when forced by the *NOTW* to give evidence.

## Rewriting history

The author comments: “It seems Tommy subscribed to the principle that the truth is what you make it and that one of the spoils of victory is to write its history” (p173). Many individuals as well as parts of the organised left gave legitimacy to Tommy’s methods - including the distortions, lies and character assassination employed against those who would not play the game. He believed that if he dropped the court case, his guilt and misjudgement would be established and he would have no chance of coming back to lead the party and regain his old stardom. So he determined to prove that black was white and those who said otherwise were traitors.

But first he had a lot of knitting to undo - not least because he had told a whole room of people at the November 9 2004 EC that he *had* visited Cupids and then resigned because of that admission. He even claimed that the EC minutes, which the SSP had agreed to withhold from the *NOTW*, had been fake. McCombes, who had strongly advised Tommy against his course of action, was actually jailed for contempt for refusing to hand over the minutes, but this did not save him from the designation of traitor by Tommy and his supporters.

In numerous TV, radio and press interviews he did indeed argue that black was white. In order to do this he was forced to charge all his former comrades who had decided to tell the truth with conspiring with the *NOTW* and the state against him. “In the 2006 case, Tommy constructed the fabrication that the 11 SSP members [who gave evidence against him] were guilty of ‘the mother of all stitch-ups’ against him and of perjuring themselves in court to do so.” Meantime the Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Party in England and Wales condemned the SSP for forcing Tommy to resign as convenor before the case.

The *News of the World* did not, however, cave in, as Tommy had expected, claiming that its story was “substantially true”. So the defamation case started in Edinburgh Court of Session on July 4 2006 and ended after 23 days on August 4. Tommy was suing for £200,000. His rationale

was that the case was not about truth or lies, but what could and could not be proved. His strategy was not so much to cast doubt on the evidence, but on the process by which the evidence was accumulated and upon the character of the witnesses. The trial saw News International call 24 witnesses, including the 11 SSP EC members who had attended the November 2004 ‘admission’ meeting. Among them were some who had been Tommy’s closest comrades and friends. It is perhaps worth reminding readers, in light of the accusations of ‘grass’ and ‘scab’, that all of them were there against their will: they could not legally refuse to be indicted and once on the stand under oath, their options were either to lie and perjure themselves, and so risk legal sanction and other consequences, or simply tell the truth. That they were in that position was entirely due to Tommy’s ill-advised choice of action rather than their own universal view to let the charge ride and face it down as an attack on his private life.

Calling his own wife, Gail, to the stand to give evidence on his behalf was a master stroke: “What is clear is that Gail played a key and starring - almost theatrical - role, when cross-examined by Tommy ... saying with tears that if the allegations were true ‘You would be in the ... Clyde with a piece of concrete tied around you and I would be in court for your murder’” (p182). He was also supported by Steve Arnott of the Highlands and Islands Branch SSP; he suggested that it had been “mass delusion” which had caused 11 fellow EC members to recollect Tommy admitting the Cupids visits.

The media reported Tommy’s 85-minute submission as “spellbinding” and “barnstorming”. One said it was “the best speech of his career”. After 160 minutes of deliberation the jury found seven to four in favour of Tommy and awarded him the maximum damages of £200,000. The author speculates, soundly in my view, as to whether the jury actually believed Tommy or just did not want him to lose at the hands of the hated *News of the World*.

Having won an outstanding victory (and pulled off what was effectively a massive con), perhaps he would then try to repair the damage done to the party he had previously given so much to? Not at all. Instead he negotiates an exclusive deal with *NOTW*’s main rival, the *Daily Record*, for £20,000 plus expenses. His story is serialised day by day for a week. Gregor Gall comments that Tommy seemed to forget the relish the paper would have “in printing stories which helped further undermine the SSP” (p186). In the process he continues to attack the SSP EC as scabs, perjurers and collaborators with the enemy. This nailed any hope of ever reconciling the organisational division.

Worse, having being so accused, those reluctant witnesses for the *NOTW* now had a vested interest in clearing *their* names and reputations and went onto the counteroffensive. Barbara Scott, the EC’s minute-taker, hands over to Lothian and Borders police her hand-written original minutes of the November 2004 meeting. This sets in chain a perjury enquiry and the *NOTW*, which now also had access to George McNeilage’s video recording of Tommy admitting to his attendance at sex parties, smells revenge. The whole mess is thrown back into the public arena. Tommy was charged with perjury on December 16 2007.

He had by then set up a new political grouping, Solidarity. It too was based on no more than the desire to turn an elaborate lie into the truth: Tommy is an honest advocate of principle, while the SSP is full of traitors and grasses. Solidarity’s reaction was that this was all “a colossal vendetta by the Rupert

Murdoch empire ... which is rooted in [Tommy’s] role of leader of the anti-poll tax movement”. His hope was that only he of the six SSP MSPs would be returned to the Scottish parliament following the scandal and split. Thus he and Solidarity would now be able to claim the SSP’s former mantle and start to retake its ground. In reality that election night in 2007 saw all vestiges of radical socialist presence wiped out. The *combined* SSP-Solidarity vote only achieved a third of what the SSP had polled in 2003. But Tommy claimed the vote had not been affected by either the court case or the split.

When in November 2009 Tommy stands for the Glasgow North Westminster by-election, he is fifth, beaten even by the British National Party - the least ‘Scottish’ and least ‘socialist’ party standing - and he loses his deposit. His vote in the June 2009 European election, where he runs on the No2EU ticket, is worse - he does not hit 1%. Later calls for both Solidarity and SSP to cooperate within a Scottish version of the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition were always going to fall on deaf ears, given the bad blood.

The perjury case begins at the end of 2010. After six hours of deliberation on December 23 the jury found Tommy guilty of wilfully and knowingly making false statements under oath. It judged him to be the MSP in the *News of the World* story of October 2004, that he had visited Cupids, had admitted this to the SSP EC and had had sexual relations with Katrine Trolle - another *NOTW* allegation he had denied. The split decision of eight against six shows he nearly - just nearly - pulled it off again, one might say *regardless* of the evidence (the author calls his case “thin and threadbare”).

Despite the verdict Tommy acknowledged nothing, admitted nothing. He remained defiant, claiming that his downfall was related to the News International phone-hacking scandal in some unspecified way.

## Moralising

The book is minutely researched and, given its scope, decidedly easy to read and follow. However, if I have any criticism it would be of the chapter on Tommy’s alleged sexual predilection (beginning roughly on p264). From a discussion of facts and real events, suddenly we are catapulted into *a priori* reasoning based upon highly dubious value judgments about what is and what is not acceptable sexual morality.

I should clarify perhaps that I am *not* talking here of the criticism of Tommy’s disastrous sex club visits and semi-public orgies, nor his absurd decision to turn reality on its head by denying them. These are disastrous from a *political* point of view, given his position in the movement. No, those criticisms are well made and I would agree with them.

Rather this chapter goes beyond political considerations. It contains massively patronising assumptions about the ability of “young women” - or rather their *inability* - to decide for themselves whether they engage in sexual activity and with whom. Consent is not actual consent because of Tommy’s apparent “authority” and “power” over them. Tommy is asked by one of the comrades after a one-night stand with a young (consensual) member, “What are your expectations here?” Eh? Tommy might well have answered, ‘What the fuck has that got to do with you?’ and he would have been right. The idea that a brief sexual encounter requires some ongoing commitment or ‘meaningful relationship’ is just so much bourgeois moralist shite.

Similarly the use of the prefix “vulnerable” before “women” at once renders the woman childlike: a

victim, unable to actually know what she is actually consenting to. What is it that makes her “vulnerable”? It seems simply her youth - there is no need for any evidence. In other words, a social workers’ charter to interfere in everyone’s lives on the basis of their own, very narrow judgmental yardstick. “Vulnerable” applies to anyone doing something our betters think they should not do.

