

weekly worker



**Christine Shawcroft:
divisions surface in LRC
and 'Labour Briefing'**

■ Italy: local elections
■ CPGB aggregate
■ PCS conference
■ Bert Ramelson

No 916 Thursday May 31 2012

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

www.cpgb.org.uk

£1/€1.10



Learn
from the
dead lion
of 17th
century

LETTERS



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

Myth making

Heather Downs, dividing as ever the world into feminists and the carriers of misogynistic ideology, takes me to task for daring to suggest that half of Britain is not dominated by gangs of men engaged in the systematic abuse of young girls (Letters, May 24).

As usual, she is on something of a 'hair trigger', which is to say that she does not appear to have read the article very closely before declaring herself up in arms. Hence, she throws all kinds of statistics around, neatly undermining them all by recycling this bunkum about thousands upon thousands of women being 'trafficked into prostitution' - statistics which typically see the widest possible, worst-case projections of researchers presented as objective fact.

Sex trafficking is defined under the 2003 Sexual Offences Act as the movement of any sex worker to any other country under any circumstances - a great many of whom will not be under direct coercion, but the rather more mundane compulsion of economic circumstances (like most prostitution, then). The story of the sex trafficking scandal is how we got from an 'initial figure' of 71 women who were *confirmed* as having been trafficked into the sex trade against their will in 2000 to an initial and avowedly speculative worst-case estimate by two academics of 1,420, to that estimate being taken for fact, to it being wildly inflated - under the influence of dubious advocacy groups, some 'feminist' and others evangelical-Christian - to an 'upper bound' figure of 3,812, to a 'conservative estimate' of 4,000, to an entirely made up 25,000 in the mouth of Denis MacShane in 2007.

Bringing MacShane, the hard-right Blairite, into this makes clear what was actually going on - the propagation of this myth is part and parcel of the reactionary attacks on immigration *as such*. A certain trend in feminism has been acting as a group of useful idiots for evangelical anti-sex religious groups at least since Catharine MacKinnon's successful attempt to get the Canadian Supreme Court to ratify an anti-porn precedent in the province of Manitoba, which subsequently led - *quelle surprise!* - to prosecutions against the lesbian S&M skin-sheet *Bad attitude*. By leaping on the trafficking scandal, these same people then put themselves at the service of British chauvinism. The moral of the story: the road to hell is paved with advocacy research.

"A certain trend in feminism", I say above, and in the article I refer to "a certain sort of feminist". In comrade Downs's letter, it has mysteriously become "feminism (of any variety)". Let me be clear: there is a trend in liberal, 'radical' feminism which elevates violence against women from being merely a political problem to being *the* political problem, around which all other activity is to revolve.

Such elements find violence everywhere - firstly in pornography ("pornography does not cause violence against women," said Andrea Dworkin; "pornography *is* violence against women"), then in the sex trade more generally, then in outliers of the sex trade (lads' mags). All these things are reduced to sexual violence, and thus all the demands coming out of this end up being for state repression, for all the fulminations about police fumbling of rape cases and such. Cultural problems become matters for police action. As an ironic side consequence,

women - in the sex trade especially - become characterised in large numbers as helpless victims.

I do not care that such people self-describe as feminist 'progressives' - their politics are *deeply reactionary*, and do absolutely nothing for women, least of all at the sharp end of the sex trade, where women have always known the frightening consequences of the further criminalisation of their work.

This is the political character of Julie Bindel; and I take all the figures she, and others like her, recycle - particularly after the trafficking scandal - with a generous pinch of salt. None of this means that rape is not under-reported and so on, still less that the women's question has been 'solved': simply that the refusal to take every new bit of scandal-mongering from reactionary violence-feminists at face value does not mark one out as a card-carrying hater of women.

Such people increasingly act in a cultish manner, as can be glimpsed in the refusal of admission to transgendered people to an upcoming radical feminist conference in London. After all, when one wants repression of the sex trade on the basis of wild distortions, why not then consider (as some influential organisers of this conference do) 'penis-in-vagina' sex itself male violence? And from there, why not consider those at odds with their biological sex an attack on the sovereignty of women, traitors to the sisterhood in the one case and male interlopers in the other? Alliances with evangelical Christians, Canadian Tory judges, Blairite immigration alarmists and now, for all intents and purposes, sexually conservative transphobes - by liberal feminists' friends shall ye know them.

Paul Demarty
London

Not so

I want to thank Mike Macnair for trying to deal with what was, in part, my resignation from the CPGB, in his article 'End the cycle of splits' (May 24). It was an interesting article and I learnt a lot from it. The opinions that, I assume, are being ascribed to me are, however, false.

Mike writes: "In essence, the comrades share the view that the project of the Anti-Capitalist Initiative is more promising than the CPGB's project". I don't.

"Our 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". They didn't.

"... 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". I did grasp this.

"The comrades continued to work and think in the frame of the 'activist' practice". I didn't and I don't.

"But to argue for turning CPGB into something more like Permanent Revolution". I have never done that and I am not interested in doing that.

"The left-economist, 'activist' model which has led them out of the CPGB". It did not and I do not subscribe to this 'model'.

I don't know that I have said or written anything to suggest I hold any of these opinions. If I have, then I have either been unclear or I have been misunderstood. I certainly did not, however, hint at any of this in my resignation letter. In fact, very little of what I actually wrote in that letter has been dealt with here.

I do, however, accept some responsibility for these

misrepresentations, as I readily admit that I did not forthrightly argue what I thought about the work of the CPGB, about its methods, about how it furthers the project, about its approach to the far left and the advanced sections of the workers' movement. And I tried, in my resignation letter, to explain why I, at least, thought that to be the case - the atmosphere, the culture and the way we organised within the CPGB.

I wonder, however, why, if Mike did not know my opinions, he chose to construct them for me instead of listening to the two things that I did say clearly: "I have always tried to be open and honest - if you want to know what I think or what I am doing, then please just ask me ... If any comrades want to discuss my resignation or anything that I have brought up in this email, please get in touch and I will take the time to talk with you."

Choosing to tell me what I actually think (but I assume have not yet realised myself?) instead of taking up an open invitation to discuss it with me is not treating me, or the difficulties that led me to resign, in any kind of serious way. In any case, though, the offer still stands.

I am sorry that I was not confident enough, tough enough, thick-skinned enough - whatever - to have been a positive influence in the organisation. And I am also sorry that, in assigning all the failures to promote a democratic organisation to me and none to the majority, Mike appears to have accepted very little of what was written, in earnest, in my resignation letter.

Cat Ryland
email

Get over it!

Mike Macnair says of Chris Trafford, who has recently left the CPGB: "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."

This is a complete fabrication. Permanent Revolution has never given any "political direction" to Chris Trafford. We don't, unlike the CPGB, run agents in other people's organisations; we leave that kind of thing to toy Bolsheviks.

All this frenzy over the Anti-Capitalist Initiative in the *Weekly Worker*, and now outright fabrications, has only one source: the loss of members by a failing sect.

Get over it!

Stuart King
Permanent Revolution

The graduate

Mike Macnair writes: "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".

I came across the RCG in the 1970s and can assure readers that, after much study of Marx's critique of political economy, I eventually took the exams and squeezed in with 95%. This was by no means the highest score for the year in question.

Trevor Rayne
email

Soft on Occupy

It was encouraging to see London Occupy activists symbolically linking up with the workers' movement by participating in the May 1 demonstration. Their 'impromptu' protests targeting high street outlets that participate in the government's 'workfare' scheme on the same day, likewise, were a step up from

their calling upon an ill-defined 'democracy' to act against the 'worst' finance capitalists.

Perhaps it is beginning to dawn on some of these activists that capital and the bourgeois state are necessarily in cahoots. In the United States, Occupy protests seem to have positively breathed some life into the somnambulant labour movement, embarrassing trade union leaders into tailing Occupy to some extent. Again, this is a progress when compared to Democracy Real Ya and the Indignados in 2011, who were known to ask trade unionists to leave their camps.

In the *Weekly Worker*, a lot has been said about the way Occupy organises. I agree that its structureless 'horizontalism' repeats the worst errors of the 1960s-70s 'counter-cultural left' and that its distrust of vaguely defined 'authority' and 'leaders' leaves it vulnerable to the worst kind of authoritarianism and misleadership. However, the politics of Occupy have been left largely unexplored - possibly because we have been operating under the presumption that its political outlook amounts to no more than a few anti-finance platitudes. I would argue that the latter are an expression of a broader, petty bourgeois anti-capitalist ideology (as opposed to doctrine) that dominates the Occupy movement and that can be traced all the way back to Proudhon. Even if we leave the rather more sinister 20th century manifestations of this ideology aside so as to avoid invoking guilt by association, it is crucial to criticise this and demonstrate why it is entirely insufficient even for its very limited stated purposes.

When investigating last summer's Occupy prototype, the Spanish Real Democracy movement, I argued that, rather than "grumpily standing on the sidelines", it is imperative for communists to engage with such spontaneous anti-capitalist movements ("Tahrir Square comes to Madrid" *Weekly Worker* June 2 2011). What communists can offer Real Democracy, Occupy and other such elemental movements, is, as I suggested while invoking the words of Karl Kautsky, to "give voice to their various concerns within the framework of a comprehensive theory". Indeed, it is up to communists to forcefully argue for the need for the working class to take power in order to overcome capitalism and liberate humanity. In other words, our approach needs to be the exact opposite of that of the Anti-Capitalist Initiative, which dreams of attracting a mass movement by lowering its political level to the most backward elements 'out there'.

A critique of Occupy's 'Global Mayday manifesto' (<http://anticapitalists.org/2012/05/11/occupys-global-mayday-manifesto>), would be a good place for us to start. In fairness, the list of demands contained in this document is more than the SWP has ever produced in terms of a programme. It also gives an interesting insight into the Occupy ideology. Predictably, the responses from the ex-Workers Power youth in ACI have so far been disgracefully soft.

Maciej Zurowski
email

Panderers

John Galt (Letters, May 24) takes me to task for crowing about the Socialist Party of Great Britain result (Letters, May 17). Surprisingly enough, I too can do arithmetic and am perfectly aware that 98% did not vote for the SPGB. But that wasn't really the point, was it?

Ever since the SPGB was

founded, our position that a socialist party should campaign solely on the maximum programme of socialism has been challenged. The Social Democratic Federation, the Independent Labour Party, Labour and Communist parties, and Trotskyist groups of all the variants of the Fourth International have claimed the necessity to offer the electorate a list of immediate palliatives and, in the case of Trotskyism, those needn't even require to be achievable.

At one time, dissent among socialists was not so much about the nature of socialism, but about the best way of achieving it. There used to be a consensus among those calling themselves socialists as to what socialism meant. At that time, socialists and their organisations did not offer reform policies as an end in themselves, but rather as strategies that would lead to the eventual overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of socialism. The SPGB opposed this view, arguing that leading the working class along the path of reform was not equipping them for their historical revolutionary role, but was in fact reinforcing the contrary idea that capitalism could be made to function in the interests of the class it exploited.

We, indeed, must square up to our tasks seriously. But if past lessons are not learned, then the same mistakes will continue to be committed and the debate centred not upon the socialist objective, but what menu of palatable reforms to present at elections. If socialism isn't treated as an immediacy, there will be no mass audience for it. Those with party policies that are deemed to possess a realistic possibility of being implemented will continue to acquire the workers' votes and socialism will forever be abandoned as a viable option. To be sure, as John Galt says, the votes for ourselves and the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition were "pathetically small", but the SPGB result indicates that the Tusc strategy of pandering to the electorate does not lead to any more votes than our so-called hard-line 'impossibilism'.

Alan Johnstone
SPGB

Twin peaks

Tony Clark says: "But the world upon which Kondratiev based his theory is in the process of disappearing. It was one of cheap, abundant energy and other resources, readily available to a relatively small number of industrially developed countries. It is important to mention this because it is not usually understood that capitalism can only thrive when only a few countries are industrially advanced" (Letters, May 10).

The reason it is not generally understood is because it's not true. The very opposite is the case. Within the national economy, it is development and industrialisation in one sphere which is both dependent upon and stimulates development and industrialisation in the rest of the economy. The same law applies on an international scale. As Lenin and Trotsky understood in relation to the USSR, for example, the development of Soviet agriculture was itself dependent upon the development of Soviet industry. That was Marx's great insight - as against the Malthusians, whose views Tony Clark peddles today.

And, of course, as Marx demonstrates, it is not just agriculture to which this law of development applies, but all such extractive industries. That is why these kinds of industrial development, and the revolutionising of the forces of production, through the rapid development of science and

technology (which speeded up in the last part of the 20th century and has accelerated once again as part of the new long-wave boom), have not only made the use of existing resources more efficient, but have created whole new forms of synthetic materials to replace natural products, have revolutionised the output of existing natural products, facilitated the cheapening of these products, made it possible to extract sources and reserves of them, which previously would not have been economic, as well as facilitating the recycling of already extracted and used resources.

It is precisely this kind of development, which is facilitating the rapid growth of African economies, not just as sources of primary resources - Africa is set to become the world's bread basket in coming decades, as agricultural production is developed on an industrial scale - but increasingly as industrialised economies too. The same is already true of Latin America.

But the same tendency can be seen in relation to natural gas. Tony Clark is factually incorrect when he says, "for a start, US gas production peaked around 1973 and the global peak for gas will be only a few years after world peak oil." Quite the opposite is the case. In fact, the example of US natural gas proves Marx's point both in relation to the Malthusians and in relation to the long wave. It did appear to be the case that US peak gas had been reached in 1973. Proven reserves from that point remained flat until the start of the new long-wave boom in 1999. But in the last 10 years they have more than doubled. The reason proven reserves have risen is that the pressure of demand has brought forward new technological developments such as horizontal drilling and 'fracking'. US natural gas prices have fallen from more than \$10 in 2008, to a 10-year low of just \$2 now, based on the huge reserves of shale gas that have been discovered.

According to the US Energy Information Service, at current levels of consumption, even the existing proven reserves of natural gas would be enough to last 92 years. *National Geographic* also comments: "Natural gas is now flowing so fast into US pipelines that the big question seems to be what to do with it all ... With about two-thirds of US states thought to hold natural gas reserves, many take president Barack Obama seriously when he calls the United States the 'Saudi Arabia of natural gas'."

But, of course, it is not just the US that has massive reserves of natural gas. In fact, scientists are finding that reserves of natural gas exist almost everywhere, and frequently in very large quantities. What is more, whilst Tony Clark points out that "one barrel of oil contains the energy equivalent of 8.6 years of labour-power working intensively", what he fails to point out is that natural gas is both one of the most environmentally friendly fossil fuels, and is so because of its efficiency in generating energy.

