



# weekly **worker**

**Ernest Mandel and the  
strategic poverty of the  
Fourth International**

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# The EC-IMF-ECB troika cometh





# LETTERS



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

## Decline

Arthur Bough asks how the view that capitalism is in decline fits with the fact that the Chinese economy is growing at around 10% per year (Letters, May 24). The answer is that it fits very well.

Firstly, the International Monetary Fund predicts that China's expansion will be cut in half, as the crisis in Europe worsens. This year growth fell to 8.5%. A property slump is underway, which will see growth fall to 7.5%. This trend will continue, as the housing bubble deflates. Between 25% and 40% of China's recent growth consists of unproductive investment in property supported by loans from nationalised banks. The 10% figure was only made possible by China's nationalised banks' creation of money. Readers will remember that the growth of unproductive investment, regulation and nationalised banks is a consequence of decline.

Secondly, growth rates in individual countries do not prove there is a long-term boom underway in the capitalist economy as a whole. Gross domestic product statistics reveal nothing about underlying trends, such as the growth of the labour force or growth of productivity. In fact, it can be argued from other statistics that - even in China - there is little evidence of a long-lasting boom. For example, if surplus rural labourers are included in figures for unemployment, 20% of the labour-power of Chinese workers has no productive use. This is not a "marginal" rate, as Bough states.

Moreover, China's workforce remains excessively underpaid. According to *China Labour Bulletin*, the annual *per capita* disposable income of urban workers is approximately \$3,000. For rural workers it is roughly \$800. Rural workers have no entitlement to social security or welfare benefits. From 2005-07, Chinese employers withheld the payment of \$10 billion in wages. This is typical of a Stalinist system that relies on forced, semi-slave labour. The effects of extensive political and bureaucratic controls on workers' productivity are well researched. They are poor. Readers will also recall that the growth of these kinds of controls is evidence of decline.

Thirdly, GDP statistics are not compiled by Marxists. They do not indicate whether or not labour-power is used to generate surplus value. Put differently, they do not show the proportions between productive and unproductive capital. Bough's statistics (eg, global trade rising from \$12,000 billion to \$28,000 billion from 2002 to 2007) prove only that investment has expanded. They do not explain the nature of that expansion.

The view that capitalism is in decline holds that the expansion of investment in the 1990s and 2000s was an expansion of finance capital. Finance capital is unproductive. It attempts to make money out of money through bypassing the productive process. It is interested in speculative forms of accumulation, such as derivatives and futures. In 2007, the growth of investment in derivatives had reached \$596 trillion. This was a huge expansion. In 2008, \$582 trillion was wiped out. This investment was productive of nothing but insolvency. The contemporary long-term slump is a result of large corporations saving, not spending. In other words, there is no growth and no boom because capitalists refuse to invest.

Fourthly, Bough does not seem to understand Marx's basic categories. His remarks on Marx's distinction

between abstract and concrete labour prove either that he has not yet read *Capital* or he profoundly disagrees with Marx. Nor does he seem to know about the Marxist distinction between productive and unproductive labour. He does not have an idea of finance capital. This may explain why he thinks that Lenin's characterisation of imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism is "shoddy". It may also influence his false belief that Trotsky's theory of long waves is somehow at odds with the facts of decline.

Finally, readers interested in this debate might like to look at Hillel Ticktin's article, 'Decline as a concept - and its consequences' (*Critique* Vol 34, No2, August 2006, pp145-162; he has also written on decline in the *Weekly Worker*). Ticktin is the most articulate and informed exponent of the view that capitalism is in decline. He is therefore worth studying.

**Paul B Smith**  
email

## Wave goodbye

Arthur Bough is still refusing to face up to the unfolding contradiction between the new Kondratiev long-wave cycle, which started around 1999-2000, and world peak oil, which began around 2000-05.

Capitalism, since the industrial revolution began, has gone through five Kondratiev long waves, which have been statistically established, taking into consideration the movement of prices. The global economy is now in the sixth long-wave cycle, which started around 1999-2000. None of the growth phase of the previously recorded cycles has ever been undermined by the depletion of an essential, non-renewable resource, or occurred in a context of a global population of over seven billion people. In the case of oil, production grew annually in the period 1859-2005.

The question we need to ask is: which will prove stronger, the new long wave, or the global peak in oil production? For Arthur Bough the Kondratiev long wave can overcome all obstacles. This is a worship of the market - ie, demand-supply economics. I fear this is wishful thinking. My argument is that peak oil will undermine the Kondratiev long-wave business cycle of capitalism, which was simply a long period of economic growth in each cycle powered by cheap energy.

Rather than facing a rosy future for the next 25-30 years, what we actually face, as a result of the coming decline of oil production, is a period of permanent austerity and economic contraction. This process will affect all countries unevenly around the world. This period has already started and those who are looking for long-wave number six to save the day will be disappointed.

Arthur Bough hopes gas will come along to save the long wave. It's not going to happen. While there may be some uncertainty about the world gas peak and how much of it remains, one thing we can be certain about is that Britain's gas production in the North Sea has already peaked and is in decline. Gas fields in America, mentioned by Bough, are not going to help Britain. We are being kept afloat by Russian gas.

In fact, the downfall of capitalism is inevitable, unless the ruling class have some energy secrets they are not telling us about. This is not a Marxist prediction based on the circulation of capital: it is prediction based on our energy realities, as publicly perceived.

Capitalism is a historical anomaly which came into existence because of cheap energy. It is an economic system which to stay alive needs permanent growth, a fact which is in

contradiction to the ecological limits of the planet. As a result, capitalism is slowly undermining the conditions which support life. Capitalism gave rise to the modern long-wave cycle, but it was cheap energy which gave rise to capitalism. That is why we can wave goodbye to the Kondratiev long-wave capitalist business cycle, as we approach the end of growth.

**Tony Clark**  
email

## Questionable

That last article by Lars Lih on Lenin's '*Leftwing*' communism was very welcome ('Bolshevism and revolutionary social democracy', June 7). It's a positive assertion, compared to the politically biased criticisms of the likes of Gilles Dauve (*The renegade Kautsky and his disciple Lenin*). However, '*Leftwing*' communism is particularly questionable as a work for revolutionary strategy before a revolutionary period.

When Lenin said, 'Merge, if you will', it is clear from the context that his perception of the merger formula (the party as the merger of revolutionary socialism and the worker-class movement) was corrupted by this point, no matter what 'historians' like Hal Draper like to believe. The party ideal wasn't so much preserved as it was corrupted. If one looks at most left and ultra-left groups today, they see 'the party' and 'the movement' as being separate, when in fact real parties are real movements and vice versa!

Lenin's conception of 'Merge, if you will' was closer to Lassalle's agitate-agitate-agitate machine (although way more political than many left and ultra-left groups today) than to the institutional might of Alternative Culture and all things pre-World War I SPD, itself the German worker-class-for-itself at that time.

**Jacob Richter**  
email

## Shoddy

I thought the Lars Lih piece was a bit shoddy for him. To argue that Leninism post-1912 was not for a different kind of party than the RSDLP uniting the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks is clearly at odds with empirical reality.

It is true that in a polemic with the ultra-lefts Lenin can emphasise those elements of the SDP model which point to the need for a Marxist party, but it is politically weak to glibly pass over the central point of the Third Internationalist critique of Second Internationalism in the need for communists to organise separately from the reformist socialists as somehow just being a continuation of the Second Internationalist model.

**Alan Gibson**  
email

## They enjoy me

Heather Downs claims that "most mainstream sex researchers identify intercourse as being unsatisfactory for about 75% of women" (Letters, June 7). By strange coincidence, all of the blokes I have ever spoken to, including myself, have only ever had sex with the other 25%. Isn't that fortunate?

But, seriously, such a huge statement requires some actual source qualification: the size of the survey, the location, the group representativeness, and so on. We are told: "Most mainstream sex researchers have come to this finding", but what is meant by 'unsatisfactory' and how were you allowed to answer and qualify the answer? If we are asked, 'Is sexual intercourse satisfactory?' most people would actually answer, 'Well, not always'. But if we are only given a yes/no option, we might record a high

percentage of 'no'. There are so many unknown quanta in the question as to make the statement meaningless.