SSP Glasgow organiser Richie Venton is given reign to ‘out’ Tommy’s sexual practices and offer a psychological analysis of the man with no authority other than this is what *he* thinks: that is, it is nothing more than his own (probably very jealous, hypocritical and moralising) opinion. This then becomes a springboard for a whole construct of historical patterns and sexual behavioural dysfunction - again with nothing more than the *a priori* social-worker reasoning mentioned earlier. Tommy’s assertion that “sex was a form of recreation” is quoted as some huge admission of guilt. It is a quote I suspect most of us would have subscribed to in happier moments of our lives - and why not? Many of Tommy’s sexual exploits detailed in the chapter on the subject could be those of almost any young working class lad.

Behind this reasoning is the sort of rationale which takes as its starting point that heterosexuality is basically a ‘bloke thing’, that it is essentially exploitative by its very nature. The reactionary bourgeois feminist notion that men are the enemy and heterosex is something women are subjected to. Men flaunting their sexuality in the way Tommy had ought never under these criteria to be accepted, as would, say, homosexual men behaving in the same way. This chapter is by far the weakest in the whole book and represents a sharp diversion from the rest of the exposition; it would have been far stronger without it. But I mention that very much as an irritating aside which does not in any way characterise the book as a whole.

## Contribution

Tommy’s contribution to the development of a new wave of radical socialist organisation and aspiration in Scotland is beyond question. He was a *somebody* in the fight for socialism; his work on the streets, on the picket line and in organising a mass fightback was invaluable. He took parliament seriously and was a highly effective parliamentarian. He was also a champion organiser and party-builder, especially between 1999 and 2003.

What makes this whole story a tragedy is that all of this was brought to a crashing end by Tommy’s own catastrophic errors of judgment - one has to ask if his grip on reality slipped to the point where he no longer knew fact from fiction. Tommy’s impact on the working class struggle is called into question by the extent to which we think his latter failings destroyed his early positive contribution - a question often asked in relation to Arthur Scargill (and indeed, on a rather grander scale, in relation to the Soviet Union). Has the damage done during their degeneration made the overall situation for our class worse now than it would have been without them? Such is pure speculation and history cannot be wound back and replayed.

Tommy Sheridan gambled away his most precious achievements - his name, his credibility, the trust and respect of large swathes of the Scottish working class. The crazy thing is that none of the subsequent loss was due actually to his sexual behaviour: it was all down to the very public elaboration of a huge lie. He was jailed not for being a red or because of his sexual appetite, but for being a liar and a fabricator; in the court of public opinion he was convicted of being a hypocrite.

What sparked his bizarre road to destruction? One can only conclude it was his vanity and love of power and the limelight, and a fear of being confronted with a reality of himself which did not fit the carefully manufactured public image that he - and the SSP leadership - had worked so long to create. Tommy is still a highly public figure and still wishes to make a contribution, it seems. But one feels that without a totally public and honest, critical assessment of past mistakes, facing up to the disastrous road of falsehood and distortion he embarked upon in order to save his political skin, that contribution will be permanently crippled. It is in recognition of the need to assess the past in order to move forward that the old communist principle of *self-criticism* still holds good.

But the evidence seems to suggest that, rather than confront the past and come clean in order to make an honest reassessment of his life and move forward, he still persists with the lie. In the wake of the *NOTW* scandal Tommy’s phone was found to have been hacked too. Undoubtedly this was more to do with the racket to expose celebs’ private sexual lives in order to sell newspapers than a political conspiracy to frame a socialist activist. That the *NOTW* hated Tommy’s politics is beyond doubt; that this made any difference whatever to the unrolling of events is, however, highly unlikely. It was Tommy’s refusal to listen to the sound advice of comrades and friends which was the cause of his downfall, not any actions by the *NOTW* or sections of the state out to get him. That Tommy’s supporters and he himself have clutched at this straw of new evidence against the *NOTW* is proof that they still do not get it and as such will be unable to move on. Prospects for re-uniting the two SSP and Solidarity factions are nil, but frankly even if they come back together it is now too late to regain the SSP’s earlier reputation and standing in the class. Both are now like deflated balloons, abandoned after a wedding from which the guests have all departed.

There are sadly other comparisons one could draw with this case - not only Scargill, but Derek Hutton comes to mind - where there has been a tendency by a shrinking band of followers to say ‘My leader, right or wrong’ and to forgive or excuse even the biggest deviation from socialist practice and honesty in some misguided ‘loyalty’ that conflates the leader with the cause. There is a sound anarchist slogan, ‘Too many chiefs, not enough anarchists’ - in fact in the case of the SSP and SML mass involvement, mass leadership and mass democracy were not practised. A small, tightly knit cabal of individuals practically ran the whole show, with Tommy increasingly at its centre. Tommy became the basket in which the SSP put all its political eggs and its total reputation.

That he was aware of his crucial strategic position within the organisation and the class at large in Scotland, yet still behaved in a way which would lay them wide open to devastating attack marks crass irresponsibility. That he compounded all of this by playing a huge game of poker with nothing but bluff and blather, knowing the entire SSP survival depended on it, and against the universal advice of his comrades, throws into doubt his values, certainly his judgment. But the SSP itself, had it been built as a revolutionary organisation, would have recognised this and taken measures early on to stop it happening.

The left and labour movement has to learn the lesson brought at such cost by Tommy Sheridan’s actions - not least to stop defending the politically irresponsible actions of our leaders ●

**David Douglass**



**ECONOMY**

# Planless G8 leaders face abyss

Angela Merkel and the European Central Bank seem determined to resist calls for Eurobonds and a 'Marshall Plan'-style stimulus package, says **Eddie Ford**

**W**ith Greek voters decisively rejecting austerity and 'fiscal consolidation' in the May 6 parliamentary elections and set to do so again on June 17, the crisis in the euro zone is bound to escalate - whichever party manages to come first in that country or whatever government finally emerges. A Greek exit from the euro/European Union, which may be only months away, could be messy. Contagion could spread to Portugal, Spain and - most dreaded of all - Italy, the euro zone's third largest economy.

After all, Spain has given us an intimation of the future in recent weeks - having a banking system riddled from top to bottom with toxic debt generated by the dramatic, though eminently foreseeable, collapse of the housing bubble in 2009. On May 17 Moody's rating agency downgraded 16 Spanish banks, not to mention four regions and Santander's UK arm. The same day the Spanish newspaper *El Mundo* reported that over €1 billion had been withdrawn from Bankia, the country's fourth largest bank, since it was partly nationalised on May 9.

Naturally, this sparked a panic amongst both investors and ordinary savers about a bank run and at one point during the day the bank's shares plummeted by almost 30% - the abyss beckoned. Terrified, Bankia's chairman issued a hasty statement to the Madrid stock exchange claiming that clients could be "absolutely calm" about the security of the savings they have deposited. Spain's economy minister, Fernando Jiménez Latorre, also declared that the bank was "not suffering" from a massive outflow of deposits. Do not panic. We are in control. There is no bank run, do you hear?

Bankia and the Spanish government just about survived the day, which can be a very long time when you are in the middle of a catastrophic economic/fiscal crisis. But the real fear, of course, is that a Greek ejection from the euro would lead to bank runs all across Europe - including France, which is heavily exposed to Greek debt. And in turn UK banks, for example, are exposed to French debt. Great fleas have little fleas upon their backs ...

Interestingly, the Greece paper *Kathimerini* carried a relatively lengthy article on May 23 arguing - quite cogently - that an exit from the euro would need to be squeezed into a 46-hour window; that being roughly the amount of time the country's leaders would have to 'organise' or 'control' any departure from the single currency while global markets are largely closed from the end of trading in New York on a Friday to Monday's market opening in Wellington, New Zealand. Hence we read that during this hypothetical weekend - though watch this space closely - Greece would need to freeze bank accounts, put troops along the borders to prevent a capital flight and start stamping existing euros to work as a new currency whilst drachma notes are being printed and then reintroduced. Of course, Greece's banks could well be shut down for several more days after that. Now, how do you think the markets would react to that?