So his comment that "what is often overlooked is that [methane] is a more potent greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide" is irrelevant, because if we can access this seabed methane (natural gas), not only will we remove the potential for a natural disaster due to its greenhouse potential, but in burning that methane we will turn it into less potent greenhouse gases (see: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Methane#Combustion>, which also demonstrates the greater effectiveness of burning this methane to power vehicles, etc, than the current use of petroleum).

A look at development in Africa shows once again the operation of the law of combined and uneven development, as rapid industrial and

agricultural change is being effected using the latest techniques, which in turn means development can proceed more rapidly, with less demands being placed on resources to achieve it. For example, the development of the internet and mobile technologies means that demands for transport and other forms of communication infrastructure are massively reduced.

Arthur Bough
email

Zero questions

I'd like to thank David Douglass for his considered review of my book *Tommy Sheridan: from hero to zero? A political biography* ('Fall of an icon', May 24). There are two small points I'd like to make.

The first is that the title does contain a question mark. This is important because the book does not decide in advance that Tommy has gone from a hero to a zero (short-hand terms for longer tracts of political analysis). Indeed, I conclude that Tommy is certainly no longer just a 'hero'. Rather, he has become and will remain both hero and zero - 'hero' to many for what he did before 2004, 'zero' for what he did after 2004. Both stand together and need to be recognised for their coexistence.

The second is that there is no proof - as of yet - that Tommy's phone was hacked. Glenn Mulcaire had Tommy's details in his notebook, but this is not tantamount to hacking itself. Indeed, it is curious that if Tommy has evidence of his phone being hacked he has not made it public and neither has he sued News International. This issue is important, as is his part in what I argue in the book to be a strategy of fabrication. In other words, a smokescreen for what he did and to curry political support for himself.

This relates to the central thesis of the biography: namely, that Tommy sought to protect his crucial public persona of honesty and integrity - built up before 2004 - by his actions after 2004. So the thesis was that Tommy created a very successful public persona by which to convey his politics. And it is this which explains his subsequent actions.

Finally, I leave the issue of the criticism of moralising for a subsequent debate.

Gregor Gail
Hertfordshire

Pub talk

I've just read comrade Hunter's criticism (Letters, May 10) of what he sees as the failures of Paul Demarty's article on the Norway massacre ('Crisis and creeping despair', April 26). The following may help address his central questions.

Hunter's assumption that Norway had a fixed fairly settled population with little racial diversity is a popular perception and was largely true until the mid-1960s. After that time the state decided the population needed to expand and opened up immigration. At this particular time eastern Europe wasn't allowing its citizens to leave, and most British and Irish emigration was to Australia, Canada, New Zealand and America. Migration was suspended during the mid-1970s and started up again in the 1980s, and I believe it is still being welcomed from across the globe currently.

In 2000, the country had 8.9% immigrant inhabitants, 23% of those living in Oslo. Muslims at that time composed 2.5%-3% of the total population. Many of the Iraqi and Bosnian migrants are asylum-seekers from conflicts in those countries. Half of all Norwegian Muslims live in Oslo - this is about 10% of that population - the majority of whom come from Pakistan. Incidentally, 1,000 of the Muslim population are noted as having being 'converted'

non-Muslims, presumably of the traditional 'Nordic stock' variety.

Would such information have been useful in the article? Personally I think so, and I can see how your average punter at large would have wondered about it - and done so without them being Nazis or Islamophobes, by the way. This is the kind of conversation many of us have at work or down the pub most days of the week.

David Douglass
South Shields

Censorship

For years, German leftwing critics of Israeli occupation politics and Israeli imperialist wars (dressed up as the 'war on terror') have been threatened, censored and in some cases even physically attacked.

Now the agitation against critical lefts has reached a new level: Laika Verlag, a publisher in Hamburg, has been excluded from participation in the Linke Buchtage, a 'left' book fair being held in Berlin from June 15 to 17. Upon the publisher's inquiry, a spokesman for the organisers claimed "political reasons": in 2011 Laika Verlag had published a book entitled *Mitternacht auf der Marvi Marmara* ('Midnight on the Marvi Marmara'). The book contained reports and reflections from roughly 50 authors - among them many Israelis and Palestinians - on the attempt by the Gaza flotilla to run the blockade imposed by Israel, as well as critical views on the attack of the Israeli navy on the ships, during which nine passengers were killed.

In recent years, more and more former anti-capitalist leftwing structures, parties and foundations, as well as the German media, have neutralised themselves politically. They have been colonised by neo-conservative and other bourgeois rightists, who appear in the guise of *antideutsche Linke* (anti-German lefts) or *ideologiekritiker* (critics of ideology). Obviously the Linke Buchtage are next in line. A constructive debate with the organisers is not possible. They act under cover of anonymity and refuse to enter any discussion over their decision, which is beyond the pale.

The expulsion of Laika Verlag from the Linke Buchtage is one more attempt to silence international leftwing voices against occupation, war and oppression. We will not accept this. The time has come to take a stand. We call for a boycott of the Linke Buchtage.

Linke Buchtage boycott campaign

www.laika-verlag.de

Charisma veto

In relation to comrade Ben Lewis's remark about Trotsky breaking the rules, that action was unacceptable, I'm afraid (Letters, May 24). Breaking unity in action by calling for a separate demonstration after 'freedom of discussion' resolved upon some party-organised demonstration is amateurism. This is far different from airing out publicly various differences in opinion after a resolution. This incident, comrade Mike Macnair noted, led directly to Trotsky's justified expulsion.

Second, as an update to comrade Tina Becker's article, 'Split looming in Die Linke' (May 24), Oskar Lafontaine has backed down, and there is some momentum for Katja Kipping and Katharina Schwabedissen to co-chair the party. The former is a bit of a coalitionist when it comes to the Greens and the latter is a radical anti-capitalist. This might be the bureaucratic solution, going along with the suggestion of Dietmar Bartsch becoming the federal secretary once more and Lafontaine becoming parliamentary (co-) chair again.

Jacob Richter
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 June 3, 5pm: Public meeting, Caxton House, St John's Way, Archway, London N19. 'Lies, Leveson and a progressive alternative'. Speakers: Donnacha DeLong, president NUJ; James Turley, CPGB. **Sunday June 10, 5pm:** Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by open discussion and *Capital* reading group. This week: Vol 1, part 1, section 4. Caxton House, 129 St John's Way, London N19. Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesday June 5, 6.15pm: 'The Stonehenge lying machine'. Speaker: Lionel Sims. St Martin's Community Centre, 43 Carol Street, London NW1 (two minutes from Camden Town tube). Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: radicalanthropologygroup.org.

Stop the Olympic missiles

Thursday May 31, 7pm: Meeting, Bow Road Methodist Church, 1 Merchant Street, London E3. Speakers include: Rushanara Ali MP; Alex Kenny (NUT); Chris Nineham (Stop the War), Abjol Miah (Respect). Organised by Stop the War Coalition: office@stopwar.org.uk.

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.

Celebrate democracy

Sunday June 3, 12 noon: Meeting, St Paul's cathedral, St Paul's Churchyard, London EC4. 'Levellers, Chartists, suffragettes: the struggle continues'. Speakers include: Peter Tatchell, John McDonnell MP, Real Democracy Working Group, Jubilee Debt Campaign. Organised by Occupy London: <http://occupylondon.org.uk>.

After the party

Wednesday June 6, 7pm: Book launch, Housman's bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, King's Cross, London N1. Twenty years since the demise of the Communist Party of Great Britain. Speakers: Kate Hudson (CND), Lorna Reith (Haringey councillor), Stuart Hill (North Tyneside councillor). Organised by Lawrence & Wishart: lwenews@btinternet.com.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Labour Representation Committee

Thursday July 19, 8pm: Public meeting, Ruskin House, 23 Coombe Road, Croydon. The radical alternative to austerity. Speaker: John McDonnell MP. Organised by Greater London LRC: milesbarter@yahoo.com.

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.

PCS

Reality behind the fighting talk

The May 23-25 annual conference exposed the weaknesses of Britain's biggest civil service union, says Tina Becker

Having been an observer at the annual conference of the Public and Commercial Services union, I was rather surprised to read a report in *The Independent* that stated:

"The biggest civil service union today threatened another strike in protest at the government's controversial pension reforms amid claims that the coalition 'unleashed hell' against workers and communities through its spending cuts. The Public and Commercial Services union agreed to build towards fresh walkouts at the end of next month with as many unions as possible unless talks over the pension changes are reopened."¹

You cannot really blame *The Independent's* journalist for deciding not to sit through three long days of debate (especially when the weather in Brighton was extremely nice). However, you would have expected a media representative to at least listen to the discussion that followed the speech of general secretary Mark Serwotka to the conference lead motion. Had he done that, our scribe would have been able to report a much more interesting and complex dynamic.

In fact, while the resolution that was overwhelmingly passed commits the national executive committee to push for a strike at the end of June, it crucially contains the caveat, "with as many unions as possible and to take final decisions once the position of other unions becomes clear". In other words: PCS will not fight by itself.

In reality, conference had to deal with the fact that all of the union's key allies in the fight against the so-called "pension reforms" seem to have pulled out of joint action in June. Unison has turned its back. The executive of the National Union of Teachers has agreed to work with other teaching unions towards joint actions in the autumn instead, which might or might not include strike action.² And it currently looks pretty unlikely that Unite will come out in favour of a strike at this late hour.

The NUT and Unite in particular have been "our allies on the TUC and were the only unions that voted to re-negotiate the pensions deal", said Serwotka. The "reforms" will see the pension age raised to 68 and employees' contributions upped dramatically (that already began in April this year). Add to that inflation and the fact that wages in the civil service have been frozen for the last couple of years and you have a dramatic worsening of the financial situation of hundreds of thousands of the lowest paid people in Britain. Average civil service pay is £22,850 a year, and 63% of civil servants earn less than £25,000.³

As the motion commits the PCS to "not going it alone", as comrade Serwotka put it, that effectively means that PCS will not go on strike in June after all. But only a small minority of delegates pointed out this obvious fact - and argued to 'go it alone' in any case. Charlie McDonald of the recently depleted Independent Left within PCS warned: "It shouldn't be our policy to wait for rightwingers like Dave Prentis of Unite or fake leftists like Christine Blower of the NUT" (here he was revealing his membership of the Alliance of Workers' Liberty, for whom everybody else on the left is "fake"). Similarly, Lee Rock (one of the people who left the IL), said that "of course it is a blow that the NUT have pulled out. There's no

guarantee that we will win if we go it alone. But there's a guarantee that we will lose if we don't even try to fight back."

This small opposition argued that "naming the day" for strike action might force unions like Unite, Unison and the NUT to follow suit. It is debatable whether this tactic would work. Mark Serwotka was right to point out that "going it alone would be an incredibly high-risk strategy. Imagine Francis Maude's face if there are fewer members on strike than there were on May 10. It would be deeply demoralising for our members." He has a point, of course. But taking no action at all is the worst of all possibilities (it became clear during the debate that "selective" or "targeted" strike action was not a tactic that the NEC considers worthwhile - it has put all its eggs in the 'joint action' basket).

I was surprised to see no more than 50 of the 1,000 or so delegates vote against the lead motion. Clearly, members have no confidence that they can win this fight - and the union leadership does not give them confidence. There might be more joint strike action in autumn. But for now the union has rolled over.

Lack of opposition

PCS is not just hampered by the fact that the Socialist Party in England and Wales bureaucratically dominates the organisation from top to bottom. The opposition is woefully weak and divided as well. A particularly unhelpful role is once again being played by the Socialist Workers Party, which has two comrades on the NEC.

The pre-conference report in *Socialist Worker* argues: "Unity with other unions cannot be used as an excuse not to call action. Over and over again during the dispute, unions have reached a stalemate, with each spending weeks saying to the others, 'We'll call a strike when you do.' That cannot continue."⁴ Fighting talk. On the day, however, the comrades voted *in favour* of the NEC motion. Funnily enough, a long-standing SWP member tried to speak against it - it turned out he had missed that morning's SWP caucus.

It gets worse. While the post-conference report in *Socialist Worker* does not actually mention how SWP comrades voted, it clearly implies that they voted *against* the motion. It approvingly quotes the conference speech by SWP member Anna Owens: "We proved that by taking action we pulled other unions behind us - we need to use the same tactic again."⁵ The report fails to mention that she and her comrades then went on to vote exactly against using this tactic.

This is dishonest in the extreme. However, this results from a common situation for the revolutionary left. In order to gain seats on union leaderships, they agree to keep quiet on controversial issues - many eventually 'go native'.

● In 2005, PCS NEC members Sue Bond and Martin John (both in the SWP) voted in favour of a pension deal that sold away the rights of new entrants (in cahoots of course with Mark Serwotka and SPEW). This deal in a sense opened the way for the current assault. Eventually, after exposure of their action on the left (not least in the *Weekly Worker*) and growing complaints from other SWP members, the SWP leadership was moved to take action against these renegades. Sue Bond got off lightly following her let-

ter of apology and still sits on the PCS NEC, but Martin John flounced out of the SWP the day before he was due to face a meeting of the organisation's PCS fraction (and was made a PCS full-timer almost immediately).

● Similarly in 2009, SWP member Jane Loftus used her position on the executive of the Communication Workers Union to vote to accept an "interim agreement", which effectively ended the union's opposition to the attacks on working conditions imposed by Royal Mail. After demands by the SWP leadership, she eventually resigned from the party. But she had been voting for similarly bad deals for many years.⁶

● While in theory SPEW supports the principled demand for a "workers' representative on a workers' wage", its comrades consistently vote against the demand when it is brought up at PCS conference (that is, in those rare cases that such a motion is actually heard and not just "guillotined" by the SPEW-controlled standing orders committee). After all, it would be their own pockets that would be hit - dozens of SPEW members are now employed by the PCS.

There are plenty of perks to the job and other social pressures which weigh upon those who enter the upper echelons of the union structures. A revolutionary party should be constantly on guard and fighting against the effects of these pressures on its militants, yet the actions of the SWP and SPEW leadership often do just the opposite of that. Their desire to get close to and win the approval of 'left' union leaders creates a culture of diplomatic silence and conciliationism.

Financial troubles

While the PCS styles itself as a "campaigning, fighting union", its ability to act as one is severely restricted by the dire state of its finances. Comrade Serwotka reported that 11,000 new members have joined since June 2011, but because of the massive job losses in the public sector, many more have left. Several years ago, membership peaked at 320,000 - now it stands at about 280,000. This means that "we now have £5 million less income than last year", Serwotka explained.

PCS treasurer and SPEW member Chris Baugh later outlined that "over 50% of our income goes towards paying wages, staff pensions and national insurance contributions of PCS full-timers". Incidentally, PCS employees - represented by the General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trade Union (GMB) - managed to escape any pay freeze.