Most women, I would guess, are heterosexual, choose a male partner and choose sexual intercourse, along with the full range of options and techniques available to any other sexual tendency. If the claim is that most women reach an organism other than through penis penetration, I could easily accept that is the case, but that wouldn't mean they didn't want and enjoy that too. The suggestion here is that sexual intercourse is somehow a blokey thing and women have to be coerced, forced, bribed or otherwise have it imposed upon them, which frankly is an absurd suggestion, and actually deeply sexist.

**David Douglass**  
South Shields

## Thanks, comrade

Thank you to Simon Wells for understanding the situation for sex workers in 'End harassment of sex workers' (June 7). It is a good article that shows the complexity of the problem, with false figures circulating and the wrong approach of prohibition still defended in a broad part of the left. It is good to read strong support for decriminalisation and labour rights. Well done.

**Thierry Schaffauser**  
President, GMB sex workers branch

## Predators

In Simon Wells's article, yet again we see a socialist organisation addressing the sex industry from the wholly mistaken perspective that it is primarily an issue about prostitutes, or "sex workers". This stems from the idea that women are the gatekeepers of sexual morality, since we have no autonomous sexual desires of our own - unlike men, who are naturally insatiable. This assumes that the demand for this industry is in some way inevitable and natural. It is beyond question; it pre-exists the social relations in which it occurs.

The emphasis is therefore always on women (and, less often, men) in prostitution; harm reduction, state repression and - of course - choice. This is presented as in some way 'radical' and free from traditional notions of prudish moralism, particularly regarding women. Sadly not. The focus in prostitution has, historically, always been on prostitutes, not 'clients'. The market is beyond question - it is obvious why men buy sex, right? So the global industry is unchallenged. You say sex workers are workers like any other, but no other field is analysed as if initiated by workers, not employers.

The sex industry is no longer a marginal issue. But why are socialists so enthusiastic in their support for global capitalism's commodification of the human body? In what way do socialists anticipate their support of the sex industry's pandering to male ego will promote their stated aim (in the CPGB *Draft programme*) to "turn formal [gender] equality into genuine equality"? The *Draft programme* continues with aims to "Decriminalise prostitution to remove it from criminal control. Prostitutes to be provided with special healthcare and other services to reduce the dangers they confront."

Let's look in a little more detail at these mysterious, disembodied "dangers". An interesting formulation to find in the defining document of an organisation committed to the principles of dialectical materialism. Is no human agency involved in these "dangers"? We might look to the experience of women in prostitution to discover a bit more about the material reality.

"To know prostitution, you must enter some very dark places. On that

first night, I was gang-raped. That was the test to see if I was suitable material for prostitution. Prostitution is where any man can perform their porn fantasies on real women and girls. That is what is wrong with prostitution."

Rebecca Mott was 14 at the time, the average age for starting prostitution. Obviously then, many are younger. Any ideas on how these people might achieve happy, mutually satisfying sexual relationships in later life? You say you favour self-organisation of prostitutes. Is Survivors Connect what you had in mind? I guess not, because they include survivors of sex trafficking, which you believe is a figment of the bourgeois imagination. There are many other first-hand accounts by trafficked women available, presumably not subject to the cited accusation of methodological inaccuracy in the Poppy Project's research, which apparently invalidates any criticism in my previous letter (June 7).

Knowing the difficulty some readers have with believing women subjected to sexual abuse, it may help to read what punters have to say. "Men pay for women because he can have whatever and whoever he wants. Lots of men go to prostitutes so they can do things to them that real women would not put up with. Surveys show large numbers of men who use prostitutes hold some interesting opinions: that prostitutes cannot be raped; that men are entitled to do anything they want once they have paid; that they would rape women if they knew they could not be caught; that a woman who dresses 'provocatively' is 'asking to be raped'" (M Farley, etc *Men who buy sex* London 2009). That goes some way to explain how it is that between 62% and 85% of prostitutes had been raped by 'clients', according to studies in various countries.

Quite how the CPGB's policy of provision of "special healthcare" will resolve the problem of sexually transmitted infections with this level of rape and the ubiquitous resistance of 'clients' to use condoms is unclear. Will the "special healthcare" include similar tests on the 'clients'? Post-traumatic stress disorder, which is suffered by 68% of prostitutes, requires specialist therapy. Over half of 'clients' in recent research believed the majority of prostitutes had been lured, tricked or trafficked. Did it cause those men to make an anonymous report of their suspicions? Five out of 103 did so; their beliefs don't seem to have had much effect on their actions.

It is alarming that there seems to be a genuine belief that the sex industry has a timeless inevitability and should be sanitised for the welfare of humanity. Any questioning of this formulation is greeted with howls of protest and denounced as aiding and abetting state repression of perfectly healthy sexual expression.

"The abolitionist argument has never been about 'cracking down' on women who work in the sex industry, but rather has been about ending male privilege, male violence and the exploitation and abuse of women and women's bodies. It is about pointing out that, in a truly egalitarian society there is no 'deal' in which men are allowed access to women's bodies simply because they have the cash and women need the cash. In a truly egalitarian society we would not believe that men have this right or that men somehow need to use women's bodies" (Meghan Murphy). There is nothing complicated and there should be nothing controversial about this.

The ridiculous lionisation of 'personal choice' in the sex industry is remarkable for its unique character.



Is any other sphere of employment justified by the liberal mantra of ‘personal choice’? My cousin chooses to work as a manager for British Aerospace. Does his individual choice justify either ‘management’ of other workers or the international arms trade? Of course not. Even theorists of classic liberalism, in which the free individual is limited by the restrictions of the state, concede that conceptualising the ‘individual’ as pre-existing ‘society’ is deeply problematic, in fact contradictory.

The libertarian argument focuses on women exercising something liberals like to call ‘agency’, their ‘personal choice’, ‘individual preference’ and so on. The few women who find the sex industry a comfortable environment are not my primary concern other than in their capacity to act as cover for the 85% who do not. I am much more interested in the motivation of the men who use prostitutes who they know or believe to be underage, trafficked, controlled by violent pimps or otherwise unwilling to engage in an abusive simulation of sex. More than that, I’m extremely interested in their justification by socialists.

Do you imagine that the sex industry is unique in being unaffected by the forces defining all other aspects of life? Why are you so determined to agree with a challenge to one piece of research quoted in my letter and so reluctant to challenge the existence of trafficking and prostitution itself? Why so committed to maintaining an industry based on the fundamentally and self-evidently flawed assumption that men ‘need’ sexual access to women’s (and more rarely) other men’s bodies?

How can you possibly deny the obvious truth that the sex industry is both the cause and effect of sexism; not because all prostitutes are passive victims, but because all users of them have an overweening sense of entitlement? There is nothing natural or inevitable about the sex industry because there is nothing natural or inevitable about sexism. Why have you got such a low opinion of men? Surely, socialists must believe that men are not inevitably sexual predators. If not, we may as well all give up now.

**Heather Downs**  
email

## Adult

I read Simon Wells’ article and Heather Downs’ letter about prostitution with interest.

I prefer to use the word ‘escort’ rather than ‘prostitute’ or ‘sex worker’. The media stereotype of a prostitute is of a short-skirted, heroin-addicted young woman on a street corner with a pimp standing in the shadows in the background. The reality is very different.

The police are correct to target street walkers and brothels. Local newspapers are receiving hundreds of pounds each week from adverts for brothels. The sooner this income is stopped, the better for all readers. The aim should be to encourage all escorts onto the Adult Work website, which is the number one website in the UK for putting escorts in touch with potential clients.

When I last looked, there were more than 18,500 women in the UK with profiles on Adult Work. A brief look at the profiles shows that more than half of the women are either married or in some kind of relationship. All the hogwash about sex trafficking and drug-taking is disputed by those 18,500-plus women who freely advertise their services.

All the leftwing sects are very prudish about prostitution, particularly the Socialist Party in England and Wales, who, in an attempt to win over the feminists, do not see sex work as work at all. They are against prostitution because they see that it

reinforces the bourgeois institution of marriage. For example, it is better for a married man to see a prostitute than for him to have an affair with his secretary, which usually ends in divorce.

The recent book, *The sex myth* by Dr Brooke Magnanti, exposes the 10 most common myths in the media about sex, including sex trafficking and drug taking. Most of the women with Adult Work profiles are women who enjoy sex, some being swingers or ex-swingers who would rather earn £100 an hour working as an escort than work on the tills at Tesco for £6.95 an hour.