Given these circumstances, therefore, you do not need a particularly lurid imagination to envisage the effective collapse of the entire euro project. Eurogeddon. Nor necessarily have to be a fantasist to think that a near automatic corollary



**Mutual destruction**

of such a scenario would be a series of worldwide bank runs, failed states - this time in Europe and not Africa - and a global slump/depression potentially more devastating than the 1930s. The United States, for all its mighty dollar and even mightier military, would not be immune from such an economic tsunami and would inevitably get dragged down into the mire. Not even China would be able to come to the rescue of capitalism - a truly deluded notion.

## Banal

With storm clouds gathering over Europe, world leaders congregated at picturesque Camp David for the G8 summit on May 18-19. The EU was represented by the presidents of the European Commission and the European Council, respectively José Manuel Barroso and Herman Van Rompuy.

So what was agreed? A radical plan of action to avert disaster engulfing an already recession-hit Europe? Forget it. Rather, they essentially agreed to do *nothing* but just kick the euro can a little bit further down the road, as if June 17 was years away or Spain's creaking banking system will magically revive itself in a Harry Potter moment. The G8's profound inaction is in many ways a near perfect summation of the capitalist ruling class in this period - no ideas, no strategy.

True, the summit has been widely touted as a "victory" for Barack Obama and the new French president, François Hollande - the proponents of fiscal stimulus, as opposed, or so the story goes, to the unbending advocates of austerity like Angela Merkel and her allies in the European Central Bank and the Brussels euro-bureaucracy. Thus we are supposed to take comfort from the assertion made in the final communiqué that "our imperative is to promote growth and jobs" and "welcome the ongoing discussion in Europe on how to generate growth". Presumably, we are also supposed to be reassured by the G8 leaders' little homily about how important it is to "boost confidence" and "nurture recovery" within a "sustainable, credible and non-inflationary macroeconomic framework". Hollande in a separate statement stressed the need to pursue "two goals simultaneously" - ie, "budgetary solvency and maximum growth". A splendid aspiration, no doubt.

But where are the *concrete* details and proposals to stimulate growth?

Where *exactly* are the pounds, euros and dollars to come from in order to finance this Obama-Hollande vision - if indeed it is deserving of such a description. Nowhere to be found, no matter what language you read it in. Instead we have to make do with the stunningly banal observation that the "right measures are not the same for each of us" - a triumph of diplomatic fudge, producing a formula intended to please everyone but in reality pleasing nobody. Ditto for the Panglossian remark about how the global economy "shows signs of promise", even if "significant headwinds persist". The more expert decoders of international diplomatic-speak ('summitese') amongst our readers would, of course, note the distinctly Merkelesque-sounding commitment in the final communiqué to "maintaining a firm commitment to implement fiscal consolidation to be assessed on a structural basis". No deviation from austerity and the *Fiskalpakt*, in other words.

More critically still, what about Greece? Only the manufacturers of rose-tinted glasses would be consoled by the G8's honeyed words to the effect that "we affirm our interest in Greece remaining in the euro zone while respecting its commitments". Meaning that the Greek government, irrespective of its political composition or programme post-June 17, must stick to the utterly onerous terms and conditions of the bailout imposed by the EC, ECB and International Monetary Fund troika. "Commitments", that is, that the Greek masses regard with increasing contempt - as they do all those who attempt to enforce austerity upon them, bringing nothing but misery and destitution.

Someone like David Cameron, for instance. Speaking at the Nato summit in Chicago on May 20, he delivered an ultimatum to the Greek people - accept austerity or leave the euro zone; although hypocritically he remarked that "it's not for me to say what Greek parties should and shouldn't stand on and how the Greek elections should work". And despite the fact that the majority of Greek people have no isolationist desire to see the return of the drachma or pull out of the EU. However, Cameron was insistent that the "choice" Greece faces - do you prefer the fire or the sword? - is between, on the one hand, "maintaining its commitments and maintaining itself in the euro zone" and, on the other, "deciding that is not the path it wants to take". This,

he declared, is a "moment of clarity". Sentiments he repeated to parliament on May 23: that the second election must be treated as a referendum on Greece's future in the euro zone. So vote accordingly on June 17.

On the same day the Bundesbank, in line with Cameron's views, issued a stern statement warning Greece that it would be putting any future financial aid at risk if it elected the 'wrong' government. A "significant dilution of exiting agreements", we hear, "would damage confidence in all euro area agreements and treaties and strongly weaken incentives for national reform". Seeing how the system of euro zone central banks had assumed "considerable risks" by providing Greece with large amounts of liquidity, the ungrateful Greek electorate "should not significantly increase these risks". Clearly the ECB has cast its June 17 vote early.

Meanwhile, establishment voices in Brussels and elsewhere have been trying to convince us that the euro zone has sufficient firewalls in place to protect the currency and prevent contagion if Greece goes down the tube. But they are fooling nobody - probably not even themselves.

## Eurobond wars

Following G8, the European leaders decamped to Brussels on May 23 for a supposedly 'informal' meeting - though more like an emergency summit, in reality. This was heavily billed as a showdown or political war over Eurobonds (collective borrowing/mutualised debt) between Germany and the emerging 'Latin bloc' of France, Italy and Spain. According to Italian prime minister Mario Monti, Hollande's "entry into the game" had changed Europe's political dynamics; he, for one, now had an ally "on the same wave-length". Now let's build the 'resistance', infers the Italian prime minister, to Germany and the fiscal hawks within the ECB and the EU - by forming a "growth pact" as a counterweight to the fiscal compact that seeks to eternalise austerity economics.

In short, Hollande proposes an infrastructure blitz - a sort of new fiscal Marshall Plan - financed by Eurobonds so as to revive economic confidence. He claims to have supporters within the belly of the European Commission beast itself, like José Manuel Barroso. Hollande told reporters after the G8 summit that he would outline his growth proposals at the May 23 meeting: "within this packet of proposals there will be Eurobonds and I will not be alone in proposing them". Apparently, Hollande had "confirmation" of this whilst enjoying bracing walks through the Catocin Mountain Park and so on. In the opinion of the *Financial Times*, the "resurrection" of Eurobonds is the "latest sign" that Hollande's election has "shifted the terms of the euro zone crisis debate" and also "reflects the growing belief among some leaders that instability in Greece necessitates revisiting the crisis procedures to ensure they are sufficient to deal with a Greek euro zone exit" (May 21).

Lending his support to the Hollande-Monti 'agenda', Herman Van Rompuy has appealed to European leaders to come out with and agree "specific steps" to stimulate growth and create jobs across the EU - in sharp contradistinction to the empty, platitudinous statements emanating from Camp David. No more kicking cans down roads; those days are

over - perhaps. Measures outlined so far include boosting the paid-in capital of the European Investment Bank and plans for 'project bonds' - enthusiastically touted by Hollande during his election campaign - which would be underwritten by the EU budget to finance infrastructure.

Another idea prominently put forward by Bruegel, the Brussels-based think tank, would involve mutualising all debt up to 60% of GDP, with any over and above that limit having to be underwritten by the specific country alone. Furthermore, it was expected that the May 23 'summit' would discuss allowing the European Financial Stability Facility/European Stability Mechanism - currently holding a war chest of approximately €700 billion, to take the most generous estimate - to help recapitalise banks *directly* rather than lending to individual countries for them to pass on loans to the respective banks as required. The aim, by some accounts, is to hammer out a coherent set of proposals that can be formally signed at the next summit on June 28-29.

Inevitably, the *core* ideas of the 'Latin bloc' have run into swift and bitter German opposition, adamantly maintaining that it is up to individual member-states to ensure the stability of their banking sectors. For the German political-fiscal establishment it was impermissible for that 'stabilising' function to be allotted to the ECB or, god forbid, the Bundesbank - over our dead bodies. Reiterating Berlin's position, Steffen Kampeter, a top German finance ministry official, pronounced the Hollande scheme for Eurobonds to be the "wrong medicine at the wrong time with the wrong side-effects". Fully endorsing Kampeter's remarks, Germany's representative on the ECB, Jörg Asmussen, reminded Hollande that the fiscal pact "cannot be renegotiated or softened" - just obeyed and implemented.