Considering the dire personal financial situation of many PCS members, it is understandable that most resist a hike in their contributions. But there are some serious anomalies that undermine any attempt to build an effective union. Membership contributions are set at 0.6% of gross income. That is half, for example, of what most union members in Germany pay. Also, there is a cap, which currently stands at £12.68 per month. That means anybody earning more than £25,360 pays actually less than 0.6%. The more you earn, the lower the percentage you have to pay towards your union membership. Ridiculous.

To make matters

worse, the union does not have a strike fund. If PCS members go on strike, they simply lose the pay for that day. In the old Civil and Public Services Association, 15% of members' fees went towards the union's strike fund. Those on strike were paid between 50% and 85% of their average wage after the first day of strike action. But after the merger with the National Union of Civil and Public Services to form the PCS, this was replaced by voluntary local hardship funds.

The lack of a strike fund in effect means that the employer (ie, the state) knows from the start that it can more easily sit out any strike action the PCS will take. After all, how long can people go without receiving any pay? During the miners' Great Strike of 1984-85, the union's funds soon ran out and the strikers could only continue thanks to solidarity donations from the public - but this is difficult to replicate in today's political situation.

At this year's PCS conference, there was an attempt to change this, albeit a pretty half-hearted one. Comrade Rock moved a motion penned by the AWL-dominated Independent Left that sought to establish a "voluntary levy" to help fund "selective strike action". Hardly revolutionary stuff, you might think.

But SPEW and the SWP strongly opposed the motion on the grounds that "we cannot ask people to finance solidarity with others when they just had a pay freeze", as Anna Owens put it. Dave Vincent opposed the motion for a number of rather spurious reasons, amongst them this gem: "People who collect the money might dip into the pot." Sheryl Gedling was admirably honest when she opposed the motion on behalf of the NEC: "It is irresponsible to promise members that we can support them the length of time it would take to win this dispute. The government would find the money to sit it out."

I think it is fair to say that Francis Maude and Vince Cable will not be losing too many sleepless nights fretting over

the pensions dispute right now.

Political strategy

While conference was strangely apolitical, it has to be said that PCS is one of the few unions that have at least tried to put forward a more political strategy. In 2005, PCS voted to establish a "political fund" that would allow it to intervene in "and between" elections. As one of the unions not affiliated to the Labour Party, PCS has clearly found it difficult to exert real pressure on politicians.

In 2007 it first established a 'check list' of "our key industrial issues" and put them to parliamentary candidates, publishing their answers online. In June 2012, the union will conduct a ballot to ask members whether they want to expand the remit of the fund so that in "exceptional circumstances" the union "could support candidates or stand them in elections where it would help us to defend jobs, pensions, pay and public services".⁷

Not exactly a massive step forward after seven years. Clearly, the leadership is dragging its feet. No doubt this is in part to do with the pathetic election results received by left groups, amongst them of course the SPEW-backed Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition. It would expose the union's lack of political influence.

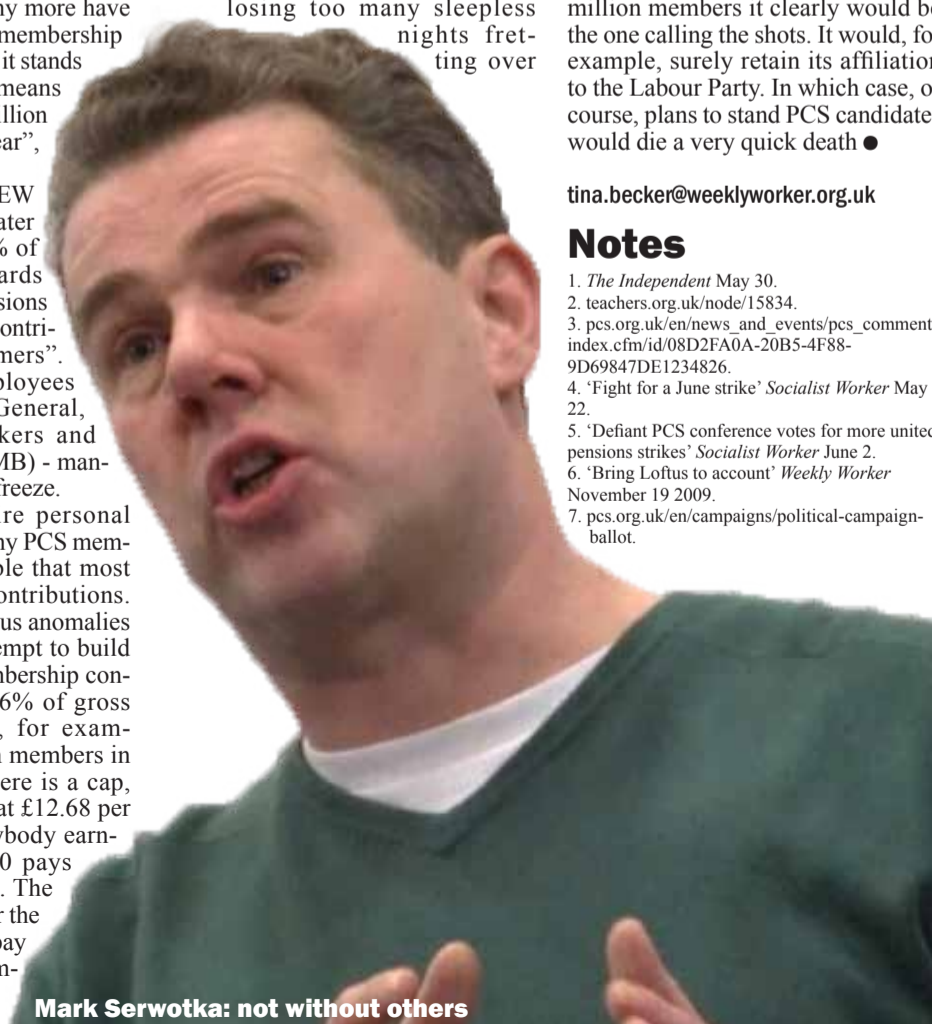
But there also seems to be another reason. In his main speech to conference, comrade Serwotka spoke about the need to "deepen our working relationship with the Unite union". He repeatedly tried to assure members that "a merger is not on the table". A report would be drawn up for next year's conference to map out the "way forward", but "rest assured: nobody is talking about merging our unions".

Apart from most members on conference floor. The merger (which obviously is on the cards) was clearly on everybody's mind and many members spoke against it. Unite's structures are a lot less democratic than those of the PCS and with its 1.5 million members it clearly would be the one calling the shots. It would, for example, surely retain its affiliation to the Labour Party. In which case, of course, plans to stand PCS candidates would die a very quick death ●

tina.becker@weeklyworker.org.uk

Notes

1. *The Independent* May 30.
2. teachers.org.uk/node/15834.
3. pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/pcs_comment/index.cfm/id/08D2FA0A-20B5-4F88-9D69847DE1234826.
4. 'Fight for a June strike' *Socialist Worker* May 22.
5. 'Defiant PCS conference votes for more united pensions strikes' *Socialist Worker* June 2.
6. 'Bring Loftus to account' *Weekly Worker* November 19 2009.
7. pcs.org.uk/en/campaigns/political-campaign-ballot.



Mark Serwotka: not without others

LABOUR

Divisions surface and split beckons

What political differences lie behind the heated arguments in the Labour Representation Committee and *Labour Briefing*? Stan Keable of Labour Party Marxists reports on the proposed merger, and counsels against irresponsible splits

More heat than light has been produced by the online exchanges on the Facebook pages of the Labour Representation Committee and *Labour Briefing* following the May 26 LRC national committee meeting. By 17 votes to 7 the NC endorsed an executive committee merger motion - that the LRC and *LB* should combine, to their mutual benefit: an organisation without a journal should get together with a journal without an organisation. The proposal will depend on the July 7 AGM of *LB*, which will debate a similar motion from editorial board member and LRC joint secretary Pete Firmin. While opponents of the merger are calling it a takeover, and warning that it will precipitate a split in both organisations, some pro-merger comrades are hinting that they may abandon *Briefing* if they do not get their way.

Irresponsible splits are the debilitating disease of the left. They are a crime against the struggle for unity which the left and the working class movement needs, and which both LRC and *LB* claim to stand for. I would urge comrades on both sides to clearly present their arguments so as to ensure that LRC members and *LB* subscribers and readers are fully engaged. I myself - a member of LRC and a subscriber to *LB* - only obtained a copy of the LRC motion three days after the NC had voted for it. And I only read about the merger proposal in the 'for' and 'against' single-page articles in the June issue of *LB*, which arrived in the post on the very morning of the May 26 NC meeting.

How did such a situation arise, in two mutually supportive, pro-Labour Party, left unity groups? Both seek to unite the left and to democratise and transform the Labour Party. But democracy begins at home, in our own organisations, and depends on open discussion. The problem seems to me to lie in the reluctance to air our differences in public. Many rank-and-file comrades have expressed dismay at the heated conflict which has broken out online between leading comrades, where previously differences had not been apparent. This surely points to the short-sightedness of the view that we should hide our differences, not 'wash our dirty linen in public', that publishing criticism will frighten away potential supporters, that we should 'leave our guns at the door', and so on.

In his pro-merger *LB* article, comrade Firmin argues that the merger will give *Briefing* "a bigger base, bigger readership and wider audience" and that there is "much overlap of both political views and personnel (and even more so of supporters)". The LRC is "in need of its own publication", but "to start one in competition with *Briefing* would be a duplication of effort". *LB* fights to "channel the demands of the broader movement and campaigns towards the party and a Labour government", he says approvingly, while the LRC is "committed to fighting for the Labour Party to support the resistance ...". Implicitly criticising *LB* for being one-sidedly orientated towards the party, to the neglect of the extra-parliamentary mass struggle, he argues: "*Labour Briefing* ... needs to recognise that there is a layer of activists who see Labour as a neoliberal party, some seeing little point in relating to the broader labour



Christine Shawcroft: where are the politics?

movement at all ... socialists ... have to win their activists to our ranks, pointing out how political gains can be achieved through the labour movement ..."

Some comrades have asked me whether the merger plan will be put to the next LRC AGM. But Pete's proposal is "to transfer *Briefing* to the LRC with immediate effect, with the aim of a relaunch at this autumn's Labour Party conference".

Editorial board member John Stewart put the case in the June issue for *LB* "retaining its independence ... unless others can demonstrate the superiority of their proposals". "*Briefing*'s durability" - it's been around since 1980 - "gives it a stability lacking in the LRC". Comrade Stewart doubts "LRC claims ... of over 1,000 members and dozens of affiliates". But, although it is not a precise measure, the two Facebook pages seem to back up the claim: LRC - 1,463 and rising; *LB* - 120.

Comrade Stewart displays an unconscious hypocrisy with respect to democracy and open discussion. On the one hand, he worries that an article like his 2007 piece "advocating support for one of the leading lights of the soft left" - namely, John Cruddas - would not "be included in a future LRC *Briefing*".

On the other hand, he holds up the bogey that LRC affiliates - the New Communist Party and the *Morning Star* Supporters Group - might be given space to support "the invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia ... and the governments of North Korea and China". And worse: "Recently, another affiliate, Labour Party Marxists, repeatedly criticised *Briefing* chair Christine Shawcroft in print during the Labour NEC election campaign." Well, firstly, it was comradely criticism, which Christine accepted. Secondly, if criticism of leaders is out of order, I have to ask comrade Stewart what exactly he thinks is wrong with North Korea or China.

The caption to the picture selected to accompany comrade Stewart's

article gives us a pointer to the politics that appear to be involved in this dispute: "Tony Benn addresses delegates to the 2008 Compass conference at *Briefing*'s fringe meeting. John McDonnell MP refused to attend because of John Cruddas's association with Compass" (the rightwing Labour pressure group "committed to help build a Good Society").

However, we should not judge the opposition to immediate merger by the limitations of John Stewart's arguments. But what does he mean by saying that his "greatest concern" is "that an LRC takeover may lead to negative developments on the wider Labour left"? Apparently those against the merger believe that a journal can only be genuinely "pluralist" if it is not controlled by any one group. The anti-merger leaflet, backed by comrade Christine Shawcroft and distributed at the May 26 LRC NC meeting, makes this clear.

"It's no good saying that 'LRC *Briefing*' would be 'pluralist': there's plenty of 'pluralist' magazines trotting out their own line; and plenty more 'pluralist' magazines debating the 'pluralist' lines within their own organisations. Above all: who will take a commitment to 'pluralism' seriously if you close down a pluralist magazine and set up, using its name, the magazine of your own organisation?" The implication is that *LB*, at present, has no political line of its own, and if it adopted a line, that would diminish the range of (left) opinions willing to write for it. If "*LRC Briefing*" is also to be "a journal of debate within LRC" with space for both majority and minority opinions, "will it be made clear what is the majority position? Hang on a moment - where has that 'pluralism' gone, then?"

"*Briefing*'s genuine pluralism", the leaflet claims, would be "killed off" if it were "directed exclusively by the NC of a single organisation on the left". So what kind of left unity should we strive for? Instead

of fighting to unite the left politically and organisationally, do the authors of the anti-merger leaflet advocate preserving the disunity of the left, so that the diverse tendencies can enjoy fair and equal access to the pages of *LB*?

This defeatist horizon seems to be a fetish arising from a unity moment in *Briefing*'s history. "When the [Workers Revolutionary Party] collapsed in the 1980s," explains the leaflet, "*Labour Herald* called for unity of left publications. At a meeting of *Herald*, *Briefing*, *International* and *Socialist Viewpoint*, Graham Bash announced: 'I am all for unity. Let's have a joint magazine. The only preconditions are that it is called *Labour Briefing* and that no one group has control.'" The leaflet complains that Graham has not explained his reasons for abandoning "*Briefing*'s ethos".

I cannot speak for comrade Bash, but there is an obvious justification for his change of heart: the circumstances have changed. The unification of several left journals to survive hard times for the left after the defeat of the 1984-85 miners' Great Strike may well have been a positive step, but today we need to build a higher level of unity.

Comrade Christine Shawcroft has fully identified with the leaflet's contents. I should like to hear the views of the other six NC members who voted 'no': Ted Knight, Jon Lansman, Gary Heather, Claire Wadey, Lois Radice and Miles Barter. And I should like to hear all NC members declaring against irresponsible splits. In other words, if you lose the vote, stay together. Accept majority decisions, insist on minority rights.

Come on over

Motion carried by 17 votes to 7 at the May 26 LRC NC

The EC notes that members of the

Labour Briefing editorial board will be putting a motion to their AGM to transfer *Labour Briefing* to the LRC.

The EC notes the proposal by members of the *Labour Briefing* editorial board and if the motion is passed at the *Labour Briefing* AGM (on July 7), we would agree to take the magazine on.