The website of the International Union of Sex Workers explains that in all the Anglo-Saxon countries there is a very high incidence of Asperger’s Syndrome, wherein many men find difficulty in forming relationships with women. Escorts, therefore, provide a valuable service to society. At the same time, escorts can enable men to get over bereavement or divorce. Escorts can also help shy or disabled men find sexual fulfilment. By seeing an escort a few times, the cycle of sexual failure and depression can be broken. Men can then concentrate on getting to know women as women without coming over as being desperate for sex.

Finally, the Adult Work website gives a glimpse of what sexual relationships will be like under communism. Some women, who are in relationships, will have sex with other men, as happened during the age of primitive communism.

**John Smithee**  
email

## You could laugh

We wrote to you on January 17 regarding our concern about the lack of any real unity on the left despite the most ferocious onslaught on our class in living memory.

We mentioned our concern about dwindling attendances at meetings of the Left Unity Liaison Committee in 2011. We asked why your organisation thought this had happened, so that together we could decide how best to promote greater unity across the left in the future. We asked that this situation be discussed within your organisation and a collective response be sent in by early March.

We asked three specific questions: Does your organisation want to help promote left unity? If so, why does your organisation no longer attend LULC meetings? What concrete suggestions does your organisation have that would promote greater unity on the left?

The response to the questionnaire provides further evidence to back up our initial concerns. Only one out of the 15 organisations which have been, to varying degrees, part of the LULC bothered even to respond - and that was the Socialist Alliance, which had initiated the questionnaire! You could laugh if this was not serious. Do no socialist or green left organisations want to work with others on a broader basis than any coalition/project they are presently involved with? Does no-one want discussions which could, at the very least, avoid electoral clashes and inform others of events that should be supported?

For what it is worth, the SA suggested that the LULC could set up a left notice board - a website that enabled left organisations to publicise their events. This could include announcing where candidates had been selected to stand - and any clashes could then be discussed between the organisations concerned. But it would appear, from the lack of interest in left unity, that even such a minimalist project would be unlikely to gain support.

This clearly demonstrated lack of any serious desire for left unity amongst socialist and green

socialist organisations will almost certainly leave our class without the coordination needed to combat the austerity programme being enforced by the establishment, despite a handful of commendable, though somewhat limited, examples of unity in action through coalitions and networks.

**Pete McLaren**  
Socialist Alliance

## Draconian

Shawn Carter raised an important point about free speech in last week’s paper (Letters, June 7).

I joined a group calling themselves the ‘Diggers 2012’, who are attempting to set up an eco-village on Windsor Great Park Estate. We set off from a community centre on Saturday, camping near Sipson village and hoping to set up a final camp on Sunday. However, even before we left the community centre on Saturday, the group was served an injunction threatening arrest for setting up the camp. The consensus was to continue the plan.

From Saturday onwards, police trailed the group, accompanied by two officers, occasionally a police car, and on many occasions a police van with officers taking photographs of the invading hoard. About three miles from Windsor we were met again, this time by two solicitors representing the crown estate, serving each of the group with more stringent injunctions. However, the group decided to carry on with the plan, with the police continuing to trail us.

Camp was set up outside the estate, but the next day part of the group entered it. Simon Moore, the Save Leyton Marsh activist served with an anti-social behaviour order banning him from “taking part in any activity that disrupts the intended or anticipated official activities of the Olympic Games or diamond jubilee celebrations”, was arrested and could now be sentenced for up to five years - all for trying to stop a patch of grassland in London being turned over to make way for an Olympic structure.

This is only one example of the way the police and the state use draconian powers to stop any form of legitimate protest and direct action.

**Arnold Kemp**  
London

## Bond theme

What was so interesting about the recent diamond jubilee were the cries of protest - that is, from the monarchists, particularly in the press. The rage of rightwing disappointment at the ‘fiasco’ was palpable.

Was it just the populism of the BBC (following the royal household itself, which has been trying to appear closer to the people since at least the late 60s)? Was it the disagreements over what constitutes the queen’s pop music? (What, no Handel, no Brian May?) Was it guilt at making two seniors stand in the cold for hours on the river? (The pageant organisers had two years and they couldn’t even allow for the weather - something your average barbecue planner seldom forgets.)

Or was it a fiasco because Britain is so disunited - by income and ideology - that even this long-serving family (in an institution which has served the bourgeois state since 1689) can no longer meet the demands of representing national values in an approved way? Those unhappy commentators, in mourning for past power and propriety, cannot though admit they find no satisfaction in the aloof/accessible balancing act that the royals, and their PRs, go in for now, as the ‘Firm’ continues to postpone the coming disaster - the succession of King Charles the Opinionated and his widely loved consort.

Time for a new ceremony, a new social bond, which can only be equality.

**Mike Belbin**  
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 17, 5pm:** Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by open discussion and *Capital* reading group. This meeting: Vol 1, part 1, section 4. Caxton House, 129 St John’s Way, London N19. Organised by CPGB: [www.cpgb.org.uk](http://www.cpgb.org.uk).

### Radical Anthropology Group

**Tuesday June 19, 6.15pm:** ‘Anthropology and activism’. Speaker: Ragnhild Frend Dale. St Martin’s Community Centre, 43 Carol Street, London NW1 (two minutes from Camden Town tube). Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: [radicalanthropologygroup.org](http://radicalanthropologygroup.org).

### No intervention in Syria

**Thursday June 14, 5.30pm:** Emergency picket, Downing Street, London SW1. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [office@stopwar.org.uk](mailto:office@stopwar.org.uk).

### Carnival of Dirt

**Friday June 15, 11am:** Demonstration. Assemble steps of St Paul’s cathedral, St Paul’s Churchyard, London EC4. Come dressed in black to show solidarity with those paying with their lives for resisting western mining and extraction corporations. Funeral procession to London Metal Exchange. Organised by Carnival of Dirt: [www.carnivalofdirt.org](http://www.carnivalofdirt.org).

### Refugees Are Welcome Here

**Saturday June 16, 12 noon:** All-Scotland demonstration. Assemble George Square, Glasgow G1. Stop the evictions, end destitution, no dawn raids! End detention and deportations now! Organised by Glasgow Campaign to Welcome Refugees: [glascamref@gmail.com](mailto:glascamref@gmail.com).

### Defend our pensions

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

### Build for October 20

**Monday June 18, 6.30 pm:** Organisational meeting to win support among LGBTQ communities for TUC’s anti-austerity demonstration. TUC Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1. Organised by TUC: [www.tuc.org.uk](http://www.tuc.org.uk).

### Stop austerity

**Tuesday June 19, 6.30pm:** Rally to build the TUC demonstration, Friends Meeting House (opposite Euston station), 173 Euston Road, London NW1. Speakers include: Tony Benn, Len McCluskey (Unite), Christine Blower (NUT), Katy Clark MP, Owen Jones, Salma Yaqoob, Clare Solomon. Organised by Coalition of Resistance: [www.coalitionofresistance.org.uk](http://www.coalitionofresistance.org.uk).

### Battle of Saltley Gate

**Friday June 22, 7.30pm:** UK première of *The battle of Saltley Gate*, South Birmingham College, Digbeth Campus, Floodgate Street, Birmingham B5. Tickets: £8 (£4 concessions). Banner Theatre production: [mailout@bannertheatre.co.uk](mailto:mailout@bannertheatre.co.uk).

### Unite the Resistance

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

### Keep Our NHS Public

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

### Stop deportations to Afghanistan

**Monday June 25, 7pm:** Meeting, Praxis Community Projects, Pott Street, Bethnal Green, London E2. Organised by National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns: [lisa@ncadc.org.uk](mailto:lisa@ncadc.org.uk).

### Resisting austerity

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

### Defend Council Housing

**Saturday June 30, 12 noon to 4pm:** National meeting, Sheffield Trades and Labour Club, 200 Duke Street, Sheffield S2. Organised by Defend Council Housing: [info@defendcouncilhousing.org.uk](mailto:info@defendcouncilhousing.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](mailto: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.



**ECONOMY**

# The EC-IMF-ECB troika cometh

Euphoria over the Spain bailout 'triumph' proved to be very short-lived, writes **Eddie Ford**

**N**o longer able to avoid reality, the Spanish government finally bit the bullet on June 9 by formally requesting a bailout from the European Union possibly worth up to €100 billion or more. Even then, after many months - if not years - of pretending that it needed no external help to prevent its heavily toxicated banking system from collapsing, the central government in Madrid is still attempting to maintain the fiction that its finances are essentially healthy and there is no need to panic.