Adopting an even more inflammatory tone, Thilo Sarrazin, previously a Bundesbank board member and author of a bestseller denouncing Germany's post-war multiculturalist immigration policy, described Eurobonds/stability bonds as a form of "penance" for World War II. Part of the unjust collective punishment of the German nation. Joining the battle too, Austria's finance minister, Maria Fekter - the Germanic bloc? - simply regarded Hollande's growth recipes as "nonsense". She commented: "Growth financed by debt? Those are the recipes from the day before yesterday." No deviation from the course of 'fiscal consolidation' and 'labour reforms' will be tolerated.

The plain fact of the matter is that the Merkel administration is unlikely to yield - or blink - when it comes to either Greece or the fiscal pact, especially after the trouncing the ruling Christian Democratic Union got in the key North Rhine-Westphalia regional elections on May 13. Trying to secure a third term in office, she is fully aware that any notion of Berlin carrying the can for others' debt - particularly those 'lazy' southern Europeans - is a near certain vote loser. Yet to remain on the same hubristic course threatens to bring the euro zone crashing down around the ears of Angela Merkel and co, inside or outside the euro zone ●

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## HOPi

# Iran and Islamophobia

Is there something suspect about the opposition of Hands Off the People of Iran to the Iranian theocracy? **Yassamine Mather** answers some of the allegations

One of the arguments put forward against Hands Off the People of Iran is that our slogan, 'No to the theocracy' (which usually follows 'No to imperialism'), is pandering to Islamophobia, especially at a time when there is a threat of war against Iran. In dismissing such accusations we have to point out one more time that it is not Islamophobic to support the call for separation of state and religion in a country where three decades of Shia governance has left religion's reputation in tatters. There is a difference between being anti-Islamic and being against the rule of the clergy: the left cannot compromise on the basic democratic demand for separation of church and state.

In addition there are major differences between the propaganda used in the current escalation of imperialist threats against Iran and the anti-Islam arguments used in justifying 'the war on terror' and the subsequent Islamophobia. In the aftermath of the attack on the Twin Towers in New York, as the United States went on a mission to spread 'liberal democracy' through conflict, it was necessary to identify an enemy, albeit a largely invisible one, and to a certain extent a very specific form of anti-Islamic propaganda was used: Islam (of a certain type) was 'the other', whose terror had to be defeated. However, even then, the 'war on terror' was not presented as a war against Islam as such, but against a specific enemy.

At its height we did not see the demonisation of Saudi Arabia or the Gulf states who preach and finance Islamic fundamentalism. Although most of the perpetrators of 9/11 suicide attacks were from Saudi Arabia, the air raids and military invasion were directed against Afghanistan. The western 'allies' did not want to mention that the origins of the group claiming responsibility for 9/11, Al Qa'eda, could be traced to the deliberate politicisation of Islamic groups during the cold war by the United States and its allies. Recent history was brushed under the carpet, with media analysts and military experts failing to mention that since the 1950s western governments had encouraged, financed and even initiated Islamic groups in the Arab world and beyond in order to undermine and confront secular, nationalist and socialist forces. From Hamas in Palestine to the Taliban in Afghanistan, they were indeed creations of imperialism, with the deliberate aim of weakening revolutionary forces in the region.

So in many ways the 'Islamic' in this 'war on Islamic terrorism' was at best ambiguous and at worst misleading. Of course, in France, where the Arabs are the poor of the *banlieues*, the war was an excuse to attack the underclass, and to a certain extent in the rest of continental Europe, as well as the United Kingdom, a side benefit of the 'war on terror' was to isolate further a section of the immigrant population. In other words, its anti-Islamic character was only stressed when it suited the warmongers. At no time was their anti-Islam aimed at rich Saudis, Kuwaitis or Qataris - even though, for example, the Saudi royals continued to apply its constant state of internal terror in the name of Islamic fundamentalism. According to Alain Badiou, the predicate 'Islamic' in 'Islamic terrorism' has no function



**Ayatollah Khamenei and armed forces tops**

except to give content to the word 'terrorism'.<sup>1</sup>

One could argue that, far from being a war against Islam, the 'war on Islamic terrorism' was used to incriminate, victimise and therefore control a certain section of dark-skinned migrants. Here I am not advocating indifference to the plight of Muslim migrants who bore the brunt of the attacks in response to 9/11. However, this fictitious war on Islam was not a war against a Muslim nation (such a thing does not exist) and in forming alliances to oppose it the left should have been honest about the reactionary nature of Al Qa'eda and the Taliban, and less eager to excuse Islamic fundamentalism.

Having said that, as far as the threat of war against Iran is concerned, the issue of 'war against Islamic terrorism' is not relevant. No-one in authority in the US or Europe has used the term for the last few years and military action against Iran is proposed not on the basis of the regime's Islamic fundamentalism as such, but because of its alleged intention to acquire nuclear weapons. In fact vilification of the country's civilian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, is far more prevalent than that of senior clerics. The occasional attempts by US military officials to link the Iranian regime with Al Qa'eda and the Taliban backfired. It is now known that in fact Iran arrested bin Laden's relatives in the early 2000s.<sup>2</sup>

## Tehran regime

However, the Islamic nature of the Iranian *theocratic* regime cannot be ignored. It has specific characteristics that differentiate it from other capitalist regimes in the developing world and these pose specific dangers for ordinary Iranians at a time of war and sanctions.

1. If it ever came to a real military confrontation with the United States and its allies, the main weakness of the Iranian state is the fact that it currently does not enjoy the support

of the majority of its own population. The dire economic conditions, polarisation between the rich and the poor, and political repression are characteristics of any 'third world' dictatorship. However, what distinguishes the Islamic regime is the fact that the state's interference in the private lives of its citizens has made it deeply unpopular amongst the majority of the population, notably the youth as well as women. This makes the regime more vulnerable to the combined policy of severe sanctions and regime change from above.

2. The reliance of the state on the mobilisation of the lumpenproletariat and reactionary petty bourgeoisie against the working class as part of a Nazi-style 'rent a crowd'; the way it tolerates multi-billion-dollar corruption from within its own ranks, while punishing petty crime using severe measures, ranging from long-term imprisonment to amputation: these are specific features of a semi-fascistic state and cannot be brushed aside just because they are justified in religious terms.

Another argument put forward by mainly Iranian opponents of Hopi's critique of the religious characteristics of the Islamic state is that there is widespread (anti-Arab) racism among Iranians and in effect anti-Islamic propaganda panders to this Iranian form of ultra-nationalism.

First of all, it should be pointed out that this particular form of racism/anti-Arab nationalism is predominant as much amongst Shia clerics as it is amongst secular Iranians. Many Iranians equate national pride with opposition to the Arab invasion of Iran and the collapse of the Sassanid empire in the 7th century. Although the conquerors, especially the Umayyad, were keen to stress the primacy of Arabs among Muslims, the Iranians gradually managed to impart their influence: the Sassanid coinage system and many Sassanid administrative practices, including the administration of taxes, finance,

political office and Iranian court ceremonial practices, were adopted in the new Islamic territories. However, this did not diminish the resentment over the loss of the empire. That is why Iranians played an important part in founding a particular version of Islam - Shi'ism - during a dispute over the caliphate.

In fact many Shia practices, ceremonies and *hadith* (a collection of traditions and sayings of the prophet Mohammed)<sup>3</sup> have their origins in Persia's Zoroastrian religion. So from its inception the Shia religion was itself anti-Arab. Which means it is a bit rich to accuse opponents of Iran's Shia state of feeding a racist form of Islamophobia - especially when it comes from sections of the British left who in their ignorant enthusiasm for a monolithic Islamic rebellion against imperialism, pay no attention to Islamic history.