The EC notes that *Labour Briefing* - like the LRC - has always followed a pluralist line, promoting discussion within the labour and trade union movement. We would pledge to maintain that tradition.

We also believe that having a magazine associated with the LRC would be beneficial for the following reasons:

- It would create more space for discussion and debate within the LRC and wider movement.

- It would give the LRC more visibility, and would help us to recruit and retain membership and affiliation.

- It would assist in organising the Labour left and trade union movement.

- We could develop a coordinated and integrated communications strategy, incorporating the website, magazine, email, Twitter and Facebook - as well as to reach LRC members who are digitally excluded.

In taking on *Labour Briefing*, the LRC would agree to maintain its pluralist traditions and coverage of Labour Party, trade union, social and international struggles. We believe becoming a magazine hosted by the LRC would broaden the base of *Labour Briefing* and help it to develop as a useful tool in organising the labour movement left.

We believe that the correct structure to run the magazine would be an editorial board accountable to and delegated from the national committee, though with the authority to coopt (subject to NC approval) ●

Fighting fund

Upward curve

"Towards your increased postage costs!" reads the little note on comrade OG's resubscription form, explaining the addition of £15 to the £30 she paid for the next six months. It's gratefully received, comrade!

This week also saw £148 in standing order donations, plus the promise of increased SO payments from a number of others. There are, however, a number of readers who are still paying the old standing order subscription rate of £10 a quarter and have not yet returned the form we sent them three weeks ago. This is to remind them that the new rate is £12 a quarter (or £4 a month if you prefer) and until they increase their SO we are having to cover those increased postage costs that OG is so aware of ourselves.

Of course, £12/£4 is the *minimum* you need to pay - which represents fantastic value, I think, as the total cost of the *Weekly Worker*'s cover price plus postage would be £18/£6. But there is nothing to stop you bumping your payment up to

at least that. New subscriber DT, for example, is so impressed with the content of our paper from reading it online that he is going to pay £8 a month. Thank you, comrade!

Talking about reading us online, we do seem to be on an upward curve again following a period when our internet readership had dropped below 10,000. But this week we are up to 11,041. Mind you, 11,040 of those readers did *not* leave us a donation via PayPal. The one exception was comrade DT, who gave us a fiver. Every little counts, but I just wish there were rather more of such 'little' gifts.

Anyway, the last seven days brought in just £172, but it was enough to take us beyond our £1,500 fighting fund target for May. We end the month with £1,577. Thanks to all who contributed.

Robbie Rix

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

ITALY

Last man standing

The Partito Democratico, dominated by ex-‘official communists’, is now Italy’s leading party, writes Toby Abse

The second round of the Italian local elections on May 21-22 marked a new stage in the crisis of 2011-12 - a crisis triggered by external economic developments in the euro zone that is now turning into the death agony of the ‘Second Republic’ (1994-2011) associated with Silvio Berlusconi and his personalised parties: first Forza Italia and then more recently Popolo della Libertà (PdL).

This crisis in many respects increasingly resembles that of 1992-94, caused by the end of the cold war, which swept away Italy’s ‘First Republic’ (1946-92) and the Christian Democrat party that dominated it. The recent corruption scandals involving the finances of entire political parties are very similar to those known as *Tangentopoli* (Bribesville) that were at the centre of the earlier crisis. Some have seen more sinister resemblances between the school bombing at Brindisi¹ (and the kneecapping of a company boss in Genoa by anarchist terrorists belonging to the Federazione Anarchica Informale²) and the Mafia bombings of 1992-93, arguing that in all periods of crisis in Italy such events recur. Some draw linkages with the ‘strategy of tension’ during 1969-80, suggesting implicitly, or sometimes explicitly, that the secret services or powerful interest groups are behind such events. Even if such recent occurrences are mere coincidences, such thinking adds to the sense of tension in Italian society.

And, of course, after two serious earthquakes in the Emilia Romagna region in slightly over a week, there is a great deal of unease at the moment. The earthquake casualties, especially on the second occasion, can not be treated as victims of a purely natural disaster. Ten of the 16 dead on May 29 were factory workers, and three were small employers, killed as a result of the collapse of their factories. It has been pointed out that the factories were reopened quite quickly after the first earthquake, although large numbers of people, including many of the dead workers, were still prohibited from returning to their own homes for safety reasons.

At one rather superficial level the second round of the local elections, with its run-off contests between the two leading contenders for the mayoralties of the major municipalities, marked the triumph of the centre-left over the centre-right. Of the municipalities with more than 15,000 inhabitants where an election took place, the balance shifted dramatically from 98 centre-right mayors and 56 centre-left before the poll to 95 centre-left and 34 centre-right afterwards.³ However, the ex-‘official communist’-dominated Partito Democratico (PD) has won a pyrrhic victory because of the massive decline in the votes for Berlusconi’s PdL and Bossi’s Lega Nord, rather than because of any increase in its own vote. The abstention in the second round set a new record for Italy, where traditionally the numbers voting in local and regional elections has been far higher than in the United Kingdom - only 51.4% of the electorate participated in the second round. Whilst it was higher amongst those who had voted for the parties associated with Berlusconi and Bossi over the last two decades, to some extent this unprecedented abstention represents a weariness with all political parties rather than

just the absence of an attractive and viable option on the centre-right of the spectrum.

‘Five stars’

The revolt against the major parties has taken various forms. Some of them are quite healthy and give us cause for optimism, in that they have led to the election of mayors clearly to the left of the PD, associated with either Antonio Di Pietro’s Italia dei Valori (IdV) or Nichi Vendola’s Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà (SEL). For example, in Palermo the dedicated veteran anti-Mafia campaigner and former mayor, Leoluca Orlando, standing on behalf of IdV resoundingly defeated the PD’s Fabrizio Ferrandelli by 72.4% to 27.6%. In Genoa, the centre-left candidate Marco Doria, who is in fact closely associated with SEL, beat the centrist, Enrico Musso, by 59.7% to 40.3%, albeit on an horrendously low 39% turnout. Doria’s election means that two out of the three major cities of Italy’s ‘industrial triangle’ - Milan and Genoa - have mayors linked to SEL and not the PD, indicating the hidden potential for a radical left vote.⁴

However, the main expression of raging discontent with all the major parties and with the vicious austerity policies of Mario Monti’s technocratic government has not taken the form of votes for the IdV or SEL, but instead has been represented by the rapid rise of the grouping led by the 63-year-old comedian, Beppe Grillo, the Movimento Cinque Stelle (M5S) - literally the Five Stars Movement. This grotesque phenomenon bears some family resemblances to Germany’s Pirate Party: its cadre tends to be predominantly young and petty bourgeois (unlike the Pirates’ elderly and rather well-to-do leader), it makes extensive use of the internet and it has been able to profit from the weakness of its native radical left - in the German case Die Linke’s endless compromises with the pro-austerity SPD at the local and regional level; in the Italian case SEL’s tailing of the PD. But it has its own distinctly Italian features - the most evident being

an absurd leader
cult of a type
that I believe
does not
exist,
as yet

anyway, amongst the Pirates.⁵

M5S made a breakthrough at the national level and won itself international publicity by first getting into second place in the first round of the Parma mayoral election and then rapidly overtaking the PD front-runner, Vincenzo Bernazzoli, in the run-off, so that the fairly young and politically inexperienced candidate, Federico Pizzarotti (a former IT manager for a bank, which in some ways typifies M5S’s social base) beat his rival by no less than 60.2% to 39.8%. M5S had led the local campaign against the construction of a rubbish incinerator - the kind of issue over which the rather technocratic Emilian PD tends to side with developers. However, regardless of such local factors, the victory in Parma greatly enhanced M5S’s credibility as a national force, with one recent poll giving it 18.5%, putting it in second place - behind the PD, but in front of Berlusconi’s PdL. Grillo is currently talking about standing about 100 candidates in the general election that is scheduled for April next year.⁶

It is worth remarking that there are already tensions within M5S between Grillo and Pizzarotti. The latter had suggested the appointment as “city manager” - an example of Italianised English, probably meaning a municipal chief executive - of somebody with previous experience of that role outside Parma. Since the man in question had been expelled or suspended from M5S by Grillo, the authoritarian demagogue has been attacking the right of the new mayor to make autonomous decisions about this or any other matter, and, with astonishing hypocrisy, attacked Pizzarotti for granting too many interviews to the media.

Panic

The advance of M5S has caused panic amongst the established political parties. The PdL is currently wracked by internal dissension. Needless to say, Silvio Berlusconi - who played such a minor role in the election campaign and deliberately fled to the safe haven

offered by his friend, Vladimir Putin, in Moscow before the close of poll in anticipation of poor results - refuses to take any personal responsibility for the debacle and blames the hapless party secretary, his former tame justice minister, Angelino Alfano. Unsurprisingly, Berlusconi rather admires Grillo, despite the comedian’s abuse directed at the older buffoon

- “Berlusconi is so dead he doesn’t even wear his make-up any more” was one choice outburst. After all, they are both narcissistic clowns who know how to use the media - even if Berlusconi uses television and Grillo the internet.

However, conflict within the PdL is not confined to mutual recriminations between Berlusconi and Alfano. The former Alleanza Nazionale wing of the party, which never really broke with its neo-fascist past (Ignazio La Russa does not really conceal his admiration for Marine Le Pen’s Front National), is now suggesting that the PdL should oppose Mario Monti and take a more rightwing line. Conflict is also taking a generational form, with two different groups of younger PdL members, who clearly see a future for themselves after Berlusconi’s death or retirement, holding meetings to publicly air their grievances with the party’s leadership and line.

The PdL’s credibility is now taking further knocks from the ever increasing allegations of sleaze surrounding the longstanding president of the Lombard region, Roberto Formigoni, whose new year holidays in the Caribbean have been paid for three years in succession by an extremely dubious entrepreneur, Pierluigi Dacco. Dacco is currently in jail charged with large-scale fraud resulting in the bankruptcy of a major Milanese private hospital and a medical research foundation in Pavia - both of which regularly received funds or contracts from the Lombard regional government during Formigoni’s tenure as president. In addition to the free excursions to the Caribbean granted to Formigoni (on one occasion involving the expenditure of €100,000 on the chartering of a private plane), during at least one summer Dacco hired a luxurious yacht for Formigoni. The latter has denied all allegations, claiming that he cannot remember where he went for new year a few years ago and that he has thrown away the receipts indicating he paid Dacco for his share in these group holidays. Given the police are claiming that Formigoni may have benefited to the tune of €400,000 in terms of free holidays and excursions, it might be pointed out that a man as careless and forgetful as this is certainly not a fit and proper person to be running Italy’s wealthiest region.

In the light of the growing vacuum on the centre-right of Italian politics, it is not surprising that Ferrari boss Luca Cordero di Montezemolo is now planning to launch a new political party. Montezemolo, the 64-year-old aristocrat and former president of the employers’ federation, Confindustria, has for some years been running a political think tank, Italia Futura, which he now intends to turn it into a fully-fledged party standing candidates next spring on what his associates describe as a “centrist, free-market platform”.⁷ Whilst there has been a certain amount of rivalry between Berlusconi and Montezemolo, the Ferrari team’s exploits in Formula One have for some years been covered on all the Italian television channels at absurd length - as if F1 were a genuinely popular sport like football - and massive airtime given to interviews with non-Italian Ferrari racing drivers, spouting banalities in halting Italian. This means that his outfit has in effect got considerable advance publicity - an effect that mirrors Berlusconi’s use of AC Milan.

The PD’s reaction to the rise of M5S has not been to move leftwards

in an attempt to channel the growing discontent in Italian society, but to shift further to the right. It has been engaging in interminable discussions with the PdL about changing the electoral and constitutional framework - discussions which suggest a desperate effort to find fundamentally undemocratic methods of excluding M5S (or any other challenger to the status quo) from parliamentary representation, by such methods as bringing a French-style, two-round voting system. The PD is also making clear that it is increasingly dubious about maintaining its projected electoral alliance with SEL and the IdV. It sees them as too leftwing, given their lack of enthusiasm or, in the case of the IdV, outright opposition to Monti’s austerity policies, with which the PD has so wholeheartedly identified itself. The centrist UdC, renowned for its dubious links in Sicily, is still being actively courted as a partner for next year’s general election and there is a lot of rather vague talk about deals with lists representing ‘civil society’⁸ - part of a recognition that the PD brand has little wider appeal.

It seems increasingly likely that the PD’s tactical ineptitude will replicate that of the post-communist PDS during the 1992-94 crisis. Although in terms of the major parties, given the collapse of the Lega and the PdL, it could be seen as the last man standing, some more skilful new force may well arrive from the right and carry off the prize. Of course, for us the tragedy is not the degeneration of the heirs of the Italian Communist Party’s right wing, but the fact that, in contrast to Synaspismós/Syriza in Greece, no sizeable force of the radical left has emerged from the left Eurocommunists ●

Notes

1. Although the bomber seems to have been caught on CCTV as he pressed the detonator, this criminal investigation still remains open. The Apulian Mafia-like organisation, Sacra Corona Unita, has denied responsibility and one of its prominent associates has claimed that if they found the man who murdered the schoolgirl and sought to murder a much larger number they would “eat him alive”. While the SCU has murdered people in its time, it must be pointed out that it has never previously engaged in deliberate random killings of civilians unconnected with its own criminal activities.
2. This FAI has no connection with the Federazione Anarchica Italiana, a much longer established organisation with no involvement with terrorism.
3. The numbers do not tally exactly because some mayors are independents or represent formations that cannot be easily assigned to the two main camps. These figures are taken from *La Repubblica* (May 22).
4. The ideological weakness of SEL, particularly its subaltern relationship with the PD, has become more manifest in the last couple of months if one makes the inevitable contrast with Syriza, whose largest component, Synaspismós, emerged from the same left Eurocommunist background as SEL’s leadership group.
5. Obviously, as was pointed out long ago in that splendid polemic, ‘The tyranny of structurelessness’, all such ‘horizontalist’ movements produced an informal leadership group which behaved in a far more authoritarian and unaccountable way than organisations with an official leadership.
6. According to his interview in *The Guardian* (May 26), he tends to make statements without much prior thought or consultation, so it is hard to know what to make of this. As things stand, he probably would have no difficulty in recruiting as full a slate as any major party.
7. See ‘A Ferrari caress to get Italy back on track’ *The Sunday Times* May 27.
8. Paul Ginsborg and other intellectuals have come forward with a vague project about a “new political subject”, but it is not clear if this is what the PD is seeking an alliance with. Given the existence of SEL, the IdV, the Federazione della Sinistra, M5S and so forth, it is hard to see the point of another organisation somewhere on the left of the spectrum, but with a confused and nebulous programme - although Ginsborg is apparently going to come to the UK to promote it to Italian academics employed over here.