Actually, or so we are told, rather than receiving a bailout - perish the thought - the Spanish government has been granted a "credit line" to use if and when needed. A mere capital injection "for those banks that need it", as suggested by Luis de Guindos, the finance minister - *not* a rescue of the Spanish economy as a whole. Do you understand? The amount eventually requested, stated de Guindos, would depend on the capital required by banks plus a "significant margin" - certainly one way of putting it. According to a very rushed International Monetary Fund report published on the day before the bailout - sorry, "credit line" - Spain's largest banks had enough capital to "withstand further deterioration". However, several of the smaller banks would need to "increase capital buffers" by a combined €40 billion and it went on to say that the actual requirement could be far greater - depending on "restructuring" costs, the "reclassification" of mortgages and so on.

Anyhow, the Spanish government has organised audits of the entire banking system's capital requirements and the reports are due by the end of June. Then there will be further audits that will scrutinise each of the major banks in turn - which might take a little bit longer. Only once all these investigations have been completed - so goes the story - will the Spanish government put its hand out for the cash. EU sources have told the financial press that the provisional offer made by the euro zone's finance ministers during a near three-hour telephone conference on the afternoon of June 9 (with the IMF's Christine Lagarde also participating) was unlikely to be ratified before the June 21 meeting of the euro group in Luxembourg, and might even have to wait for the June 28-29 summit of EU leaders in Brussels.

Fredrik Reinfeldt, the Swedish prime minister and leader of the Moderate Party - in reality rightwing - openly conjectured that the Spanish deal will turn out to be "one of the biggest financial rescues in recent history". He could well be right. Fitch, one of three horsemen of the credit-rating apocalypse (alongside Standard and Poor's and Moody's), which cut Spain's credit rating by three painful notches on June 7, has estimated that the country's banks will need up to €100 billion to stave off disaster, whilst JP Morgan has ventured that the "full requirement" could be as much as €350 billion. But remember, this is *not* a bailout.

## Bailout lite?

Whether genuinely deluded or just plain desperate, Mariano Rajoy, the Spanish prime minister - who only two weeks ago was strenuously denying the ridiculous idea that Spain's banks needed a rescue package - hailed the putative deal as a "triumph" that will reclaim the "credibility of the euro". Maybe it will even - though this is



**Pestilence, plague and poverty**

probably stretching things too far - spur on the Spanish football team to replicate its World Cup success in the Euro 2012 championship.

Yes, Rajoy confessed, this "credit line" should have been made available three years ago - dumping the blame on the previous Socialist Workers Party government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. He also warned that worse was to come despite the fact that Spain is already in a crippling double-dip recession with an unemployment rate of 24% - "this year is going to be a bad one". Meaning, amongst many things, that GDP will contract by at least 1.7% and unemployment will definitely increase. Something to look forward to, especially for the country's youth, given that unemployment among 15 to 24-year-olds currently stands at 51% - and that is without including the student population. Not to mention that 37% of all 25 to 34 year-olds in Spain still live with their parents due to the harsh economic environment.

Giving voice to the despair felt by many Spaniards, one 32-year-old unemployed worker said: "I stopped my life when I was 25 years old. I can't set up a family, I can't buy a house, I can't do anything." This in a country where, thanks to the irrational and obviously unsustainable property boom that started in the 1990s, there are a *million* unsold properties going to rack and ruin and hundreds of housing developments left unfinished by construction companies and real estate brokers.

But, regardless of the promised misery, Rajoy insisted there were positive features to the June 9 deal. For him, far from highlighting the fundamental *weakness* of Spain - a country totally unable to prop up or control its own banking system - the EU's "capital injection" was instead proof of the "success" that his government has had since coming to power in December. Namely, the vigorous way in which his administration has implemented and imposed the vicious austerity demanded by Brussels and Berlin. Rajoy went on to claim that if it had not been for fiscal consolidation, deficit reduction, book-balancing, privatisation, 'labour reforms' etc, the situation would now be far worse - we would be discussing the failure of the central Spanish state itself and *direct* outside intervention by the Euro-bureaucracy and others. Thank god for Rajoy's Popular Party. Indeed, Spain will press ahead and try to slash the deficit from 8.9% last year to 3% in 2013 - the target will be met, the plan fulfilled. Somehow.

According to Rajoy, there are other reasons to be cheerful. In contrast to Greece, Ireland and Portugal - under the iron thumb of the European Commission, European Central Bank

and IMF troika - Spain's financial package will come, apparently, without any humiliating strings attached ('bailout lite', as some have dubbed it). "No macroeconomic conditions" have been placed upon Spain, the prime minister declared. Whatever the terms and conditions of the EU loan, onerous or otherwise, they will be purely "on those who receive the loans" - and that means the banks, obviously. Furthermore, Rajoy made out that he came under no pressure from the EU leaders or anyone else to accept the money - another scandalous idea.

Of course, Rajoy is speaking utter rot - and everyone knows it, including the markets. The Spanish government came under intense pressure from the ECB, Germany, the Netherlands, Finland - and the US administration, it goes without saying - to make some sort of move to sure up its banking system before the June 17 Greek parliamentary elections. If truth be told, Rajoy's telephone must have been red-hot during the days leading up to June 9 - do something now before it is too late.

What the EU leaders and the Obama government want to happen on June 17 in Greece is an outright victory for the 'pro-bailout' parties - ie, a coalition government comprised of New Democracy, Pasok and any other 'sensible' parties. Any other outcome is viewed as potentially disastrous. But only a visiting Martian, or a fool, could actually believe this is going to happen. Just about every opinion poll has ND and Syriza - pledged, of course, to tearing up the bailout 'memorandum' - running neck and neck. For example, as I write, the BBC has ND on 27.4%, Syriza on 26.2% and Pasok on 13.7%<sup>2</sup> - and some actually have Syriza scoring a relatively convincing victory, getting between 31.5% and 34.5% of the vote<sup>3</sup> (thus becoming entitled to the 50-seat 'bonus', legal shenanigans aside). Surely the very best that the Euro-bureaucracy can hope for, unless the Greek military have other plans, is a *repeat* of the May 6 election - another stalemate.

Unsurprisingly then, the EU leaders were terrified that the political chaos unleashed by the Greek elections could topple the Spanish banking system and effectively bring the euro crashing down. To have such a fear is not necessarily a sign of paranoia. In the words of one EU official, there is a "need to ensure that the euro area is properly ring-fenced" and "protected from possible Greek fallout" - which by definition meant strengthening the Spanish banks, or at the very least signalling to the markets that some sort of action is imminent. Nor does it help that Cyprus appears to be getting out its begging bowl too, various

newspapers reporting that the island might request a bailout within days - Nicosia having being locked out of the international capital markets for a year. More contagion fear.

Rajoy's contention that Spain's bailout cash will come without strings is equally absurd - get real, Mariano. When the deal is finally written and signed off, the inevitable strings will look more like chains. EU and IMF officials will 'invade' Spain, scouring every government book, record and ledger for signs of fiscal incontinence or impropriety. Doubtless correctly, the *Financial Times* notes that the EC is "expected to impose tough new measures on Spain's financial sector overhaul" - which "some officials believe has gone too slowly" and thus "contributed to market uncertainty" (June 11).

If any more evidence was needed, the EU competition commissioner, Joaquín Almunia, bluntly told Spanish radio: "Of course there will be conditions" - seeing how "whoever gives money never gives it away for free". Have no illusion, he said, the IMF will be "fully involved in monitoring Spain's programme", even if it not contributing any funds. Similarly, German finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble declared that there will be "supervision to ensure that the programme is being complied with".

In other words, it will be the Spanish masses who will have to pay the price for the 'cheap' EU loans to Madrid - getting hammered by a fresh round of austerity measures that will impoverish them still further.

## Danger zone

Immediately following the announcement on June 9 that Spain will be asking for a "credit line", there was a brief stock market rally. However, the Rajoy euphoria - if you can call it that - fizzled out within 24 hours. Recoveries ain't what they used to be and by June 12 Spanish and Italian government bond yields were back in the danger zone, reaching euro-era highs. So the yield on benchmark 10-year Spanish government bonds hit 6.68% at one point - the highest since the mid-1990s - and Italian 10-year bonds climbed above 6.19%, levels not seen since Silvio Berlusconi's government collapsed and the technocrat Mario Monti was appointed as prime minister. In turn, Fitch downgraded the ratings of 18 Spanish banks.