## No fatwas

The Iranian radical left and presumably the Iranians in Hopi are also accused of being insensitive to their fellow countrymen's Islamic beliefs. In recent weeks this has expressed itself in debates about an Iranian rapper who has become the 'Salman Rushdie of music' after clerics in the Islamic republic issued fatwas calling him an apostate. Shahin Najafi, a Germany-based Iranian, released a song with contained an unflattering reference to the 10th of the 12 Shia imams. Elements of the British left seem to share the outrage of the mullahs.

The first point to make is that the Iranian left has very good reasons for despising Islamic fatwas: thousands of Iranian communists and socialists were also called apostates and were subsequently massacred by this regime. Others on the left faced summary executions in Kurdistan, in Turkman Sahra, in Balochistan. Those of us who have no intention of forgetting or forgiving these crimes will obviously empathise with Shahin Najafi and vehemently oppose the pronouncement of an arbitrary death sentence. We see the defence of his right to use any lyrics he chooses as an integral part of our daily struggle for democracy. We have a duty to express outrage at a time when a religious website running on the regime-controlled domain, Shia-Online.ir, has offered a \$100,000 (£62,000) reward to anyone who kills Najafi.

It is very simple: many of us identify with Najafi, because we have also been called 'apostate' for

our Marxist beliefs, because we have seen our comrades executed for 'waging war on god' and because we know that, according to certain *hadith*, non-believers are considered to be 'no better than animals'. As for insulting our fellow countrymen's Islamic beliefs, Iran's Shia clerics have done so much damage, with their money-grabbing economics, endemic corruption and blatant involvement in every criminal activity one can imagine from drug smuggling to child prostitution, that no Islamophobe can ever match their record.

Having said that, Iranian political groups and individuals in Hopi have always maintained their distance from the more loony sections of the Iranian left, such as those members of the HKK fragment of the former Worker-communist Party, who streaked in the Berlin conference of 2001<sup>4</sup> or the more recent compilers of a nude calendar put together by a faction of the HKK split.<sup>5</sup> We consider such activities banal, often leading to the wrong type of publicity. There can be no doubt that the beneficiaries of the HKK's 'action' at the 'reformist' Berlin conference of 2001 were the very people our HKK streakers were trying to expose.

Those concerned with Iran's future and imperialist plans to break up the territory currently within Iranian borders should remember the damage caused by a Persian-dominated Shia theocracy. Repression of minorities, underdevelopment in regions inhabited by Balochis, Kurds, Arabs and Turkmans has caused resentment and anger, fuelling separatist tendencies in the regions inhabited by these national/religious minorities.

The way to combat imperialism's cynical plans for regime change is to confront the Persian nationalism of the religious state in Tehran rather than its leftwing opponents ●

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## Notes

1. A Badiou, 'Philosophy and the "war against terrorism"' *Infinite thought* London 2005.
2. See 'Osama bin Laden documents show tension with Iran': [www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/03/osama-bin-laden-documents\\_n\\_1474986.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/03/osama-bin-laden-documents_n_1474986.html).
3. *Hadith* are regarded by traditional Islamists as important tools for understanding the *Quran*, in matters of jurisprudence. *Hadith* were collected during the 8th and 9th centuries and are referred to in matters of Islamic law and history to this day.
4. For more information see [http://www.iran-press-service.com/articles/iran\\_berlin\\_conf\\_8400.htm](http://www.iran-press-service.com/articles/iran_berlin_conf_8400.htm).
5. [www.iranian.com/main/2012/mar/nude-revolutionaries-calendar](http://www.iranian.com/main/2012/mar/nude-revolutionaries-calendar).

## Powerful weapon



The updated *Draft programme* of the CPGB was agreed at a special conference in January 2011. Here we present our political strategy, overall goals and organisational principles in six logical, connected sections, and show in no uncertain terms why a Communist Party is the most powerful weapon available to the working class. Our draft rules are also included.

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## THE LEFT

# End the cycle of splits

If the left is to build a serious political organisation it will have to facilitate internal dissent, writes **Mike Macnair**. And that will require both majorities and minorities to act responsibly

The CPGB has just experienced a slow-motion 'split', in the form of three resignations in succession by comrades who were recruited to CPGB in Manchester. In essence, the comrades share the view that the project of the Anti-Capitalist Initiative launched by the three fragments of Workers Power (WP itself, Permanent Revolution, and the new and as yet nameless youth split from WP) is more promising than the CPGB's project.

It has been difficult for CPGB comrades to make out exactly what this split is about. The comrades who have departed did not form an organised faction or platform, and did not before they departed make any positive proposals about what the CPGB should do, though comrade Chris Strafford has over the last few years offered a variety of (inconsistent) negative criticisms of the slogans put forward by the CPGB in several elections and of the CPGB majority's strategic, and tactical, approaches to the Labour Party. The comrades who have left us have complained that it is difficult for young and inexperienced comrades to argue and put forward proposals against the older and more experienced comrades in the majority; and that this explains both their failure to propose a clear alternative course, and their decision to leave.

Indeed, comrades have said informally that they will and do continue to defend in the ACI the politics of the CPGB's *Draft programme*. Acceptance of the *Draft programme* as the basis of common action is a requirement of CPGB membership (together with paying dues, and work in a CPGB organisation). This makes the split appear on its face completely non-political.

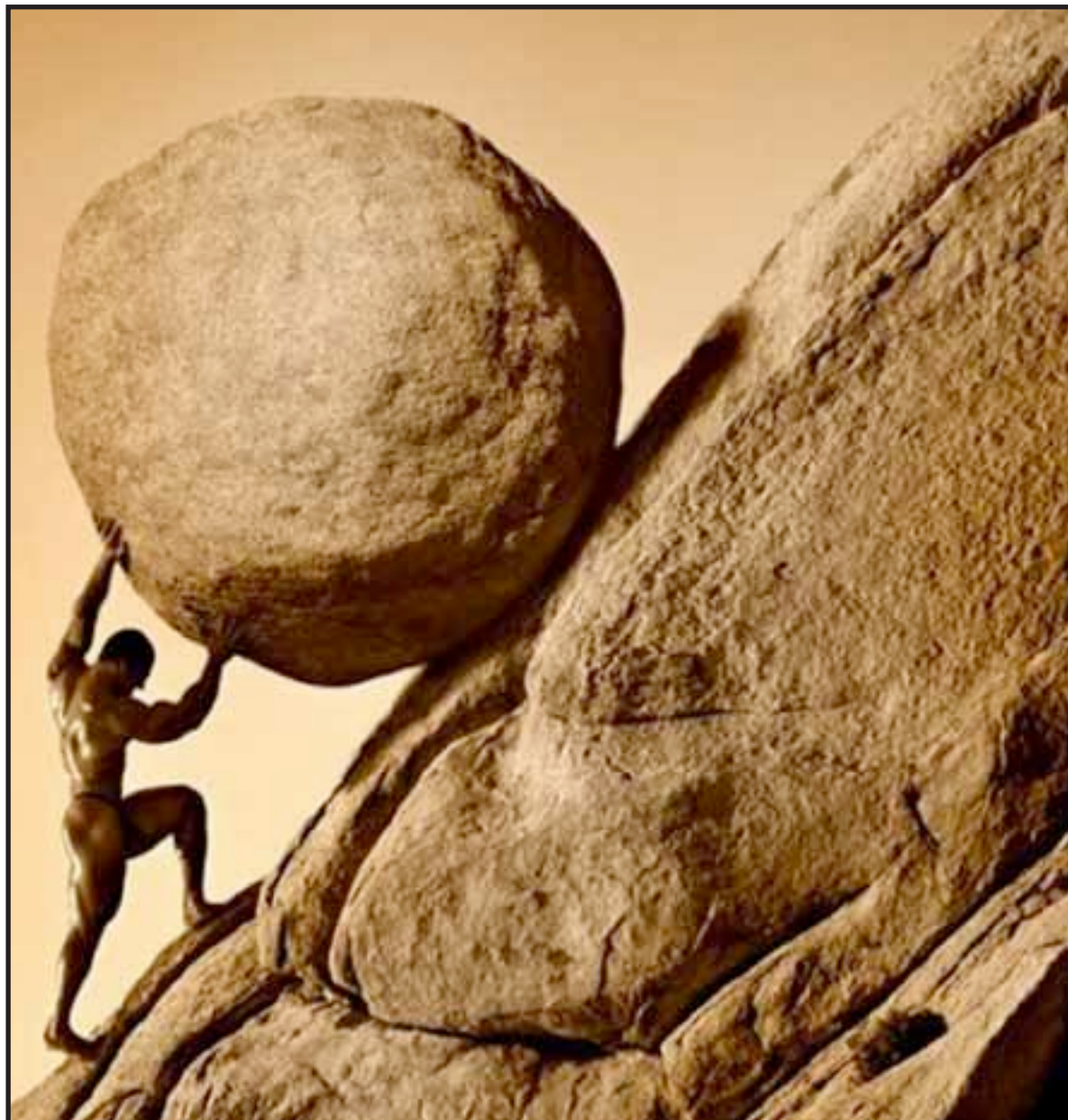
This article is my personal response to this problem. It is not an agreed CPGB (or Provisional Central Committee) response, but merely my own view. I largely put on one side the debate over the merits of the ACI, which other comrades have addressed.