Beppe Grillo: not so funny

AGGREGATE

Broad fronts and liquidationism

CPGB members have been discussing the Anti-Capitalist Initiative and the role of Communist Students.

Peter Manson reports

The May 26 aggregate of CPGB members, meeting in London, considered our attitude to the new Anti-Capitalist Initiative. This was particularly pertinent, as three CPGB members have recently resigned over our lack of enthusiasm for what is basically yet another halfway house with a strong liquidationist pull.

Linked to this was the question of Communist Students - the organisation founded by CPGB comrades to fight within the student movement for our politics of unity around Marxism. This is connected to the question of the ACI, because one of the leading members of CS has been comrade Chris Strafford, who led the pro-ACI split and would naturally like to see CS gravitate towards his new political home.

The CPGB's Provisional Central Committee presented a motion which said that the ACI "embodies a tried and failed method". That is, those behind it believe that "the path to influence is through the promotion of politics other than those they are formally committed to". While the intentions of the ACI may be "worthy and some of its interventions critically supportable", it is "extremely unlikely to produce anything of long-term political value to our class".

The motion concluded: "Building the ACI on its own political terms is a waste of time. At best, work in its ranks can win comrades to our perspective of building a serious Marxist alternative"; and it can also "provide our own comrades with some experience of the politics of the opponents of such a perspective in the workers' movement."

Comrade Mike Macnair, introducing the PCC motion, contrasted the ACI with previous initiatives - the Socialist Labour Party, the Socialist Alliance, the Scottish Socialist Party and Respect - within which the CPGB had participated. These other organisations, particularly the first three, represented potentially fruitful sites to advance the fight for a united Marxist party - all had attracted militants from a variety of groups, as well as scores of leftwing individuals. But, in the words of the motion, "The Anti-Capitalist Initiative unites nothing but the insignificant fragments of the insignificant Workers Power. Consequently it has attracted next to nothing in terms of periphery."

Comrade Macnair gave a wide-ranging presentation, in which he set the ACI against the history of liquidationism in the Marxist movement of both the right and left variety, and placed it in the peculiar British context of creating broad fronts - usually on the basis of trade union or old Labour-type politics. While, of course, broad fronts are "not necessarily liquidationist", he said, in most cases the "party concept is postponed" in favour of attracting activists on the basis of their own existing - confused and inadequate - politics.

Beginning in the 1890s, British Fabians began to win support across Europe for the idea that revolutionism was an obstacle to winning reforms in the here and now. Most notoriously Eduard Bernstein's gradualism was founded on the notion that the "movement is everything, the final goal nothing". The Russian economists had wanted the party to drop agitation for the overthrow of the state in favour of workplace demands - but the 1905 revolution proved that workers themselves spontaneously adopt political demands.



One fake front after another

However, the achievement of the 1906 Trades Dispute Act in Britain - affording union rights unequalled across Europe - saw a revival of Fabian-inspired liquidationism and calls in Russia for the winding up of the illegal party and the creation of a British-style Labour Party. Some comrades - for example, Pham Binh in the United States - seem to believe that liquidationism relates mainly or exclusively to proposals to end illegal party activity, such as in the early US Communist Party as well as in Russia.

The comrade states: "Calling for the liquidation of the existing Marxist groups does not make one a liquidationist in the way Lenin understood it, because we in America do not have a mass worker-socialist party to liquidate!" (Letters *Weekly Worker* May 10). But, as comrade Macnair explained, liquidationism also relates to the postponement of the fight to establish such a party.

Comrade Macnair moved onto a different misunderstanding of liquidationism that is prevalent amongst Trotskyists: it is associated with Pabloism and even with calls to allow internal democracy and factions within left groups (when the bureaucratic-centralist sects set up broad fronts, their "high degree of mechanical centralisation sterilises" these fronts), whereas in reality liquidationism is reflected in the aim of creating a Labour Party mark two and promoting the politics of trade unionism rather than Marxism.

The comrade concluded by reiterating the CPGB's position that we will "take seriously any initiative aimed at uniting the far left" and we do not make the adoption of our own *Draft programme* a precondition for such unity. But we do ask, "Does it have legs?" and unfortunately, in the case of the ACI, we have to answer in the negative.

In the subsequent debate comrade Callum Williamson took a different view to the PCC: we should encourage participation in the ACI, as it had "some potential for a counteroffensive". He was

also concerned that a failure to take part would leave us open to charges of sectarianism. Paul Demarty was more cautious: get involved if you like, he said, but do not volunteer for organisational tasks. It would not wash to point to the severe inadequacies of the ACI, while at the same time pretending to be enthusiastic for fear of being dubbed 'sectarian'. *Weekly Worker* editor Peter Manson also thought that false accusations of sectarianism were insufficient grounds upon which to offer support for the ACI project.

Other PCC members also spoke in favour of the motion. Ben Lewis pointed out that the ACI was "born of splits", grouping together WP and ex-WP fragments, so could anyone really claim that it was an initiative for genuine unity? New PCC member Soheil Frazad, while strongly supporting the motion, did think that we were sometimes "too negative" in our attitude to other left groups. She pointed out that it was difficult to get ex-members of left groups involved in the kind of partyist project we favour. Comrade Manson replied that that was why we orientated to the existing *organised* left.

John Bridge said that the ACI was similar to all the other halfway houses, but, unlike the SLP, SA, etc, it is "microscopic". While objective reality demands decisive action in favour of partyist unity, the left insists on watering down its politics in the latest broad front. It is no use trying to curry favour with the left by toning down our criticisms: "We *will* be unpopular."

Comrade Williamson came back in to make the point that it was better to "argue within the ACI rather than from afar". He proposed deleting the sentence from the motion which read: "We will not actively encourage comrades to join the ACI, but neither will we instruct any comrade already in it to leave."

Replying to the debate, comrade Macnair reminded the meeting of Marx's famous statement: "Every step of real movement is more

important than a dozen programmes." However, he questioned whether the ACI represented even *one* step: it was proposing to do what the Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Party in England and Wales were already doing via their various fronts - only with much smaller forces. And with the difference that it also intends to hold up a mirror to the likes of Occupy and UK Uncut. He concluded that initiatives like the ACI in reality reflect the "process of decay" that the left has been undergoing. It was indeed a form of left liquidationism deriving from the desire to "do something now".

When comrade Williamson's amendment was put to the vote it was carried by the narrowest of margins. The motion, as amended, was unanimously adopted.

Communist Students

Earlier the aggregate had debated the situation within and prospects for Communist Students. PCC and CS executive member Ben Lewis reported on the latest developments - including a recent online executive meeting which had also been attended by comrade Strafford and a couple of his supporters (executive meetings are open to all CS members).

Comrade Strafford had claimed the support of a third of all CS members for a proposal to 'recall the executive', following its decision to deny him, and other non-authorised comrades, editorial access to the CS website. Absurdly the comrade is now alleging that the executive is now 'recalled' by virtue of his putting the proposal.

While it would seem evident to most people that such a serious step could only be taken by a decision of the majority of the membership through a formal vote, comrade Strafford appears to believe that a one-third minority should be able to overrule the majority who may disagree with him. He is clearly confusing the right of one third of the membership to demand an *emergency national meeting* with the right of such

a meeting to recall its leaders if it so chooses.

The CS constitution states: "Between conferences an emergency national meeting can be called by either the executive or one third of the total membership of CS. The executive can be held accountable and is recallable by these emergency national meetings." The very next paragraph confirms that "all decisions are taken by a simple majority vote of all members present at the relevant meeting or committee" (http://communiststudents.org.uk/?page_id=453).

Comrade Lewis pointed out that the executive had already organised a conference (to be held in London over the weekend of June 9-10), so there was no need for a one-third minority to demand an emergency meeting. The conference is empowered to elect a totally new executive if it wishes. Comrade Lewis also pointed out that those supporting comrade Strafford's move numbered less than a third in any case (and some of them are not even paid-up members!).

Comrade Lewis called for a "dedicated team" to visit freshers fairs at the start of the new academic year in order to win new recruits. Like all student groups, CS has had its "ups and downs", but it has a key role as a body politically linked to the CPGB that fights for Marxist politics.

In the debate, several comrades likened the 'recall the executive' farce to an "attempted coup" just before conference, but, of course, it had no chance of succeeding. Others suspected that the aim was to liquidate CS by merging it with Revo, Workers Powers' youth group, and bring it into the ACI fold. Revo has emailed CS calling for "closer collaboration" between the two groups, reported comrade Lewis, and CS has replied welcoming its proposals for "formal talks".

Comrade Laurie Smith stated that CS had been "too lax" over its control of the website, while comrade Williamson said that this also applied to formal membership - some comrades who had attended CS events had not actually taken out membership or even been formally recruited.

In view of the resignations from the CPGB of the three comrades (all of whom were also CS members), the discussion also focused on possible failings on the part of the CPGB itself, with comrade Smith criticising the lack of integration of some recruits, while comrade Frazad wondered if we had not "made enemies" of comrade Strafford and co.

But comrade Bridge pointed out that we will always lose comrades as well as recruiting them - in this case they have left for what they see as a more activist milieu that is "with the movement". We do, however, need to take our own membership requirements more seriously, he said, and we should also strive to keep on good terms with those who have resigned.

Tina Becker called for a discussion on CS's priorities, and Sarah McDonald assured comrades that, while there had been problems and the loss of members, "better times will come". This was reiterated by comrade Lewis in his reply to the debate. It is normal for student groups to encounter a rapid turnover of membership, he said, but the project can "take off again relatively quickly" and build on its past successes ●

peter.manson@weeklyworker.org.uk

REVIEW

Rewriting the past

Roger Seifert and Tom Sibley **Revolutionary communist at work: a political biography of Bert Ramelson** Lawrence and Wishart, 2012, pp414, £25

Although the *Morning Star*'s Communist Party of Britain has been attempting to colonise the 'official' CPGB's history in its own interests, the results have been less than riveting thus far. We have been promised an in-depth exploration of the history of the CPGB covering the period after World War II - a project that is under the stewardship of the organisation's general secretary, Robert Griffiths. Meanwhile, the Communist Party History Group, a formation convened by the CPB (although apparently not limited to its members), is, at the time of writing, set to issue its first pamphlets.

However, this political biography of leading CPGB member Bert Ramelson - who was, among other things, the party's national industrial organiser from 1965 to 1977 - is a much more effective contribution by CPB supporters. Although its evangelising tone on behalf of Ramelson is somewhat wearing, this study is worth reading because it does attempt to engage with Ramelson's critics: a feature that puts it somewhat at odds with the more general culture of the CPB, where serious debate around its fragile orthodoxies is thought of as a relative luxury.

And this is very much a CPB-friendly study. Leaving aside Griffiths' own welcome for the book in a *Morning Star* review,¹ the remarks in its conclusion are unequivocal:

Whilst [Ramelson] was opposed to the split in communist ranks when it occurred, the Communist Party of Britain has tried to continue with a Ramelsonesque set of policies and strategies, and by and large adopted the *British road to socialism* that he did much to fashion over four decades. While all trace of the neo-Gramscians as an organised force has gone ... the *Morning Star*, the paper that they battled bitterly and unsuccessfully to control, remains as a daily expression of the political tradition that they tried to destroy (p350).

Some points need to be made in relation to the above quotation. First, it makes no bones about referring to the CPB "split" from the CPGB in 1988. This also reflects the thoughts of leading CPB activists such as Graham Stevenson and, more broadly, a growing feeling in CPB ranks that the breakaway's inauspicious launch was not, in any sense, the natural 'reconstitution' or 'continuation' of the CPGB, but precisely a split, and a fairly low-level one at that. This stance, in itself, reflects the thinking of Ramelson and a group of activists who, while backing the continuation of the *Morning Star*, looked at its 'party' formation (ie, the CPB) as something of an abortion.

For example, veteran Frank Watters, although generally supportive of *Morning Star* editor Tony Chater in his initial rebellion against the CPGB, put his views about the CPB split in relation to a disciplinary he was on the receiving end of in 1985:

... they [the Yorkshire District Committee] thought people [such as] Ken Gill, Ken Brett, Arthur Utting, Terry Marsland, Frank Watters and others would join the Labour Party or fling their weight behind the Communist Campaign

Group - a front set up to prepare for another breakaway, the Communist Party of Britain. None of these, to my knowledge, did so, as they had sufficient labour movement experience to understand that such splits in the communist movements in other countries were disastrous and played into the hands of the Euros.²

Similarly, Ramelson argued that "the worse thing at the moment is to allow ourselves to be provoked into a split" (p296). According to Seifert and Sibley, "Ramelson was less than happy about some of the actions of the [Morning Star] management committee and Chater. He thought that ... the description of the CP as an 'outside' body by [Mick] Costello had been politically inept as well as inaccurate, except in the narrowest, literalist way" (p278).

'Transitional' BRS

The London launch meeting of this book was peppered with references (including from its authors) to the so-called "ultra-left" critics of Ramelson, the CPGB's leadership and, implicitly, the *Morning Star*'s CPB. In the lexicon of the CPB, 'ultra-left', to the extent it has any meaning beyond being mere verbal diarrhoea, means people or groups to its left that are critical of it. Usually that includes the various brands and sub-brands of Trotskyism, groups from a Maoist background, along with the publishers of this paper, of course. Laughably, I have even heard CPB members (*sans* alcohol) refer to the decrepit New Communist Party as "ultra-left", which suggests that such terminology has about as much scientific veracity as that used in a medieval witch trial.

However, all this guff around the 'ultra-left' masks a deeper *amalgamation* of Trotskyism and 'official' communism around key strategic tasks. This is brought out clearly by Seifert and Sibley in relation to Ramelson, who argued in 1977 that the *British road to socialism* (BRS) was in fact a "transitional programme". He said:

It must be a programme the implementation of which challenges the ruling class and the only way it can be implemented is to mobilise the people who see the credibility, the practicality and the need for that immediate programme to realise their expectations. It is in the course of that sort of challenge and counter-challenge that the political consciousness and understanding of workers is raised so that they are prepared to take the next step. This is what the first stage of the transitional programme envisaged in the *British road to socialism* really is (p99).

For those of us familiar with the explanations of comrades from a Trotskyist background regarding the methodology of Trotsky's 1938 *Transitional programme*, the similarity is particularly striking. Seifert and Sibley reinforce the point further on in relation to Ramelson's interpretation of the CPGB's Alternative Economic Strategy (AES):

The AES, by addressing immediate concerns in a way which weakened the power of the big international



Bert Ramelson

monopolies, provided a bridge from the present towards the socialist future ... So radical advances could be won within capitalism, but such progress could only be secured and guaranteed by a socialist revolution (p104).