The reasons for the renewed crisis, which refuses to go away, are not too hard to discern: investors are spooked by the sheer confusion surrounding the June 9 deal. Who exactly is going to pay what and when? Critically, no-one is yet sure whether it will be the European Financial Stability Facility or the European Stability Mechanism that will dish out the money to Spain. If the latter, scheduled to replace the EFSF next month, then that has disturbing implications for the markets. Firstly, ESM rules prescribe - and Berlin is very keen on all euro member-states obeying the rules - that the "credit line" will take primary position in the event of default, therefore forcing those bondholders who thought they were first in line into a secondary and much more riskier position. Then, as sure as night follows day, the value of those holdings will immediately start to decline when it dawns upon the investors - who always check the small print - that Spain has done little if anything to improve its overall financial situation. Suspicion is also

growing that Rajoy, maybe even the EU officials, were not aware of such an outcome when they agreed the deal - hardly inspiring market confidence.

Secondly, and much more obviously, is the brutal fact this new line of credit - no matter what the conditions turn out to be - is simply going to be added to the Spanish government's debt: the country's debt-to-GDP ratio has substantially increased overnight. In that sense, Spain's 'bailout lite' has just acted to hasten the day when another - and larger - bailout will be needed by Madrid.

Meanwhile, feeding into the feeling of crisis, evidence of slowdown and recession in the global economy is everywhere. Italy's latest GDP figures showed that the economy shrank 0.8% in the first quarter of 2012 and contracted by 1.4% year-on-year. As for the latest batch of statistics from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, they make for depressing reading. The OECD said its composite leading indicator (CLI) for China, which provides a measure of future economic activity, slipped to 99.1 from 99.4 in April - falling further below its long-term average of 100. Indeed, China's slowdown worsened in May, as its factories saw a further deterioration in demand at home and abroad - and recent data revealed the fourth monthly decline this year in exports from South Korea, as shipments to the United States, Europe and China all fell.

The OECD's CLI for India also showed signs of weakening, dropping to 98.0 from 98.2, again below the 100 average. Similarly, official data released last month showed that India's economy grew at an annual rate of 5.3% in the first quarter - the slowest rate in almost a decade. And there was yet more grim news from the euro zone, with industrial production falling 0.8% in April, according to official statistics. Production was 2.3% lower than a year ago, pointing to the worst downturn since December 2009.

Nor did the UK fare any better. Figures from the Office for National Statistics showed that factory output fell 0.7% in April, following a very modest 0.9% rise in March - on the tail of the most recent official data which demonstrated that the economy as a whole shrank by 0.3% in the first three months of the year, and confirming beyond any shadow of doubt that the UK is back in recession. In the opinion of the Ernst and Young Item Club - a prominent economic forecasting group - these figures "suggest that the manufacturing sector will be a drag on growth in the second quarter", which, of course, is "already expected to be disappointing due to the extra bank holiday in June". Who said the monarchy was good for business?

Now more than ever, Europe is gripped by a seemingly permanent crisis that could shatter the euro and send the entire world economy - already suffering - plunging into a slump/depression the likes of which we have not seen since the 1930s. Meanwhile, the main powers - not least the USA - seem paralysed and incapable of any action to prevent it ●

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## Notes

1. <http://nextgenjournal.com/2012/06/spain-bailout-provides-little-hope-for-unemployed-youth>.
2. [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-18251531](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-18251531).
3. [www.publicissue.gr/en/1684/varometro-3rd-wave-may-2012](http://www.publicissue.gr/en/1684/varometro-3rd-wave-may-2012).



## ITALY

# Turmoil threatens

While Italy teeters on the brink of a new crisis, the left is nowhere. Toby Abse reports on the machinations of the main parties

The long predicted 'contagion' seems to be spreading throughout the southern periphery of the euro zone, not least to Italy.

Last week the spread on its 10-year bonds jumped from 433 on Thursday to 442 on Friday, before soaring to 473 at the close of trading on Monday June 11. Whilst the final Tuesday figure was only slightly more - 475 - it had been 490 at one point during the day and the narrowing of the gap was due to an unusual loss of value of German bonds (perhaps because of transatlantic scepticism about the fate of the euro zone) rather than a gain in value for Italian ones. At the closing of trading on Monday the interest rate on these Italian bonds was back up to 6.03% and by Tuesday it rose further to 6.16%. These levels have not been seen since January and are once again moving towards 7%, the level universally believed to be unsustainable, triggering bailouts elsewhere.

The major American daily newspapers seem to think that the Monti administration has run out of steam. The *Wall Street Journal* drew attention to the fact that Italy is in recession and suggested that the 'reform package' could be "too much even for Mario Monti" (June 11), whilst the *New York Times* asked: "Will Italy be the next to fall?" and expressed the view that too many reforms were stuck in parliament (June 11).

It is indeed the case that the infamous labour market 'reform' - that in practice abolishes the protection offered to workers by article 18 of the 1970 workers' statute, despite some minor modifications belatedly introduced by the Partito Democratico (PD) in order to buy off the CGIL union leadership - has still only passed the Senate and awaits the ratification of the Chamber of Deputies, without which it cannot become law. Silvio Berlusconi's continuing attempts to turn a new draft anti-corruption law into something close to a made-to-measure amnesty for his own misdemeanours probably does not help Italy's image in the US - foreign firms would prefer a less corrupt business environment (to avoid additional costs, in terms of illicit commissions for politicians and the like, rather than because of any concern with financial morality).

American papers on June 12 were no kinder to Italy than the previous day's editions - the *Wall Street Journal* said that Monti's honeymoon was over, whilst the *New York Times* dwelt on the risk of contagion spreading from Spain to Italy. The international cult of 'Super Mario' in the mainstream neoliberal media that marked the immediate aftermath of Berlusconi's enforced resignation in November 2011 has lost any real purchase.

The negative international responses to Italy's crisis have not been confined to the US - June 12 saw a statement by the Austrian finance minister, Maria Fekter, claiming that Italy would soon be seeking a bailout. While she subsequently retracted this in response to outrage by Italian ministers and mainstream press claims that it was "a gaffe" by somebody notorious for such errors, it may in reality be an indication of thinking amongst the more hard-line northern Europeans - Monti had a very unsatisfactory telephone conversation



**Mario Monti: super no longer**

with Angela Merkel on the same day, getting nowhere in his efforts to suggest that a greater emphasis on growth was required to save the euro zone.

If a speculative attack on Italy has really started, this could be an appalling week. A €6.5 million auction of Italian one-year bonds was due to take place on June 13, followed by a €4.5 million auction of 10-year bonds the next day and a third auction of €9.5 billion worth of other bonds on June 15. By noon on June 13, the interest rate on the 6.5 billion annual bonds had reached 3.972%, compared with only 2.34% in May, returning to the worst levels of December 2011. There was also a fall in demand for the bonds - 1.73 billion compared with 1.79 billion at the last auction in May.

The Milan stock exchange fell by 2.79% on yet another Black Monday and continued to fall - by another 0.70% - on Tuesday June 12, when every other European stock exchange made minor gains. By noon on Wednesday the Milanese index was down a further 0.5%, so the downward trend seemed to be continuing. Whilst Monday was a bad day for most Italian shares, the most spectacular falls were, very significantly, in those of Italian banks, suggesting that fears of a Spanish scenario of bank failure might be taking hold. Monday's closing figure on the Milan bourse of 13,070 points was very close to the lowest it has reached during the last eight years - in March 2009 after the collapse of Lehman Brothers.

There are some objective factors that may give a partial explanation for the apparent panic. Italian GDP is down 0.8% compared with the previous three month period, and down 1.4% compared with the same period of 2011. A decreasing GDP inevitably means a decrease in revenues from taxation and in the first three months of this year the yield from VAT has gone down 25.8%, despite all the dramatic raids on tax-dodging restaurants and bars by the Guardia di Finanza (finance police) that was such a marked feature of the early months of the Monti administration. Italy's contribution to the Spanish bank bailout, at 19.8% of the total, will be no small sum of additional government expenditure, even if it its precise dimensions in monetary terms are yet to be clarified. All these factors mean that Italy's longstanding and world famous problem with its national debt is likely to get worse rather than better in the short run,<sup>1</sup> and Monti's sincere desire to achieve fiscal rectitude by balancing the budget in truly Teutonic style seems increasingly unrealistic.<sup>2</sup> Whilst the

10% general unemployment rate and the 36% youth unemployment rate are less dramatic than those of either Greece or Spain, they hardly suggest that Italy is in a strong position to stage a rapid recovery.