I simply do not believe in the inability of young and inexperienced comrades to argue against older or more experienced comrades or develop their own positive positions. If they are confident in their own ideas, very young and inexperienced people *can* stand up (or write) and contradict the old-timers. I have plenty of experience of this from the old International Marxist Group and International Socialist Group. By this I do not mean to refer to my own involvement in oppositional groupings (at any date after 1976); I mean the numerous other relatively new comrades who came up with one or another sort of oppositional idea and argued it with more or less success.

In my view the split is about a political difference, and an extremely fundamental political difference. The unclarity of the comrades' criticisms of the CPGB, and their failure to fight for an alternative line before they left, are in fact expressions of this political difference. The difference is about the core of the problems of the British far left.

## Unity in diversity

It is only possible to have a collective political organisation - as opposed to a series of top-down sects and a gravel of sects of one member ('independents') - if we have open disagreement within the organisation.



**Labour of Sisyphus: the left never seems to learn**

Open political disagreement within the organisation depends on two elements: first, that majorities (or leaderships) do not kick the minorities or individual dissenters out, either for expressing disagreement or on factitious disciplinary charges of one sort or another; and, second, and equally important, that minorities do not walk out in search of fresh fields and pastures new. The latter is what the comrades who have recently resigned have done.

Of course, the presence of open disagreement within a common organisation is not a guarantee that splits will not occur. The problem is the inverse: the *absence* of open disagreement is a guarantee that splits *will* occur.

The comrades *may* have walked out of the CPGB due to their failure to understand this issue. But if so it is not because the CPGB has been keeping quiet about the two sides of the issue or not attempting to educate new comrades about it. On the contrary, we go on and on about it. We have quite recently publicly condemned both the Rees-German faction<sup>1</sup> and Chris Bamberg<sup>2</sup> for effectively walking out of the Socialist Workers Party (under severe provocation, in contrast to the situation of the comrades who have resigned from the CPGB), even while we condemned the SWP majority for their anti-democratic practice. On a larger scale we have condemned the comrades of the Socialist Party in England and Wales who walked out of Unison in the (ludicrous) belief that Unite was a more democratic union, or the slightly less ludicrous

belief that the Unite bureaucracy would not personally persecute them (in reality because, Unite being *less* democratic than Unison, trivial groups of Trots do not in any way threaten the Unite bureaucracy).<sup>3</sup> Our very similar criticisms of Simon Hardy and his co-thinkers for walking out of Workers Power may have played a role in comrades' decisions to resign themselves.<sup>4</sup>

Why isn't the simple point that to have a serious organisation we are going to have to facilitate internal dissent, and that this requires both majorities and minorities to act responsibly, utterly obvious to the British far left? After all, it is obvious to a substantial part of the continental far left.

## Groundhog Day

The answer, I think, is that the British far left as a whole is caught in a self-reinforcing 'Groundhog Day' paradigm, which leads us (the far left as a whole) to do the same thing over and over again with decreasing effect. This is reflected in the fact that split groupings repeatedly *promise* more democratic functioning and a better approach to unity; but, somehow, never seem able to deliver. The paradigm involves three elements which reinforce each other.

The first is a *practice* in which party activity means mainly 'activism': ie, running round from one agitational initiative to the next. The effect of this 'agitationism' is to devalue *both* the long-term base-level activity of building trade unions, cooperatives, workers' education initiatives and

so on, *and* the production of party propaganda and party education. It also has the effect, central to our present concerns, that discussing internal disagreements appears as a waste of time, and as not doing 'activism', not 'getting out there'. This perception, in turn, leads to both majorities chucking people out and minorities walking out - in both cases in order to 'get on with the job' or 'stop wasting time'.

The second element is an *ideology* of this practice, which consists of the concept of the 'party of a new type' or 'revolutionary party' and Lukácsian, and similar, critiques of 'Second International Marxism' (which is actually also a critique of pre-1918 Bolshevism, including the Bolsheviks' intense electoral activity during 1917).<sup>5</sup> The ideology may take both more or less explicit, and more or less sectarian, forms. Cliff's *Lenin* is one example.<sup>6</sup> The Spartacists' Joseph Seymour's *Lenin and the vanguard party* is another; astonishingly for an ostensible Trotskyist, Seymour draws arguments from those of Stalin and his co-thinkers against the Trotskyists in the 1920s, and thus demonstrates on the face of the text its ideological-apologetic character.<sup>7</sup> The Workers Power (majority) argument that a 'fighting propaganda group' must be more monolithic than a mass party is a third.<sup>8</sup>

The third element is a *concept of revolution* which underlies both the practice and the ideology. According to this concept, the basic difference between 'revolutionary politics' and reformism is the difference between,

on the one hand, strikes and street demonstrations (and ultimately barricades and fighting the police), identified as 'revolutionary politics' - Cliff's 'moderate demands and militant action' - and, on the other hand, 'passive propaganda', electoral and parliamentary activity, identified as 'reformist'. In this conception, as long as the way of 'mass action' is pursued, our side will come up against the state, and therefore be driven *automatically* to radicalise and pose a counter-power.

This concept of revolution is in substance left-economist, or 'Luxemburgist' in a negative sense. That is, it is in (unadmitted) continuity with the ideas of the semi-syndicalist left wing of the Second International before 1914, and of the left wing of *Iskra's* 'economist' opponents in 1900-02, and those of Trotsky in *Our political tasks* (which he later disavowed) in 1904.<sup>9</sup>

It is possible within the framework of this paradigm to be substantially *more* democratic than the SWP: as, for example, is the case with the Mandelites. But the drag back to the pattern of not wanting to 'waste time' on propaganda, education and internal discussion is persistent. The Mandelite version bases unity on common tactics, and makes unity both internally and externally depend on backstairs diplomacy between groups within the permanent leadership. The problems of this approach are visible in the oscillations of the International Socialist Group/Socialist Resistance in Respect between near silence on political differences, followed by an abrupt split; and on a larger scale in the very similar behaviour of the *Sinistra Critica* group in the Italian Rifondazione Comunista. Socialist Resistance's split from Respect over the Scottish issue was merely silly, while *Sinistra Critica's* split from Rifondazione concerned a real issue of principle: Italian troops in Afghanistan. But in both cases the prior history of diplomatic blocs was an obstacle to broader understanding.

## CPGB

Against this combination the CPGB remains, regrettably, a voice crying in the wilderness; though it has to be said that the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain and SPEW are substantially *less* poisoned by the paradigm than the SWP and its offshoots (WP, etc) and the sad remnant of the British Mandelites in Socialist Resistance. We have been persistently arguing against all three elements.

Our practical priorities and choices - like the *Weekly Worker* and its character, like producing a *Draft programme* and writing our *Theses on the Labour Party*, like calling for critical votes for various dodgy semi-left politicians, and so on - reflect at root a fundamentally different conception of the revolution and the party. (Our ability to actually *practise* the alternative, beyond the character of the paper, is gravely limited by our very small forces.)