It is perfectly true that the workers, who start off in this analysis only wanting to challenge the ruling class or encroach on its power, cannot in fact secure gains without a socialist revolution. However, in the practice of the 'official' CPGB and its Trotskyist imitators, the bridge is everything and the strategy nothing. Therefore, the "bridge" or the 'immediate programme' remains little more than a confidence trick, resting as it does on a reactionary and incremental view of working class consciousness that degrades ideological struggle and the party itself, leaving 'people' as cannon fodder for the machinations of bureaucratic sects.

CPGB crisis

A glaring omission in this work is its inability to come to terms with the fact that the CPGB was in a state of crisis for much of its post-World War II existence (and not just in the 1980s after the Eurocommunists had come into alliance with a section of the party's right-centrist bureaucracy to take the 'official' CPGB into its final death spiral). We do get the occasional nudge that things were not exactly hunky dory when Ramelson was at the height of his powers in the party. For example, in relation to the CPGB's 1972 congress, Seifert and Sibley note:

The frustration was palpable: [the party had] a clear and unifying line, [there was] a reactionary government, a dithering rightwing leadership in the Labour Party, uplifting struggles and victories abroad, some outstanding fights by the British trade unions, and an upsurge in progressive ideas and actions throughout the country - yet the CP, a key mover in much of this, was unable to make the necessary political breakthrough, either in terms of mass membership growth or electorally. Why this should happen and what could be done eluded the leadership, despite some forcefully brutal self-analysis and the willingness to change with the times, new and old (p197).

The subtext of this passage is self-delusional on the part of the authors. The party's strategy could not have been that "clear" and "unifying" if, in

the last analysis, the CPGB was still struggling to make an impact.

Much of this crisis was due to the toxic reformist perspectives of the various iterations of the BRS, with its disregard for the leading role of a revolutionary party in favour of a reliance on the Labour Party to deliver socialism. Ramelson, much like the authors of his biography, was blind to such judgement. For example, in 1971-72, *Marxism Today*, the CPGB's theoretical journal, held an open debate between party members on the 'Strategy of socialist revolution in Britain'. Among a general critique from the left, Bill Warren raised some more direct points:

In discussing the BRS as a strategy of revolution in Britain ... how are we to reconcile the decline in the already miserable communist vote with the alleged success and correctness of our strategy over a period of no less than 20 years? These cannot be rhetorical questions, since a bold, determined leadership is stated to be crucial to the success of the broad popular alliance, so that the continued failure of the working class to follow communist leadership must necessarily imply that the central link of the entire strategic chain is missing.³

Seifert and Sibley characterise Ramelson as an "outstanding leader who contributed much to the labour movement in a period of industrial unrest and political uncertainty" - although they insist that "his achievement belonged mainly to the work of the CPGB" (p14). And that was the problem: Ramelson shared the familiar blind spot of the CPGB's leaders when they were asked basic questions about the inability of the party's strategy to furnish a political breakthrough for the party.

In reply to Warren, Ramelson, ignoring the methodology of the BRS and its apparent suitability for 'unique' British conditions, suggested that communist parties in France, Japan and Italy were doing rather well with a similar strategy; and that anti-BRS parties to the CPGB's left were not prospering in parliamentary or union elections (unsurprising really, as the CPGB was a strategic roadblock that the sects had no strategy to overcome). He continued his rather evasive reply in the following vein:

Is Bill Warren aware that the Labour Party conference and EC, and, as a consequence, the parliamentary Labour Party, has voted against the Industrial Relations Act, against the present proposals for entry to the [European Economic Community], against the Housing Finance Bill, is pledged to unconditional repeal of the Industrial Relations Act, has changed its policy on Vietnam and supported the [Upper Clyde Shipbuilders]? It's far from a revolutionary position, but to fail to see it as a shift to the left, and above all the forces and the movement which brought it about, shows Bill Warren's total inability to understand the strategy of the BRS.⁴

It is true in one sense that the CPGB left did not understand the "strategy", given that the party had been in decline

for years and was obviously entering a terminal crisis, despite the alleged genius of the BRS. Power worker and CPGB member Charlie Doyle replied to the above passage: "How the above proves the revolutionary strategy outlined in the BRS escapes me, despite the importance of what [Ramelson] says."⁵

Union view

What of the CPGB and the trade unions? Surely there was no crisis in this particular realm under Ramelson's stewardship, given that the party was proving itself to be an important section of the leading part of the British working class? But the surface obscures a deeper prostration of the CPGB before the trade unions. The practical organisation of the party through the likes of factory and workplace groups had been in decline throughout the post-war period and Ramelson's tenure as industrial organiser had done little or nothing to reverse this tendency.

What the CPGB was left with in the trade unions was something much more politically tenuous. In the words of John McIlroy: "The picture suggested [from CPGB reports] was not a national community of political branches, but rather a shallower, personalised network of trade union militants - individuals or handfuls - largely concerned with industrial issues, sometimes with limited attachment to the CP ..."⁶

The networks that Ramelson carefully built and maintained were therefore not magically absolved from the CPGB's broader political crisis: they were part of it. Trade unionism was judged to be a significant vehicle for change in and of itself and it was this constituency in the party that the likes of Tony Chater sought to represent, only partially successfully, in the 1980s, by reducing communist politics to a simple reformist idea of tailing the trade union movement. Unsurprising then that, in such an environment, the theory and practice of communist politics *atrophied*.

Despite this study being a well-researched and interesting read, it is ultimately hobbled by the necessity of abstracting its subject from its crisis-ridden backdrop in the cause of providing a timeless recipe for CPB practice. In the words of a recent contributor to the *Morning Star*, Ramelson apparently "gave us a model which even today has relevance in the reconstruction of a communist and socialist movement".⁷ This means that the authors are often left with the cumbersome and self-serving myths that 'official' communism wove around itself in years gone by ●

Lawrence Parker

Notes

1. R Griffiths, 'Revolutionary tale of an enemy within' *Morning Star* January 11 2012.
2. F Watters *Being Frank: the memoirs of Frank Watters* Doncaster 1992, p162.
3. B Warren, 'Discussion: strategy of socialist revolution in Britain' *Marxism Today* August 1972.
4. B Ramelson, 'Discussion: strategy of socialist revolution in Britain' *Marxism Today* October 1972.
5. C Doyle, 'Discussion: strategy of socialist revolution in Britain' *Marxism Today* December 1972.
6. J McIlroy, 'Notes on the Communist Party and industrial politics' in J McIlroy, N Fishman, A Campbell *British trade unions and industrial politics: the high tide of trade unionism, 1964-79* Aldershot 1999, p222.
7. B Williams, 'A kaleidoscope of forces' *Morning Star* April 27 2012.

MONARCHY

The crown rules Britannia

The role of the elaborate jubilee is to draw attention away from the power and nature of the crown itself, write **Steve Freeman and Phil Vellender**

"Monarchy is only the string that ties the robber's bundle" - Percy Bysshe Shelley

The jubilee is an obvious time to reflect on the distinction between queen and crown. Many people think these terms mean the same thing. It is much better to see them as opposites, albeit interconnected - the monarch and the state. Louis XIV famously said, "I am the state", which is a definition of absolute monarchy. In contrast we see a hint of separation when Queen Victoria used the royal 'we': "We are not amused." This means two of them are not happy - the person and the institution - me and my shadow.

This distinction has its origins in the doctrine in the middle ages that the king has two bodies. One is the 'body natural' - the living human being. "If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die?" said Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* (Shakespeare's reference to Jews also reminds us that monarchs are not deities). But the second body is the 'body politic' - the institution of monarchy, which never dies. The king is dead - long live the king. The English revolution of 1649 made that distinction sharper.

Today we live in a capitalist world where everything is business. So our distinction is between two enterprises - the Crown Corporation and Royal Family Ltd. The latter is called "the firm" by the Duke of Edinburgh and has its HQ at Buckingham Palace. These are separate businesses which go together like a horse and carriage. The relationship between them is more like 'state capitalism' than the much vaunted 'free enterprise'.

The Crown Corporation - hereafter simply called 'the crown' - is, like any capitalist firm, a separate legal entity. It is the largest and most powerful multinational 'corporation' in the country. It has offices, or embassies, in nearly every country in the world. It has power not only in the UK, but the various tax havens or secret banking jurisdictions, such as the Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey, the Cayman Islands, etc. It also has a very extensive information-gathering network, which enables it to keep ahead of most of its rivals.

First the crown is the state, together with its various organisations: departments of state such as the treasury and home office, revenue and customs, armed forces, security or secret services, the police, Crown Prosecution Service, the courts and her majesty's prisons, etc. But it is much more than this. It is the people in charge who direct these millions employed by the crown across its territories.

The power of the crown is concentrated in its board of directors, which can be called the core executive or the political class. The phrase, 'The crown rules Britannia', means that it is the political class that runs the place - certainly not parliament and much less the people. The crown is not a democracy. The political class includes senior civil servants, the prime minister and his key ministers and advisors, heads of the security services and the joint chiefs of staff. The prime minister is the chief executive reporting weekly to the royal chair of the board.

The political class is mainly made up of bureaucrats who have clawed their way up from their Oxbridge



Behind the monarch lies the real power

education or through the military, with which "the firm" has a special affinity. The chair of the board is an hereditary position. Then there are professional politicians who are chosen by the prime minister to serve as the key ministers of the crown. They do not have to be elected because of the backdoor route through the Lords. But they all have to swear allegiance to the crown.

The crown is no more a democratic institution than Ford, McDonalds or News International. This is not to say that there is no democratic influence. This is not absolutism, but constitutional monarchy. But gone is the pretence that we elect the people who actually govern us. They are all *chosen*, although it helps if you have a seat in parliament (general elections do impact on the composition of the political class). However, a minister who is not trusted by the political class will always be an outsider and 'not one of us'.

The crown, therefore, has a kind of permanence at its core. Its strategic role in governing the country transcends the vagaries of elections. We often hear of one government defending its reactionary policies by pointing out that it all began under the previous lot. So it did. The crown and its policies in reality hardly change from one election to the next. They are merely given a face-lift and painted blue or red and pushed more quickly or slowly. Thatcher, Major, Blair, Brown and Cameron follow the same line of policy and serve the same financial markets.

If we look inside the robber's bundle we do not find the landed interests associated with aristocracy. We discover the City of London, its banks and financial markets with a long history of robbing people on a global scale. The crown has been their political instrument and the Bank of England their lever. The prime minister is the first minister of the City, whose priority is to protect and support them - for example, against a Greek default, the Tobin tax or European regulation. Today we are living through the 'great bankster robbery' carried on by the crown and the Bank of England, and fronted by the Tory-led coalition.

Crown and health

Since the defeat of the miners and the rise of Thatcherism, the crown has adopted the free-market philosophy. Governments come and go, but the

same free-market strategy rolls on. Tory, Labour, Liberal Democrat - it makes little difference to the policies of the crown. Naturally, this sameness and consistency is echoed in the mass media, which generally promote the crown's settled consensus of what are or are not the acceptable parameters for debate on any given subject.

Take the recent example of the NHS. The crown, in the guise of the department of health, has had a long-term plan to privatise healthcare and open it up as a market for competition. Private provision is now mainly responsible for the long-term care of the elderly. Privately run treatment centres set up by New Labour now control 5% of the profitable elective surgery 'market'. The private finance initiative financed, at huge cost to the taxpayer, Blair's hospital building plans. Now the private sector has taken over Hichingbrooke, the first NHS hospital run for profit, by Circle.

Whenever this has proved highly unpopular, ministers and civil servants have been prepared to retreat - and later return to the long-term game plan. Every government has taken it further. Now the coalition has taken a giant step forward with the Health and Social Care Bill. Tactical retreat may be necessary on some issues, as we have seen, but clearly ever more radical advances are in the pipeline.

Keep our NHS Public explained that "the health bill is the final stage in a 25-year privatisation project". Ministers of the crown are "using existing powers to abolish PCTs [primary care trusts] and set up 'pathfinder', so-called 'GP consortia' and making arrangements with foreign private companies to take over NHS hospitals, while the government has pre-empted such debate as MPs are inclined to have" (No8, autumn 2011).

Whilst parliament was debating the bill, the crown was busily implementing its policies like some invisible coup. Crucial entities underpinning the privatising agenda were put in place before even the second reading of the bill. Through various crown regulations etc, ministers were able to 'decree into existence' Pathfinder GP consortia for over half the country. Funds were used to make staff redundant from the strategic health authorities and primary trusts. The old system was virtually demolished before the bill was on the statute book and 151 PCTs

were put to the sword. Moreover, the new National Commissioning Board was empowered to appoint a chief executive, finance director and seven board members on salaries of up to £170,000. McKinsey and KPMG, who were consultants on the framing of the legislation, had been awarded big contracts to run GP commissioning.

Most of the left associate the crown with the queen and think that the latter is irrelevant to our increasingly difficult daily life. The opposite is the case. Whether the crown is taking us to war in Iraq or planning how to support the US-Israeli plans for Iran, or designing a privatised NHS or school system, it is a process largely impermeable to the needs of the people. Naturally, none of this is immutable or inevitable and the economic fragility of the economy is becoming ever more evident. Our political response to the crisis of the crown should not be another government of the crown, but another system of government altogether - one built on those truly democratic principles of popular sovereignty and accountability.

Queen rules the waves

Her majesty has a significant political role in this nation's drama as the Great Distraction. The modern monarchy is a camouflage for the crown. We are so mesmerised by the continuous royal cavalcade and its pretensions of powerlessness and irrelevance to real life that we do not look in the opposite direction and notice the unaccountable power of the crown being wielded daily by the political class.

Monarchy is the UK's national secular religion. Monarchy is the nation represented as a perfect world with a grateful people on their knees. Of course, the queen is not a god, but a living, breathing human being, dressed up for the job. Yet this ritual of worship, exemplified by the jubilee, idealises monarchy as a kind of living god which has come to walk among us mere mortals - or, most tellingly, 'subjects'.

The jubilee will promote the queen as the nation's grandmother. In her March 20 speech to parliament she spoke of "national qualities of resilience, ingenuity and tolerance". It is surely inspiring to be praised by our national icon. She thinks we are

great! We should surely reciprocate by welling up with pride.

The queen went on to say: "It is my sincere hope that the diamond jubilee will be an opportunity for people to come together in a sort of neighbourliness and celebration of their own communities." We could all echo this sentiment as republicans, without hostility or any hint of cynicism. There is no reason to see her speech as anything other than sincere, for its contents explain why the motivation for the genuine affection which many of her subjects have for her is not simply rabid royalism.