## Instability

Political instability has increased in the wake of the May local elections, as the mainstream parties debate the best way of responding to the advance of Beppe Grillo and the Movimento Cinque Stelle (M5S). At one stage the odds on an October 2012 general election seemed to increase, as Berlusconi contemplated withdrawing support from Monti in the hope that disassociating himself from austerity might avert a total meltdown of his Popolo della Libertà (PdL) and some elements within the ex-'official communist'-dominated PD were attracted by the idea of taking rapid advantage of their position as first party in the opinion polls in case the tide started to flow the other way.

It should be stressed that the Italian constitution offers a limited choice between October 2012 and April 2013 because an early general election during the last six months of Giorgio Napolitano's seven-year presidency is strictly forbidden. So, if Monti survives the next few weeks, he has every likelihood of remaining premier until the scheduled dissolution, as there is no other likely contender who could be sure of commanding a majority in the existing parliament. Needless to say, Monti is now calling upon the parties making up his parliamentary majority to unite behind him and pass all necessary measures without further ado if Italy is to stave off this week's pressure from the markets.

Berlusconi has flirted with the idea of creating a new political formation alongside, or possibly instead of, the PdL and has suggested that such a project would exclude candidates over 45 years of age, a requirement which understandably has very little appeal to many of the longer-serving PdL stalwarts.<sup>3</sup> This idea was presumably designed to win over some of the supporters of M5S by apparently rejecting the conventional party format and emphasising youth and novelty. There is also much talk of American-style primary contests for a new centre-right candidate for premier, in effect aping the procedure that the Italian centre-left (whose leading force, the PD, has taken its very name from US politics) has adopted on a number of recent occasions. This has not gone down all that well with PdL party secretary Angelino Alfano, who had assumed that he had been given

this role by Berlusconi as of right.<sup>4</sup>

Various potential candidates have been mentioned in the press, ranging from the former socialist and erstwhile foreign minister, Franco Frattini - who arguably might have some credibility with his counterparts on the European centre-right - to the thuggish Roman mayor, Gianni Alemanno. Alemanno's supporters were recently involved in a fist fight in the council chamber with opponents of their water privatisation plan - an incident that seemed to mirror the behaviour of the Greek Golden Dawn leadership, as well as reminding the more politically conscious of Alemanno's own not so remote past in the more extreme end of the neo-fascist Movimento Italiano Sociale.

It is still far from clear whether the PdL and the PD can come to an agreement on a new electoral system within the next few weeks or whether the next general election will be fought under the now notorious Porcellum created by Berlusconi and Roberto Calderoli before the 2006 election. Considerations about the relative weight of proportional representation and first-past-the-post constituencies, about the size of constituencies, about prizes for either the winning coalition or the winning party, and so on and so forth, have a practical implication for the tactics and alliances that both the PdL and PD will adopt, and proposals for modifications are very rarely based on considerations of abstract justice, as opposed to immediate party advantage. It seems unlikely that Berlusconi's renewed proposals for a shift to a French-style semi-presidentialism will go anywhere in the short term, since there is not enough time for major constitutional changes to get through parliament in this legislature.

## Centre-left

On the centre-left, the situation is becoming slightly clearer. PD leader Pierluigi Bersani seems to have made up his mind to break with Antonio Di Pietro and Italia dei Valori (IdV), claiming Di Pietro is worse than Grillo.<sup>5</sup> The IdV's opposition to the labour market reform law in the recent Senate vote added to the PD's annoyance about the IdV's consistent refusal to vote for the Monti government's austerity measures on a number of previous occasions.

Moreover, Di Pietro's allegations of a PD *inciucio* (stitch-up) with the PdL - in relation to both nominations for bodies meant to oversee television (and thus monitor possible abuses by Berlusconi and his business associates) and the wording of the as yet far from finalised anti-corruption draft law - seem to have been a bit too close to the bone, provoking angry retorts about alleged defamation, something Bersani is very unlikely to pursue in the courts. At a conference organised by the metal workers' union, FIOM, last weekend, Di Pietro talked of "the hypocrisy of those who in parliament ... give a vote of confidence over article 18" - a comment which got a very favourable response from the assembled engineering workers, in sharp contrast to the sustained heckling that greeted both Bersani's own comments about article 18 and his more general defence of his decision to support the Monti government in the aftermath of Berlusconi's downfall.

Nichi Vendola, the leader of Sinistra

Ecologia e Libertà (SEL) chose to sit next to Bersani at the conference and, despite his pretensions at mediation between Bersani and Di Pietro, seems to have sided with the PD against the IdV. Vendola's claim that "I choose the platform of FIOM without ifs and without buts" in a recent interview<sup>6</sup> is about as convincing as his claim made at the same time that "I am not devoured by personal ambitions". Vendola is desperately hoping that the PD will agree to an open primary of the whole centre-left, not one confined to the PD, to advance his own claim to be candidate premier, more or less regardless of the programme of the coalition.

If his references to "social crisis" and "mass unemployment" in the interview already referred to had any real meaning, he would be trying to unite the forces of the radical left against Bersani's PD, in the way Alexis Tsipras rejects Pasok's endorsement of ECB austerity, rather than implicitly endorsing PD collusion with the neoliberal offensive. The interview also implies that Vendola is thinking of liquidating SEL into some broader, more nebulous formation; from the context it is quite obvious that this is not some attempt to created an Italian equivalent of Syriza.

Widespread rumours suggest that Vendola intends to rally the Sicilian SEL alongside the Sicilian PD in support of a UdC candidate for the presidency of the Sicilian region. However, it seems extremely likely that Bersani and the PD leadership, who had a crucial meeting to decide their line a few days ago, would prefer to replace the IdV with the UdC as their political allies at the national as well as the Sicilian regional level.

Bersani's other main potential challenger in any centre-left primary is 37-year-old Matteo Renzi, the current PD mayor of Florence. Renzi has spent years building up a network of, generally young, careerist PD full-timers, mainly local administrators, and endlessly repeats the totally vacuous, but quite blatantly self-serving, demand for a younger generation to sweep away the existing ageing PD leadership - Massimo D'Alema, Walter Veltroni and obviously Pierluigi Bersani himself. Renzi's own political orientation is revealed by the fact that his rabid neoliberalism once took the form of a demand that Florentine shop workers should be deprived of their May Day bank holiday to boost the tourist trade; it would be impossible to find a more obvious indication of a mayor siding with capital against labour ●

## Notes

1. The EU estimate is 123.5% of GDP for 2012 and 121.8% for 2013. The slightly more optimistic Italian government estimates are 123.4% for 2012 and 121.5% for 2013.
2. The EU estimate of Italy's budget deficit is -2.0% for 2012 and -1.1% for 2013. The Monti government is sticking to the slightly better -1.7% for 2012 and -0.5% for 2013.
3. The *Corriere della Sera* (June 8) lists five candidates under 45 with matching photographs - all of whom have been ministers in Berlusconi's governments. It is probably not a coincidence that four of them are female.
4. Berlusconi, who is likely to be 76 by the next general election, seems to have accepted that he himself cannot be prime minister again, although he doubtless believes that any PdL candidate would in effect accept his instructions on important issues. It is, however, very important to Berlusconi that he is re-elected to parliament, given the protection that parliamentary immunity offers him in his legal travails.
5. See *La Repubblica* June 9.
6. *La Repubblica* June 10.



## SOUTH AFRICA

# Ideologically bankrupt

The South African Communist Party has published a new version of its programme. **Peter Manson** analyses *The South African road to socialism*

**T**he South African Communist Party is undoubtedly the largest and most influential 'official communist' party in the west. Now claiming just under 150,000 members and seven positions in the South African government, the SACP was a key player within the ruling African National Congress in the move to recall Thabo Mbeki from the presidency and replace him by Jacob Zuma in 2008.

Of course, the claimed membership figures are grossly exaggerated - 150,000 is more like the number of SACP contacts or supporters. But the party is clearly continuing to recruit: it claimed 19,000 members 10 years ago and in 2007 the official figure hit 50,000 for the first time. So, even if we assume that the number of dues-paying activists is around 10% of the total (a proportion that has previously been admitted in private), a party of 15,000 activists is still a considerable force.