In the first place, proletarian revolution involves not only mass actions coming up against the state, but also and utterly indispensably the masses coming to imagine the possibility of a real alternative to the existing order.

Secondly, it follows that the function of a workers' independent *political party*, as distinct from trade



unions and other workers’ organisations, is *not* to ‘coordinate the struggles’ and ‘push them forward’ towards the general strike. Rather, it is to spread the idea that ‘another world is possible’ by concretising it as far as possible in propaganda, electoral manifestos and selected forms of agitational campaigning which promote socialism, as opposed to merely opposing this or that effect of capitalism. And, at the same time, the political party’s job is to back up the struggles, workers’ organisations and so on by delegitimising the state order through which the capitalist class rules - exposing its corrupt and anti-democratic character - and proposing another state order in which the working class rules.

Hence electoral and parliamentary interventions, together with our own workers’ press and media, *really matter*. Hence, also, clarity on political democracy, both in and against the state, and in the workers’ movement, *really matter* and are not subordinate to the question of mobilising forces for strikes, street actions, etc.

Thirdly, if the job of the left really was to promote ‘moderate demands but militant action’, then, on the one hand, the dispersal of our forces would be unfortunate, but not disastrous: arguing for more head-banging militancy is something every individual in the movement can do without organisation. On the other hand, the obvious basis of unity would be to give up on fancy programmes, etc, and agree to unite on the basis of a little motherhood and apple pie - plus the promotion of more head-banging militancy. This is the policy of the ACI.

But if the jobs of a left *political party* are to pose and concretise the idea that ‘another world is possible’, and to back up the mass movement by delegitimising the state order, the dispersal of our forces is a complete disaster. We cannot expect either Labour, deeply committed to the ‘British national interest’ and the constitutional order, or trade union leaders who are left-Labourites in politics, to do these jobs for us. We need effective, independent workers’ media, and organised resources to support and distribute them, and electoral interventions, on the basis of clear (even if limited) programmatic commitments to the independent interests of the working class. Hence we *need* effective far-left unity on the basis of the open defence of working class political independence, radical democracy and proletarian internationalism.

It follows from this that the question of the unity of the existing organised left *really matters*. And it follows in turn that both, on the one hand, ideologically defending bureaucratic-centralist forms (the WP majority, the Spartacists and International Bolshevik Tendency) and kicking dissidents out (SWP), and, on the other hand, walking out of organisations, however small they may be, without a serious fight, *are actual crimes against the working class*.

## Programme

The possible - not guaranteed - basis of a unitary party is a political programme. On this point Workers Power is right against its splitters. But its problem is a failure to understand that a programme for this purpose has to be primarily a statement of *aims* or *goals*, with only a limited element of strategic orientation, *not* an elaboration of precise theory or tactics.

From Trotsky’s efforts to save the inheritance of the first four congresses of the Communist International from the Stalinists, the ‘orthodox Trotskyists’ of one sort and another have developed the idea that a political programme has to include points of *theory*, like the ‘permanent revolution’ and the class character of the former Soviet-bloc regimes; and points of *tactics*, like the ‘united front’ and ‘transitional demands’. The orthodox Maoists came to similar results by a different ideological route: the construction of ‘anti-revisionist’ parties. The result is to ‘programmatised’ and make into split issues all sorts of secondary questions.

When comrades react against this false conception of programme and party, it is all too easy for them to slip, as the new WP split and Pham Binh in the United States seem to have done, into the opposite position:

all that matters is a few elementary moral commitments and the commitment to ‘activism’. But on this basis organising independently of the SWP’s, SPEW’s and Counterfire’s fronts is *sectarian*: there is no political justification for yet another front based merely on the commitment to resist - even with ‘anti-capitalism’ added as a brand name.

It is in this context that the CPGB has insisted that the political basis of membership in CPGB, beyond paying dues and active participation in party organisations, is *acceptance of our Draft programme* as the basis for collective action. It is *not agreement with the Draft programme*.

Still less does eligibility for membership require a high level of understanding of the theoretical and historical judgments that inform the *Draft programme* (like the critique of ‘left economism’ discussed above). We endeavour to promote this understanding through our public press; we do not ask comrades to pass exams on it (or on Marxist political economy, as was rumoured, perhaps falsely, of the 1970s Revolutionary Communist Group) in order to join.

This is a right and necessary judgment. If we were to go down the path of demanding more *theoretical* agreement as part of the basis of membership, we would contradict our own aims. It is, however, a part of the context of the current split.

## The resigners

The Manchester comrades were originally attracted to the CPGB because of our democratic internal practice and rejection of the system of competing sects - but without ever grasping that our democratic practice and rejection of the system of sects is inextricably linked to our rejection of the left’s ‘activist’ practice and our rejection of its left-economist concept of revolution. The comrades continued to work and think in the frame of the ‘activist’ practice. Hence (among other things) comrade Trafford’s very limited attendance at CPGB aggregates. Hence also the fact that from quite an early date he began to take political direction from Manchester Permanent Revolution comrades as the basis of criticisms of the line of the PCC and CPGB majority.

But this internal contradiction explains why the comrades have felt unable to actually argue their criticisms and work up an alternative within the framework of the CPGB.

The problem is that the logic of the Manchester comrades’ criticisms was to reject the whole CPGB project. But to argue for turning CPGB into something more like Permanent Revolution would

contradict their own initial reasons for joining the CPGB (it would plainly be merely to create another Trot grouplet). So they could never work up a systematic alternative to the lines of the leadership majority or gain enough confidence to argue for such an alternative.

We have not driven comrades out for disagreeing on the issues discussed here. On the contrary, we have urged comrades to argue, develop and publish in this paper their views. Rather, their disagreement has led *them* to choose to leave us.

The ACI provides an apparent way out of this intolerable contradiction. It appears to escape the Trot-sect model, while preserving the ‘activist’ model. The reality, however, is that it is yet another piece of frontist fakery and will go nowhere. Hopefully, when they actually experience this, the comrades will be led to self-criticism on the question of the left-economist, ‘activist’ model which has led them out of the CPGB ●

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## Notes

1. P Manson, ‘Left Platform throws in the towel’ *Weekly Worker* February 18 2010. See also my own ‘Bureaucratic centralism and ineffectiveness’ February 25 2010.
2. P Manson, ‘Latest irresponsible split from SWP’ *Weekly Worker* April 14 2011.
3. P Manson, ‘Giving up on Unison’ *Weekly Worker* August 4 2011.
4. B Lewis, ‘Another split, another sect’ *Weekly Worker* April 26 2012.
5. D Jenness *Lenin as election campaign manager* (New York 1971); A Rabinowitch *The Bolsheviks come to power* (London 2004), chapter 5, on the importance of local election campaigns in the Bolshevik revival after the repression following the July days.
6. www.marxists.org/archive/cliff/works/1975/lenin1.
7. www.bolshevik.org/Pamphlets/LeninVanguard/LVP%200.htm.
8. www.fifthinternational.org/content/statement-resignations-british-section-league.
9. On ‘Luxemburgism’, the ‘classic texts’ (which somewhat polemically overstate Luxemburg’s views relative to other aspects of her writing) are *Reform and revolution* and *The mass strike* (both at www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/index.htm); these are the main ‘Luxemburg sources’ for modern left ideas. See also H Weber (ed), A Brossat (trans), K Kautsky, R Luxemburg, A Pannekoek *Socialism: la voie occidentale* (Paris 1983) on the debates of 1911-12. On the contradiction between Luxemburg’s explicit democratic commitments and the bureaucratic-hierarchical-sectarian character of the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania under her and her co-thinkers’ leadership, see R Blobaum *Feliks Dzierzynsky and the SDKPiL* (New York 1984) - a striking early example of the connection between the ‘left’s’ conception of revolution and sectarianism. On left economism see R Larsson *Theories of revolution* (Stockholm 1970), chapter 6; and the rather different take in Lars T Lih *Lenin rediscovered* (Leiden 2006), chapters 4 and 5. Trotsky’s *Our political tasks* is at www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1904/tasks. The disavowal is somewhat indirect, in his explanation of his association with the Mensheviks at this period in *My life* (1930), chapter 12 (www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1930/mylife/ch12.htm), and his repeated assertions in his later writings that Lenin was right as against himself on the party question.