However, shouldn't we all wake up and smell the Darjeeling? Coming together for a crown-organised jubilee can never offer more than an illusion of unity in our class-divided society, in which rich and poor and those stuck in the middle are fighting for, or fighting to diminish, democracy and social justice. The monarchy is *not* neutral in this struggle, but the embodiment of a conservative, class-ridden society. With the queen, or her male offspring, safely enthroned in Buckingham Palace there will never be even the chance of substantive change. The subliminal message is: 'Britain's hereditary (ruling) class system has existed since time immemorial and will continue ever more - alongside its hereditary monarchs.'

In reality, the chief function of monarchy is not simply the nation's enslavement to an ideology of a royalist-based patriotism. It is, rather, the Great Distraction - away from where the true levers of power are located within the structure of the crown. The crown not only governs the county and determines so much of our lives, but, moreover, in an epoch of its growing economic crisis, increasingly threatens our hard-won rights and liberties. The monarch ties the robber's bundle precisely because the inherent danger to democracy of the unelected and unaccountable crown is concealed by the nation's grandmother smiling sweetly.

Shelley's was an acute observation. However, an enduring misconception concerning the crown and monarch goes some way to explain why republicanism is so weak. The left fails to distinguish between the Crown Corporation and Royal Family Ltd. This error produces a weak version of republicanism, one focused almost entirely on the queen and whether she 'costs too much' or arguing about how much of 'our national income' she generates through tourism.

The crown and the class it represents know they cannot put a price on the undoubted lift to the nation's morale, brought low by an ever deepening recession, which the jubilee will bring. For, when the queen dispenses honours, waves, shakes hands, visits foreign countries or meets adoring crowds, she will distract both from the crisis that the crown is now presiding over, and, more importantly, our principal role in *paying* for it (and her!). Thus, as the crown's leading player in this elaborate jubilee spectacle, the queen will once again execute her main role, which is to draw attention away from the power and nature of the crown itself, and the current fall in our living standards, by momentarily banishing the storm clouds of recession somewhere over the horizon.

No wonder Cameron, the crown's current CEO, is smiling ●

MONARCHY

Republicanism and the form of working class rule

As the constitutional monarchy state proclaims its commitment to privilege and the status quo, **Michael Copestake** looks back to a rather different tradition

There were many who doubted whether or not the monarchy of the United Kingdom could survive the cultural transformations which it has had to undertake in order to appear, in the language of marketing, 'relevant'. How can the official ideology of 'meritocracy' within a modern consumer society co-exist with the monarchical system of heredity, elitism, crowns and thrones - not to mention the distorted personalities themselves, whose moral hypocrisies and personal failings have been so openly exposed in the age of the 'royal soap opera'?

For the time being at least it continues to do so - a task made simpler by the fact that there has been no powerful, organised force for republicanism for well over 150 years. Apart from a very small part of the revolutionary left, we are left with the likes of Republic - a liberal, single-issue grouping that, because of its lack of any working class political programme for an alternative state form, can only add to the situation whereby republicans appear or are portrayed as cheerless, middle class *Guardianista* types, out of touch with the earthy, emotional affinity for the monarchy held by the 'patriotic commoner'.

Ironically, of course, it is all the things considered so distasteful, so backward, so offensive by republicans and democrats that form the selling points, the appeal of the institution, as sold to us by the bourgeois state, parties and media in a single, loud, loyal voice. Given that the official period of celebrations for the diamond jubilee of Queen Elizabeth Windsor is upon us, we are about to experience a surfeit of fawning admiration for an institution and its personalities from an establishment determined to reinforce yet again the brilliancy of the qualities which the monarchy allegedly embodies in the interests of us all.

It goes without saying that most of it is superficial: the stability assured by a permanent figurehead, a head of state who stands 'above' the grubby world of day-to-day politics, the tourists who flock in, observing it all in awe and wonder, the continuity it symbolises with our glorious history - it is unfortunate that the only piece of plastic tat with a union flag printed on that one can *not* obtain is the diamond jubilee sick bucket. And if anyone should point out that the monarchy represents the opposite of democracy, there is another angle that can be pushed: 'Oh come on! It's just a harmless bit of fun.'

The real importance of the institution for Marxists lies not just in its symbolic power as an emblem of national unity, class harmony and so on, but in its central role within the quasi-democratic constitutional monarchy state itself, through which we are ruled. Most obviously the monarchy is a potential rallying point for extra-parliamentary reaction in a time of social crisis, which retains the power to choose the prime minister and dismiss governments. Only the *bourgeois* republican treats the question of the monarchy as separate from the nature of the state and bourgeois rule as a whole, whereas

for us it is viewed in the context of our proposals to replace one form of class rule with another.

Unfortunately, most of the left thinks about the monarchy in the same way as bourgeois republicans - seeing it as a separate or peripheral question when it comes to workplace exploitation and the rule of capital; or at best accepting that the monarchy is a reactionary institution, but believing that, once the masses have been prodded through the various stages of the economic struggle, such questions will solve themselves. Meanwhile, there is no mileage in agitating about the constitution, when the real class struggle takes place in the factory or office. But for us identifying, analysing and attacking the role of the monarchy during such a high-profile period of official jubilation is a way to open up a discussion on the system of government as a whole and on the working class alternative. Or, at least it *should* be.

Dead dogs

In his writings published as *Where is Britain going?* Leon Trotsky spends much of the sixth chapter, 'Two traditions', attacking the spineless Labourite "dogs" who fudge so terribly on the questions of state power and the monarchy, all preferring to talk of an abstract socialism rather than emulate the intransigent stance taken by the dead "lion" of the bourgeois revolution in England, Oliver Cromwell. Cromwell viewed the task of replacing feudal state forms with the rule of the new bourgeois class with uncompromising clear-sightedness. Who are the lions today, we may wonder?

Cromwell, says Trotsky, was an intensely political revolutionary, the Lenin of his day even, who pushed forward the interests of the rising bourgeois class "without holding anything back". And he stresses the importance of relearning the history of the bourgeois revolution for British workers in the present, given that "The British bourgeoisie has erased the very memory of the 17th century revolution by dissolving its past in 'gradualness'."

He goes on: "Cromwell's task consisted of inflicting as shattering a blow as possible upon the absolutist monarchy, the court nobility and the semi-Catholic church..." In short, the smashing of the existing state order and its replacement with another: the same task that the working class now faces.

The bourgeois revolution in England was not a completely straightforward process that saw the rising bourgeoisie assert its own political class interest against the monarchy and the elements of feudal power which stood behind it. The burgeoning of capitalist manufacture and capitalist social relations in town and country gave rise to a growing class of capitalists large and small - from finance and banking to farming and industrial capital. It was parliament that provided this class with its voice - a class which, in claiming greater and greater 'liberty' (power) for itself as opposed to the aristocracy, drew the political representatives of the two social



Oliver Cromwell: no holding back

classes into open antagonism.

Under Charles I parliament was a mostly powerless body, but its consent, as representatives of the moneyed classes, was nevertheless considered desirable by the monarch in order to raise funds for the crown through the levying of taxes - for which purpose it could be summoned and dismissed at the monarch's will. Having been denied adequate representation within the existing set-up, this class was faced with the historical task of smashing and remaking state power to serve itself.

This was to be an extended process that turned around the English Civil War and culminated in the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688, when the protestant, William III of Orange, was invited to take the throne by parliament from King James II, a Catholic who was attempting to wind back the clock on the concessions forced upon the monarch by parliament. A Bill of Rights was drawn up by parliament to entrench the subordinate role of the monarchy for good - this time under parliament, the rule of the bourgeoisie.

The English Civil War itself is generally held to have lasted from 1642-51, the period when the fighting actually took place, and was followed by the execution of King Charles I and the creation of a republic, the Commonwealth of England (1649-53), and then the more or less personal dictatorship of Cromwell himself as Lord Protector from 1653 until his death in 1659. During which time, as Trotsky points out, he in fact embodied in a single person the dictatorship of a new social class, which required the intense concentration of power in order to advance its interests.

After the revolution followed the period of restoration, which saw Charles II elevated to the throne by a parliament reconvened, ironically, by the army, which had previously driven the revolutionary process but had then been purged, by Cromwell, of its radical elements such as the proto-communist Levellers. But the point is that the restoration monarchy did not represent full-blown counterrevolution, but an accommodation that entailed significant concessions to parliamentary power. That placed the relation between crown and

parliament where the moderate factions in parliament had wanted it - they would have got it earlier, were it not for the republican radicalism that had taken root in the New Model Army. It was a case of two steps forwards and then only one step back.

But why this desire for 'moderation' and retaining the monarchy?

Even Cromwell did not begin as a republican. A farmer who had come into an inheritance, Cromwell is pretty archetypal for the social position of the progressive bourgeois of the time, as were his pre-revolutionary views on the monarchy, wishing for a constitutional monarchy subordinated to the will of a parliament of propertied men.

What led him down the road of republicanism was the stubbornness of the king and the creation by parliament of an army for its own defence. As well as being an army, it was a political force, becoming the pre-eminent political force, above even parliament in time. This army had to be both militarily capable of besting the royalist forces in the field and set politically against the divine right of the monarch; they had to believe in the revolution, the politics of republicanism and democracy. It was not just a military, but a *political* vanguard.

As in the later French Revolution, the forces brought into being on the basis of a set of democratic ideas led events to run far beyond what the moderate parliament had ever envisioned. It was not long before soldiers' democracy and political debate took root in the army itself, as it was transformed into the vanguard of the bourgeois revolution and threatened to take its ideas too far: to go beyond the form of rule which corresponds with the rule of capital - that is, a state form accountable to property owners, in this case a parliament composed of the members of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie - and to declare that democracy should not just be for the propertied, but for all. In other words, a form of rule corresponding to the interests of the proletariat - as yet still only half formed as a social class.

That democratic-republican ideas threaten the capitalists with the rule of the working class is the reason why

the history of the English Revolution is played down and revised, as is the history of the French Revolution in a similar way.

In his 1850 review of *Pourquoi la révolution d'Angleterre a-t-elle réussi?* ('Why did the English revolution succeed?'), François Guizot's history of the English Civil War, Karl Marx criticised the French historian for failing to understand that the revolution was far from a mere rebalancing of the relationship between the monarch and parliament, but the result of a class struggle that the feudal forces had lost and which the bourgeois class had won: "Thus, to him, the whole revolution consists only of this: that in the beginning both sides, crown and parliament, overstep their bounds and go too far, until they finally find their proper equilibrium under William III and neutralise each other." Marx added: "Guizot finds it superfluous to mention that the subjection of the crown to parliament meant subjection to the rule of a class." Even old fashioned bourgeois-democratic radicalism is too dangerous to be celebrated, and in practice no bourgeois party has advanced any thoroughgoing democratic measures in Europe since 1848 for exactly this reason.

If the subjection of 'democracy for the monarch' to 'democracy for property' means revolution and the fresh domination of one class over another, then it is confusing why the left fails in large part to understand that the subjection of 'democracy for property' to the proletarian democratic-republic cannot but mean the same in our era and should be at the top of our list of priorities. The bourgeoisie understands this, so why not the Marxists?

It is for these reasons that the Levellers had to be suppressed, and that Marx and Engels were so supportive of Chartism in their own period and why Marx, Engels and Kautsky were so effusive with praise for the Paris Commune - a form of the democratic republic, the "specific form of the dictatorship of the proletariat", in Engels's words.² Even the substantial political foundation of Trotsky's own 1934 *A programme of action for France*, though containing some of the tropes later to be given greater emphasis in his *Transitional programme*, are a series of democratic-republican demands for the smashing and recreating of the French state as a tool of working class power.³

Chartism and democracy

Just as the New Model Army was the vanguard of the 'democratic' bourgeoisie *because* it, and Cromwell especially, understood the political tasks it faced, the Chartist movement - an independent working class *political* movement - developed, in Marx's words, into "the most conscious class struggle which the world has ever seen - the whole of this class struggle of the Chartists, the organised party of the proletariat, against the organised state power of the bourgeoisie..." Famously the six demands of the People's Charter were: universal (male) suffrage; secret ballots; no

property qualification for members of parliament; pay for members of parliament; constituencies of equal size; and annual elections.

So much for Occupy, saving the NHS and 50 different anti-cuts fronts (not that these things cannot be or are not important). The Chartists put forward a wholly political programme for a radical democracy. It was insufficient for social revolution - though Marx in 1848 was very enthused that this would happen - but nevertheless displaying class awareness of the obvious truth that real democracy is death for the capitalist state. The existence of a mass working class party and an understanding of this fact are the two most wounding absences from the left in its present form, and are absences which its theorisations of economism, broad fronts and bureaucratic centralism only reinforce and perpetuate.

For Trotsky in his *Where is Britain going?* the democracy of Chartism is the second of the ‘Two traditions’ with which all British workers and Marxists should reacquaint themselves (the first being the republicanism of the English Civil War, of course). He writes: “A familiarity with both these periods is vital to every conscious British worker. The clarification of the historical significance of the 17th century revolution and the revolutionary content of Chartism is one of the most important obligations for British Marxists.”⁴

And for the CPGB democratic-republican principles are not just good for the state, which is in dire need of a Paris-Commune style makeover. The very same principles, because they are the form of proletarian democracy - as against the constitution, the ‘democracy for property’ and so on - are good for the workers’ movement too, for the regimes of power that exist within our own organisations, be they big or small. Either there is working class democracy or there is the control of the working class by someone else, whatever their subjective intentions. The most obvious examples relevant to the left here are the trade unions and the left groups themselves - both in clear need of the principles of election and recallability, the worker’s wage and honest Marxist politics rather than backroom deals

HOPI Joining forces against war and expulsions

Comrades from the Hands of the People of Iran campaign in Milton Keynes have responded to the recently escalating sanctions and war threats against Iran by working closely with the local Stop the War group to build opposition to any imperialist intervention. We worked together to organise a joint Hopi/STW public meeting to discuss these issues on Monday May 28.

Over 20 people attended, which for a town such as Milton Keynes is reasonable. The meeting was addressed by Israeli socialist Moshé Machover, who is also a member of the Hopi steering committee. He gave an excellent opening, looking at the reasons why policymakers in the US and Israel want to see a change of regime in Iran and why some actively favour the methods of war to achieve such an aim. Moshé examined the long-term strategic interests of Zionism in Israel in particular. He argued that these interests flow from the fact that Israel is a certain type of colonial settler state, based upon the total exclusion of the indigenous population, to the extent that this can be achieved (unlike some other settler states such as South Africa and Algeria, where native peoples were needed for their labour-power).

With Israel’s determination to scupper any hopes that Palestinians have for an independent sovereign state on the one hand, and the Zionist nightmare of ‘demographic peril’ (the fear that the growing Palestinian population will increasingly outnumber

and bureaucratic toadying on reformist platforms.