That is why we need to take the SACP seriously. Its leadership played a key role in defusing the revolutionary situation that arose during the last years of apartheid and helping ensure the masses were won to accept capitalism with a black face. The SACP remains central in containing their anger despite the mass unemployment and grinding poverty, and perpetuating the illusion that capitalism under the ANC can deliver them economic emancipation.

It does this by appealing to the politically conscious minority - the message is: 'The working class is winning the class war and we are on the road to socialism.' That explains why the SACP has not gone the way of so many 'official communists' before it - ditching the formal commitment to socialism and workers' power. If it can continue to keep this militant minority on board, capitalism will remain safe in ANC hands.

In order to fulfil this role the latest draft of the SACP programme, *The South African road to socialism* (SARS), required skilful crafting, but fortunately the SACP has someone at hand who is renowned for his creative talents: Jeremy Cronin, the author, poet, government minister, ANC executive member and SACP deputy general secretary. The draft is supposed to be the work of a committee, but there is no doubt who the brain behind it is.

So the SARS bears careful study. Published at the beginning of the month and due to be adopted at the party's 13th Congress in July, this document is subtitled the "draft political programme of the SACP, 2012-2017" or the "SACP's five-year plan".<sup>1</sup> Obviously a "five-year plan" is not the same thing as a political programme for communism - and indeed the draft contains no section on communism (or even socialism). Instead it claims to give a "broad Marxist-Leninist overview" of the current situation, which is one of "advancing the struggle through a national democratic revolution in alliance with our tripartite partners as the most direct road to socialism in our country" (p4). The slogan on the front cover proclaims that the current task is to "Advance and deepen working class power and hegemony in all key sites of struggle".

## Hegemony?

'Hegemony' is a key word that pops up throughout. For example, it is



**Jeremy Cronin: skilful crafting**

explained in the introduction that the SACP's "Medium Term Vision" is to "build working class hegemony in every site of power" (p5). However, if the current task is to *advance and deepen* such hegemony, that implies that the project is well underway: presumably the working class already enjoys a *degree* of hegemony.

The problem is that this is directly contradicted over and over again within *The South African road to socialism*. For example, part of the economic legacy of what the SACP calls "colonialism of a special type", which lasted until the fall of apartheid, was, according to the party, a "dual labour market" - whereby there was, on the one hand, a small minority of skilled and semi-skilled workers and, on the other, "a mass of marginalised workers". This is one of the features that "persist into the present", states the SACP (p22). I suppose the mass of workers are experiencing a kind of marginalised hegemony then.

The political legacy of apartheid - "white citizens endowed with rights" alongside "black non-citizens" - produced "other forms of stark duality - administrative, economic, social and spatial". The SACP correctly states that the results of this duality "remain deeply embedded and are continuously reproduced in our present reality" (p23). However, once again one must ask, if the mass of blacks (the overwhelming majority of whom are workers) effectively remain "non-citizens", in what way is their "hegemony" being advanced?

Perhaps they now enjoy a greater share of the country's wealth? The SACP bluntly states the opposite: "In

2007 ... profit growth was averaging 20% a year ... But labour's share of GDP has been falling. In 1996 labour's share was 55%. By 2006 it had fallen to 48%" (p40).

But this is hardly unexpected, since an "ideological current" which the SACP dubs the "1996 class project" dominated the ANC for most of the early post-apartheid years and implemented a thoroughly neoliberal agenda of privatisation and 'marketisation'. This current "succeeded ... in achieving a contested dominance and unstable hegemony within the ANC and the democratic state from around 1996 to at least 2007" (p61).

The result was devastating for workers: "The net effect of neoliberal restructuring of the workplace is the intensification of the rate of exploitation of labour and ... an increasing fragmentation of the working class". There has been "increased unilateral managerial power" (p46). In fact, "The neoliberal free market ... has increasingly eroded whatever job security the working class might still have had" (p49). There is large-scale "contractualisation" (p45) and "labour-brokering" - the increased hiring of short-contract workers with next to no rights (p46). What is more, South Africa still retains the "racialised, gendered and hierarchical features of the apartheid workplace" (p45). Not much sign of "working class hegemony" there either.

How about in rural areas? Unfortunately, the "processes underway in our own countryside" include "mass farm worker

retrenchments, forced removals off farms, the closure of many productive farms or their conversion into game farms". The SACP notes that "these local realities reflect the impact of a neoliberal approach" (p7). The countryside is also remarkable for its "untransformed justice system that often does not take up cases that are reported to them against white farmers" (p52). Meanwhile, in the former 'Bantustans', which contain the "vast majority of the rural population", the SACP observes that "our people are subjected to the rule, authority and patronage networks of the system of traditional leadership" - not to mention "extreme levels of poverty" (p53).

I am sure the reader will agree from all this that "working class power", either in the town or countryside, is largely notable for its absence. It is true that South African trade unions are relatively powerful bodies - with, ironically, SACP comrades often at the head of militant struggles in defence of jobs, pay and conditions - but SACP union leaders and rank-and-file workers frequently come up against a state apparatus determined to further the interests of South African and international capital. And SACP members have been, since the start of the post-apartheid democratic order in 1994, part and parcel of that state. The role of the party itself has often been to mediate between these two sections of its membership.

But *how* does the SACP say working class "hegemony" is being, or ought to be, advanced? Well, the draft cannot speak too highly of "the semi-spontaneous development of *localised organs of popular power*" in the battle against apartheid - it mentions "street committees, self-defence units, mechanisms for popular justice ..." (the last being a euphemism for the execution of traitors). This was the beginning of the implementation of the ANC Freedom Charter's vision of "democratic organs of self-government", asserts the document. And thankfully this vision has been "carried forward into the post-1994 period with a range of institutions intended to advance popular participation in governance". Now what might they be? Well, "They include community policing forums, school governing bodies and ward committees" (p28).

No, that is not meant to be a joke. These bureaucratic, largely powerless bodies are a far cry from "street committees, self-defence units, mechanisms for popular justice", as the SACP well knows. Perhaps that is why the document adds wistfully: "The degree to which any of these have lived up to the possibilities of being active institutions for the consolidation of people's power needs to be assessed" (p28). It does indeed!

It is the same when the draft declares that "... building working class power in the workplace is a key dimension of building working class hegemony in the whole of society" (p45). One waits expectantly for a list of measures that have been implemented, or are proposed, in order to deliver such power. Organs of workers' control with the ability to veto all workplace decisions? Workers' direct management of production? Well, "increasing worker democracy on the shop floor" appears on a list of possible measures (p30). But, leaving aside such vague and non-specific platitudes, it is clear what the

SACP thinks is really needed: a "bold state" to "drive the developmental transformation for both the public and private workplaces" (p49).

## SACP 'governance'

"Since the democratic breakthrough of 1994 the SACP has been a '*party of governance*' - but not a *governing party* as such," declares the leadership (p36).

What it means by that is that the hundreds of SACP members who have served in national, regional and local government, either as elected representatives or appointed officials, do so as ANC members - the ANC, of course, is *the* "party of governance". Following the June 12 government reshuffle, for example, there are now seven SACP ministers - and in by no means minor posts.

Rob Davies retains the key trade and industry portfolio, while Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula has just been appointed minister of defence. SACP general secretary Blade Nzimande has been the minister for higher education and training since 1999 - the year both he and his deputy, Jeremy Cronin, decided, after being MPs for well over a decade, that they should put "governance" before their party tasks. Cronin is now the deputy minister for public works, serving under another SACP 'comrade', Thulas Nxesi, who was appointed public works minister last year (before that he was secretary general of the main teachers' union).<sup>2</sup> Then there is Jeff Radebe, the minister of justice and constitutional development (formerly in charge of public works, then public enterprises). The final SACP minister is Ben Martins, who has just been handed the transport portfolio.

The party would have you believe that, with the defeat of Mbeki, the "national democratic revolution" is back on track. It claims that "since 2007 there has been important if contested progress within our broad liberation movement, and in the evolution of government policy" (p4). That is because the "provisional displacement of the 1996 class project has seen the considerable strengthening of the left's ideological positions on government economic and social policies and programmes" (p62).