## Fighting fund

# Good week

A donation from comrade PM has unexpectedly given our fighting fund a handsome boost, as we enter the last week of the May campaign. The comrade transferred no less than £250 directly into our account in “appreciation of all the hard work of the editorial team”. And we appreciate your appreciation, comrade.

Added to which, a total of £375 also landed in our account in the form of standing orders - thank you, DO, GD, SK, DT, MM and SP. Then there was DP, who handed over £25 in cash while visiting our office, and PB, who added a fiver to her subscription. That leaves us in the happy position of having got to within £100 of our £1,500 target with a week still to go - our running total stands at £1,405, thanks to the brilliant £655 received over the last seven days.

Just as important are the increased standing orders being taken out in payment for subscriptions to the *Weekly Worker*. In response to the increase in subscription charges from £10 to £12 a quarter, a number of comrades have

decided to up their payments over and above this. This week comrades TB, AN and TH have notified me that they will now be paying £15 a quarter (or £5 a month), while comrade SJ, a new subscriber, is paying a most welcome £12 *per month*.

However, there are still a couple of dozen readers who have yet to return their completed form authorising the increased payment in line with the new rate. Please do so as soon as possible, comrades - don’t forget we are already having to fork out the extra for stamps!

Despite the fact that our online readership edged over the 10,000 mark this week (10,012), nobody made use of our PayPal facility. Still, I can’t complain - £655, after all, represents quite a good week.

**Robbie Rix**

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

# 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

## International trade unions needed

## Vauxhall: defeat for all car workers

Peter Manson reports on a deal that represents an attack on working conditions

**T**rade unionists and car-makers hailed a new deal yesterday to seal a £125 million investment in Vauxhall's car plant on Merseyside and create hundreds of new jobs.

True to form, the 'official communist' *Morning Star*, grovelling as usual before the union bureaucracy, begins in this way its report of the Unite union's disastrous trading of hard-won pay and conditions for jobs - at virtually any price - in a very short piece last week (May 18). Quoting approvingly the satisfaction expressed by both business secretary Vince Cable and Unite 'left' general secretary Len McCluskey, the *Star* report does, however, end with the remark that the news was "bitter-sweet for GM workers internationally". That is because the deal means that the "Opel factory in Bochum, Germany, which has 3,000 workers, is now under threat". Coincidentally (or perhaps not) 3,000 is the projected figure for eventual new jobs at Ellesmere Port in Cheshire.

In fact it is all "bitter" and no "sweet". The union has succumbed to a deal that represents a further attack on all car workers, including at Vauxhall's parent company, the US-based General Motors, and its European operation, Opel. Vauxhall chairman Duncan Aldred said it was a "ground-breaking, historic day" for Ellesmere Port and the UK motor industry. Production of the new Astra model will begin in 2015 and is expected to continue until around 2020.

Aldred crowed about the "creative operating solutions to improve flexibility" - night and weekend work without the extra pay represented by overtime, the ending of the traditional summer closure and the employment of more temporary workers. This "flexibility" - voted for by 94% of the Unite members at Ellesmere Port - will allow the plant to work 24 hours a day for 51 weeks of the year *if necessary*. In other words, if business falls off, the company can get rid of the temporary workers, end the night shift and lay off permanent workers on an enforced summer break.

Unite had previously agreed to successive pay freezes and to cuts in holiday pay for its Vauxhall members - but when the pay freeze eventually ends in 2014 there will be a rise equivalent to that of the retail price index plus one percent. Well, thanks a lot. In the meantime, *real* pay, after allowing for inflation, will have been slashed year on year.

But such trifles are of no concern to the likes of Cable, who revelled in this "good story" - it just goes to show that the UK is "a good business environment for the motor industry". That was echoed by McCluskey, who, admittedly, did spare a thought for workers at Bochum. However, that was as far as his international solidarity stretched, for the Unite leader could not help but be pleased that "there is now a potential for a future at the plant until 2020 and beyond". And, don't forget, the deal is very good for *Britain*, isn't it? - "Importantly this move will also bring component supplier plants back into the UK - a



Vince Cable and Vauxhall chair Duncan Aldred: make the workers work longer for less

development that strengthens our manufacturing base generally." Well, so long as "our" manufacturing base is strengthened, who gives a toss about jobs elsewhere?

No wonder prime minister David Cameron was so pleased with comrade McCluskey: "This has been a real team effort," he said, "with the government, the company, unions and workers all focused on keeping production in the UK." There are various government development packages and so forth available to entice transnationals like GM, but surely what clinched it for the company was the much greater productivity that UK workers can now boast, compared to their brothers and sisters on the continent. For example, Ellesmere Port produces 47 cars an hour, whereas Bochum can only manage 30. So even before the introduction of 24-hour working the Cheshire plant churns out more vehicles a day than Bochum, despite the fact that the latter is already

running three shifts a day.

One thing that was not in Ellesmere Port's favour was the fact that it is easier and cheaper to sack workers in Britain than most other countries in Europe. But that was outweighed by the willingness of union leaders like McCluskey to give away his members' hard-won pay and conditions. He did that by persuading them that it was a straight choice between that and their jobs - after all, times are hard, aren't they, and any job is better than none.

McCluskey was also able to point to the company's recent losses - in 2011 Opel was in the red to the tune of \$750 million across Europe, while its total European losses since 1999 amount to \$11 billion. It was such figures that persuaded the union bureaucrats that they had no alternative but to join the 'race to the bottom'. In addition, a leaked GM policy paper had discussed the closure of *both* Bochum and Ellesmere Port - production is now much more profitable in the US itself

following the success of its assault on employees across the Atlantic over the last decade. Ellesmere Port will have it easy, compared to what GM has imposed on its home plants.

With the apparent threat of work being transferred out of Europe altogether, the unions in Germany and Britain scurried to Opel to persuade it, in true sectional style, that *their* workers were the more reliable and compliant. It seems that McCluskey *et al* did a better job of it than their German counterparts.

Of course, sectionalism is a natural response of the trade union bureaucracy to competition within capitalism. Not only must it make a show of defending its members against attacks by the employer: it must also defend them from what are seen as rival groups of workers willing to do 'our' work. Within a single country this sectionalism is to some extent mitigated by the fact that potential rivals will often belong to the same

union, which must attempt to represent them all if it wishes to retain their membership.

The way of combating sectionalism across national borders is obvious then. The slogan, 'One industry, one union' must apply *internationally*. We are, after all, dealing with a *transnational* company, whose primary concern is the maximisation of profit, irrespective of which groups of workers are exploited and in which country. The nationalism that afflicts both the bureaucrats and their apologists such as the *Morning Star*'s Communist Party of Britain severely weakens us all - a fact that the *Star* implicitly recognises by the fact that it does not dwell on the ignominious details of the Ellesmere Port deal, restricting its report to under 400 words.

What of the losses currently being suffered by GM, Opel and Vauxhall? In these circumstances isn't it reasonable for workers to 'temporarily' accept lower pay, worse conditions, etc, and wait for better times? Well, actually, it is not reasonable. Capitalism's business cycle, its tendency to undergo periodic crises are not the responsibility of workers. Every worker must have the right to a full life and must not be expected to endure the consequences of capital's downturns, recessions and crises. They are not of our making. They are caused by a system based not on cooperation and production for need (and do we *need* millions of private vehicles rather than an efficient public transport system?), but on production for profit undertaken by nationally based mutual competitors.

That does not mean we will not sometimes be forced to concede defeat and accept worse conditions in unfavourable circumstances. But in order to reduce such occurrences to the minimum we need not only international trade union organisation, but *politics*. And it goes without saying that the politics we require are not only intransigently proletarian, but intransigently internationalist ●

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