The left and republicanism

So what does the left have to say about the monarchist state today? As far as the larger contingents go, the Socialist Workers Party and the Socialist Party in England and Wales, the answer is, in line with their politics, very little. This week’s *Socialist Worker* has Judith Orr taking a rake to the all-too-modern pomp and circumstance of the royal ‘firm’,⁵ but, despite the odd fun article like this, the SWP has no programme at all, let alone one that lays down the form of the state appropriate to working class rule, the thing we are meant to be in this business to achieve.

In the *ABC of communism*, that classic Bolshevik text by Nikolai Bukharin and Yevgeni Preobrazhensky, we are told: “Every party pursues definite aims, whether it be a party of landowners or capitalists, on the one hand, or a party of workers or peasants, on the other. Every party must have definite aims, for otherwise it is not a party.” And “All the aims which a party representing the interests of its class vigorously pursues constitute the party programme. The programme is for every party a matter of supreme importance. From the programme we can always learn what interests the party represents.”⁶ But not in the case of the programmeless SWP.

Like the SWP, *The Socialist* comes out with an article suitable for the occasion. But the introduction to Becci Heagney’s piece explains that the diamond jubilee is “more than just a diversion” because “the existence of the monarchy poses a potential threat to the fight against austerity and more”.⁷ To be fair, the article itself is rather better, but the introduction shows where SPEW’s economistic priorities lie.

Returning to *Where is Britain going?* - this time the fifth chapter, ‘On the question of revolutionary force’ - Trotsky gives an excellent contrary indicator for the importance of the question of the monarchy: “The British bourgeoisie itself has well understood the danger of even the most fictitious monarchy. Thus in 1837 the

British government abolished the title of the Great Mogul in India and deported its incumbent from the holy city of Delhi, in spite of the fact that his name had already begun to lose its prestige. The English bourgeoisie knew that under favourable circumstances the Great Mogul might concentrate in himself the forces of the independent upper classes directed against English rule.”⁸

As Marxists it is similarly incumbent on us to be resolutely against the monarchy in our own country (however “fictitious” it is considered) - an institution we do not separate from the state as a whole. Indeed Trotsky rounds on those who “proclaim a socialist platform”, but who are soft on the question of the monarch. He was referring then to the likes of Ramsay MacDonald and other Labour leaders, but today he would be talking about much of the far left. *Our* task, he emphasises, is “the complete overturn of society and purging it of all elements of oppression. Such a task, both politically and psychologically, excludes any conciliation with the monarchy.”⁹

Of course, today’s left does not exhibit “conciliation” to the monarchy in the same way as did MacDonald. Nevertheless, its downgrading of *political* questions - questions of how we are ruled - in favour of trade union-type struggle is a form of “conciliation” too.

Notes

1. K Marx and F Engels, ‘England’s 17th century revolution: a review of François Guizot’s 1850 pamphlet, *Pourquoi la révolution d’Angleterre a-t-elle réussi?*’ (www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1850/02/english-revolution.htm).
2. F Engels, ‘A critique of the draft social democratic programme of 1891’ (www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1891/06/29.htm).
3. Particularly obvious in sections 14, 15, 16 and 17: *A programme of action for France* (www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1934/06/paf.htm).
4. L Trotsky *Where is Britain going?* chapter 6: ‘Two traditions’ (www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/britain/wibg/ch06.htm).
5. ‘The royal tradition invented’ *Socialist Worker* June 2.
6. N Bukharin and Y Preobrazhensky *The ABC of communism* introduction: ‘Our programme’ (www.marxists.org/archive/bukharin/works/1920/abc/intro.htm#001).
7. ‘Monarchy - not just a “harmless relic”’ *The Socialist* May 30.
8. L Trotsky *Where is Britain going?* chapter 5: ‘The question of revolutionary force’ (www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/britain/wibg/ch05.htm).
9. *Ibid.*

acts are made unacceptable, and indeed made impossible, through our collective opposition. To achieve such aims we need political organisation and a programme.

Everybody I spoke to left feeling that the meeting had been a success. Everyone took home Hopi literature and many bought a copy of the *Weekly Worker* or of Moshé’s new book - *Israelis and Palestinians: conflict and resolution*. As well as Hopi and STW, the local Palestine Solidarity Campaign branch was also present with a stall. These are all good signs that people are taking the issues seriously and want to learn more.

As Moshé explained at the end of the meeting, this summer is a particularly dangerous one for the Middle East. We must keep a close eye on the situation and do all we can develop the ideas and organisation we need to pose an internationalist and socialist alternative to imperialism and Zionism. Hopi is very clear: we stand in solidarity with the Iranian people - not their regime - and oppose all sanctions and war threats. In Milton Keynes we will continue to work closely with the local STW group (which incidentally displays none of the sectarianism towards Hopi that we have experienced at a national level). It is also worth mentioning our gratitude to Milton Keynes trades council, an affiliate of Hopi, who financed the meeting with a £100 donation ●

Dave Isaacson

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.**

office@cpgb.org.uk

Become a
Communist Party
member

Name _____

Address _____

Town/city _____

Postcode _____

Telephone _____ Age _____

Email _____ Date _____

Return to: Membership, CPGB, BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX

weekly Worker

Trailing behind Occupy

How to learn nothing

The emergence of a written programme¹ from the Occupy movement is in some ways an odd turn of events. It has been a source of some excitement in the Anti-Capitalist Initiative, where there is an ongoing 'roundtable' concerning its significance.²

The debate on the ACI website so far is rather unclear as to the programme's significance - Luke Cooper (from the recent Workers Power 'youth' split) exults that Occupy now has "somewhere to hang its hat";³ while Stuart King of Permanent Revolution wonders if Occupy needs a programme at all, or instead further "action".⁴

In these terms, it is probably the case that comrade King has the better of it. This has to do with what Occupy is, and what has hitherto given it what coherence it has had. Occupy is an event, more than a political movement. Throughout the 'high' period of its prominence, its most energetic proponents were suspicious of being drawn into high-level political debate. This was not unwise, because to do so - and come out with an 'Occupy position' on this or that - would have fragmented a movement whose points of unity were tenuous at best.

So what was the event? It combined a tactic - occupying public spaces - with a generalised dissatisfaction in regard to the manner in which contemporary society is very obviously a stitch-up in favour of the most powerful. Those who most closely identified with the movement were very keen to position it as somehow beyond left and right, and in a sense they were correct to do so, because that vague dissatisfaction is a common feature of everything from the most wildly ultra-left offshoots of communism to 'lifestylist' anarchism in its different guises, to anti-Semitic conspiracy theories. All could, in principle, be united on a single campsite.

Except they couldn't, really - far-right elements rapidly discovered that they were not as welcome as all that. All well and good (not so good that, at several occupations, the far left was equally treated with suspicion) - but this introduced a dynamic of political differentiation. OK, so Occupy has to admit that it is at least a little bit leftwing. It is then faced with the fact that a very considerable chunk of that famous 99% is not; that, in global terms, a good percentage is in fact very seriously reactionary on important questions.

Occupy in its original event-form needs a programme like it needs a hole in the head - because having one undermines its claim to universality, to being merely the vanguard (though no doubt that is a dirty word for many) of almost the entire world. Yet a programme forces itself on Occupy anyway, because it is an unavoidable *fact* that Occupy does not, and has never, represented anything but itself.

Its 'Global Mayday manifesto' has the same rhetoric as before - the universal 'we' - but in fact it is the first *conscious* expression of a process of political differentiation that has hitherto been unconscious. That is an advance in itself, in some ways; but

there is still a reluctance to accept that, for this manifesto to have any use, Occupy (or whatever individual Occupy groups accept the manifesto) will need to become a rather more run-of-the-mill political organisation, that will have to fight for its perspectives like any other, and abandon its claim to being radically new or different.

What's the point?

If it has to say goodbye to its novelty value, then what is the point of its existence? Why do the occupiers not just go and join existing groups, whether far-left organisations, centre-left parties, green parties or simply the flotsam and jetsam of campaigning groups bequeathed us by the alter-globalisation movement - many of which stand on essentially the same political platform we have before us now? The bottom line is: to justify its attempt to enter what is, to put it mildly, a crowded market, the manifesto has to be pretty damn good.

Good, ultimately, it is not. In terms of tone, as comrade Cooper points out, it hits some of the right notes - the preamble places Occupy in the lineage of mass struggles past, at least. A fair proportion of the individual demands are supportable. Beyond that, it is a hopeless, and tiresomely familiar, hodge-podge of liberal, right-on causes. Where some feature of today's world is identified as bad, a corresponding proposal is identified that would render it good. Corporations are rapacious - they should face sanctions for acting in this way. People starve - they should have food. The environment is in danger - ecocide should be "internationally recognised" as a crime. This is ultimately the politics of the scream of despair. It is also very obviously written by committee - or 'consensus', as the jargon has it.

It is tempting to say, in mitigation, that Occupy is young, comprising people new to politics, and untrained in its theory and practice. This should not be taken for granted. It was not disaffected war veterans who occupied Zuccotti Park in the first place, but people who heeded a call from Adbusters.

Yes, many 'new faces' have been

involved - but the core of Occupy, especially outside the US, is pre-existing activist groups of different stripes, many of which are more than a decade old now. The iron law of consensus decision-making is that it becomes a test of stamina, and it is more serious activists who have the most substantial reserves.

It is these types who dominated the drafting process for this manifesto and, on this evidence, one would not know that any of them had learned *anything* in the intervening time - Adbusters perhaps learned that getting out of the office and into the streets was a more effective means of doing politics, on the whole, than facile *détournements* of print advertisements, but the concrete politics here are indistinguishable from the alter-globalisation movement of 10-15 years ago. That movement failed.

One cannot, nevertheless, be too hard on these activists, whose hatred of exploitation and oppression is at least clearly sincere, for their failure to recognise and learn from past failures. The means for doing so is fundamentally the party, which combines the experiences of the class with organised strength and - crucially - coherence through time. The custodians of the party - even if only as an idea - are the existing groups of the far left, however imperfectly they reflect that idea. It is *our fault*, in other words, for failing to build parties rather than unattractive sects, and indeed for failing to win the argument *for* the party when that inchoate scream against oppression is voiced by new generations of activists.

Why have we failed? Many reasons - but one of the most important is a political commitment to the veneration of spontaneous movements of this kind. Underlying this is the idea that 'struggle' - defined narrowly as strikes, occupations and other forms of direct action - is the principal motor of the mass socialist consciousness to which we are all committed to building. Regrettably, this prejudice is still in evidence in the contributions so far.

Programme

Comrade Cooper, comparing the

'Global Mayday manifesto' to the programmes of classical social democracy, writes "The Erfurt programme of German social democracy put forward a set of democratic demands so 'radical' that to this day some of them have yet to be won in the west - how many states have two-year, fixed-term legislative parliaments, full proportional representation in elections, and annual referenda on levels of taxation?"

"The term 'minimum' represented a militant call for working class mobilisation, because this democratisation was the very least the socialist movement was prepared to accept. The fact that many of these rights have not yet been secured, or won only to be lost, illustrates how democracy is far from a natural bedfellow of the capitalist system of production."

One or two terminological slippages aside (to which we shall return), this is certainly a far better account of the revolutionary thrust of the Erfurt programme⁵ than one would expect from a comrade who until recently was a member of an orthodox Trotskyist group - caricaturing that programme being something of a Trotskyist pastime. Yet the comparison to this offering from Occupy is frankly absurd.

The democratic programme of Erfurt is marked out by its *systematic* character - it represents an attempt to map out the political demands which, if achieved, would *in themselves* amount to the overthrow of bourgeois political rule by the proletariat. It is hardly perfect in this regard, but nonetheless it would represent a vast improvement on the 'programmes' touted by left groups to the masses today - and moreover, it was the result of years (decades, even) of theoretical work by Marx, Engels and others, not to mention sharp political struggle against rival trends in the workers' movement (Lassalleans, Proudhonists, Bakuninists and so forth), *and* it was accompanied by a lengthy text by Kautsky⁶ making that systematic character clear. The contrast with the 'Global Mayday manifesto', cobbled together by committee and effectively listing liberal prejudices,

could not be sharper.

Here we encounter Cooper's Freudian slip - the minimum programme was not the least social democracy was "prepared to *accept*", but was rather the minimum basis on which *it was prepared to form a government*. The distinction is important, because it is not spontaneous movements that form governments, but *parties*. The party question distinguishes a programme or a manifesto from a wish-list. It is clear on which side of this divide the Occupy manifesto stands.

There is, it should be stressed, a place in the Erfurt programme, and others like it, for demands that had already been raised by the workers' movement, which do not amount to a systematic whole. In a putative modern version, many of the arguments raised by the Mayday manifesto would have a place here. Yet they, too, are constrained by the theory which the programme embodies as a whole - there is little point, to recycle an example from above, making ecocide a crime under international law if seriously addressing the democratic deficit necessitates the abolition of 'international law' as such (which it does).

The proverbial elephant in the living room with the ACI debate is as follows: the contributors so far share, by my guess, the better part of a century's worth of experience on the organised far left. The ACI is founded on the basis that at least some of those years were wasted, and have seen the left arrive at this pass 'not fit for purpose'.

Paul Demarty

paul.demarty@weeklyworker.org.uk

Notes

1. <http://anticapitalists.org/2012/05/11/occupys-global-mayday-manifesto>.
2. See <http://anticapitalists.org/tag/occupy-roundtable>. This article is a slightly edited version of a piece submitted to the ACI website, where at the time of writing it has yet to be published.
3. <http://anticapitalists.org/2012/05/19/manifesto-is-important-moment-in-renewal-of-socialist-project>.
4. <http://anticapitalists.org/2012/05/22/occupy-does-it-really-need-a-programme>.
5. www.marxists.org/history/international/social-democracy/1891/erfurt-program.htm.
6. *The class struggle* - see www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1892/erfurt/index.htm.

Subscribe here

UK subscribers: Pay by standing order and save £12 a year. Minimum £12 every 3 months... but please pay more if you can. Your paper needs you!

Standing order

	6m	1yr	Inst.
UK	£30/€35	£60/€70	£200/€220
Europe	£43/€50	£86/€100	£240/€264
Rest of world	£65/€75	£130/€150	£480/€528
New UK subscribers offer: 3 months for £10			

Name _____
Address _____
Post code _____
Email _____ Tel _____

Send a cheque or postal order payable to 'Weekly Worker' to:
Weekly Worker, Box 928, London WC1N 3XX, UK.

I enclose payment:
Sub £/€ _____
Donation £/€ _____
Total £/€ _____
Date _____

To _____ Bank plc _____

Branch Address _____

Post code _____

Re Account Name _____

Sort code _____ Account No _____

Please pay to **Weekly Worker**, Lloyds TSB A/C No 00744310
sort code 30-99-64, the sum of £ _____ every month*/3 months*
until further notice, commencing on _____
This replaces any previous order from this account. (*delete)

Signed _____ Name (PRINT) _____

Date _____ Address _____