The big problem for the SACP is that its members continued to serve in the government during the period of the "hegemony" of the "1996 class project" from the mid-90s to 2007. Not only did these 'communists' fail to criticise the neoliberal anti-working class assault: they helped drive it forward. For instance, SACP ministers played important roles in the last Mbeki administration: eg, Sydney Mufamadi, the provincial and local government minister, had been responsible for implementing cutbacks locally; Charles Nqakula, as minister for safety and security, had sent in state forces to break the huge public services strike in 2007, while Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi (public service and administration) threatened to sack strikers; and Alec Erwin (public enterprises) was central in driving forward privatisation.

Often they were quietly dropped from the party leadership, but they were never confronted or publicly criticised. In fact this whole period was hardly characterised at the time as one of retreat or defeats by the SACP leadership. The draft claims: "At the SACP's 12th National Congress



in 2007, the party programme was centrally focused on a sustained critique of a reformist tendency then dominant in the leadership of both the state and the ANC itself” (p23). The critique was actually rather tame and the figurehead of the “1996 class project”, Thabo Mbeki, was referred to as “comrade”.

Even today the SACP likes to stress the positive: “These neoliberal tendencies were always partially mitigated by attempts to simultaneously fashion a ‘caring’ state focused on redistribution by way of ‘delivery’”. Indeed the years since the democratic breakthrough have seen a very significant expansion of social grants, and millions of low-cost houses, water, electricity and telephone connections” (p33).

## ‘Most direct route’

As I have said, the SACP insists that South Africa is in the midst of an ill-defined “national democratic revolution” (NDR).

According to the *SARS*, “The NDR is not a ‘stage’ in which capitalism has to be ‘completed’ (or merely ‘managed according to its own internal logic’). The NDR is a struggle to overcome deep-seated and persisting racialised inequality and poverty in our society” (p25).

However, the NDR is not just applicable in South Africa, with its apartheid legacy of “racialised inequality”, but to the whole continent, as the section entitled ‘The African revolution’ makes clear: “The African revolution of the 21st century has to be a national democratic revolution. This means consolidating democratic national sovereignty and nation building (including the infrastructure that is the objective underpinning for any national consolidation)” (p16).

So the NDR is to be a process “of the 21st century” - one that appears destined to last some considerable time. However, “The NDR is not a ‘stage’ that must first be traversed prior to a second, socialist ‘stage’”. The NDR is not a detour or a delay: it is the most direct route to socialism in South African reality. The NDR is also not the ‘postponement’ of the class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the working class. How could it be? That class struggle is a daily reality embedded in the very nature of capitalism itself” (p30).

This is a fine example of Cronin’s craft. Administering the capitalist state most certainly does not mean postponing the class struggle, he would have us believe (in fact it represents its complete abandonment). The draft continues to pose left when it talks about “an emergent bourgeois endeavour”, whereby the NDR is “presented implicitly, and often explicitly, as the ‘bourgeois’ ‘stage’ of the revolution. The capitalist revolution, we are told, must first be ‘completed’”. But the capitalist revolution in South Africa has long been made!” (p25)

We are informed that the NDR is “revolutionary nationalism” in the best tradition of Lenin, “who first comprehensively analysed the revolutionary character of the nationalism of colonially oppressed peoples” (p26). So is the SACP saying that South Africa still remains a “colonially oppressed” country? We are not told. Suffice it to say that this “revolutionary nationalism must be ... drawn upon in the struggle for a socialism that is both patriotic and internationalist” (p27).

So what does the NDR boil down to? Firstly, it is about transforming the unbalanced nature of the South African economy, which results from “colonialism of a special type”. CST produced an “excessive reliance on primary product exports” and the import of “capital goods and manufactured consumer goods”. There was, and remains, a “relatively

weak national market”, and this is characterised by the “dominance of the mineral-energy-finance complex, to the relative disadvantage of other sectors (eg, manufacturing)” (p22).

According to the draft *SARS*, “This excessive reliance on primary product exports still locks us into a dependent-developmental growth plan”, which has “skewed our economy”. This means that “our economic growth and development is exceedingly vulnerable to global fluctuations, a reality over which we have little control” (p38).

So the SACP believes (or appears to) that the South African capitalist economy can be made relatively immune from global fluctuations. It is a belief that appears to stand in sharp contrast to the statement contained in the section entitled ‘Why socialism?’ This reads: “... the simple rejection of austerity packages *without* advancing a post-capitalist alternative - in short a *socialist alternative* - will not enable the current global economy to surpass its current turbulent and threatening dead end” (p12). That is true, although it has to be said that such a “socialist alternative” must also be global - something the draft does not discuss at all.

To sum up: “The NDR in our present conjuncture has, in essence, to be a struggle to transform the dependent-development accumulation path of our economy, and the chronic underdevelopment that this accumulation path still daily reproduces.” And, although the NDR represents the “most direct route to socialism”, it is a route that “unites, in action, a range of classes and social strata” (p25).

The *SARS* explains: “Emerging strata of capital, and even established capital, must be actively mobilised into the transformational agenda .... The mobilisation of private capital into an NDR struggle should be based on clear objectives, which should include a priority on job-creating investment, skills training, appropriate and sustainable development of the forces of production ...” (p29).

One is left wondering why those foolish capitalists would agree to be “mobilised” behind an “NDR agenda” - under “working class hegemony” - that is taking us to socialism. There again, if in reality it is about “job-creating investment, skills training” and the “development of the forces of production”, etc, then you can understand why they might be prepared to go along with that.

But let us not dwell on such niceties. Since the defeat of the “1996 class project” the “strong state” has begun to make itself felt. Did you know that “Over the past few years there have been increasing efforts to assert a different strategic agenda for the transversal coordination of the state apparatus”? This has included the “establishment of ministerial clusters, a National Planning Commission in the presidency, a presidential Infrastructure Coordinating Commission and the adoption of multi-sectoral policies like the Industrial Policy Action Programme and the New Growth Plan” (p35). There’s working class power in action for you.

## Deracialisation

The second aim of the NDR is “deracialisation”, which, for the SACP, is very much connected to the “transformation” of the apartheid economy”. But it complains that the latter is “too often reduced to ‘deracialising’ boardrooms, shareholdings and senior management structures through the promotion of ‘representative’ blacks or women, without addressing the underlying systemic features of an economy that those very boardrooms, shareholdings and management structures daily promote and

reproduce” (p29).

It is here that the draft is at its strongest, highlighting the absurdities and outright corruption involved in the “affirmative action” programme of the ANC which is supposed to facilitate “black economic empowerment” (BEE). What this means in practice is that quotas are set for the promotion of members of the “previously disadvantaged” majority by state departments. Companies competing for government tenders are also expected to comply with such quotas in respect of their shareholders, directors and managers. As the *SARS* notes, “Affirmative action is essentially an elitist process that benefits those in managerial levels, with deteriorating conditions for the working class” (p49).

For example, how was private capital to meet those targets, particularly in relation to ownership? After all, part of the legacy of apartheid is that most owners of capital, and people with sufficient wealth to buy large shareholdings, are white. The solution was to subsidise black proto-capitalists: “Considerable public funds ... were diverted into leveraging a 25% shareholding target for blacks” (p40).

The “beneficiaries” were “capitalists without capital who were allocated shares on loan, on the assumption that, with dividends and share price rises, the debt would be repaid within a matter of years”. And “The beneficiaries were often drawn into deals by established capital on the basis of their actual or perceived connections to the ruling party.”

The draft correctly observes that “Established capital played along with this game, happy to ‘pay the rent’, and preferring this to any serious transformational agenda.” But “This model of BEE has resulted in high levels of indebtedness amongst the BEE ‘beneficiaries’ ... Hence calls from sections of the black bourgeois stratum for the nationalisation of mines, essentially to rescue them from their indebtedness at public expense” (p41).

Another by-product of the wondrously misnamed “black economic empowerment” is the emergence of what the SACP labels “tenderpreneurs” - “those who use their positions of leadership in the ANC-led alliance or the state to get government tenders, often in a corrupt way” (p41). Many other black beneficiaries at the earliest opportunity sold off the shares kindly provided to them by the state as the easiest route to self-enrichment. That in turn left the companies concerned with problems fulfilling their shareholding quotas.

In short, the whole thing has been a dismal failure, for the reasons so clearly explained by the *SARS*. But what alternative “model of BEE” does the SACP propose? Well, it complains that this “‘deracialisation’ without class content” means that “there are no national democratic strategic guidelines provided to those who are promoted to boardrooms and senior management positions” (p29). Obviously, even in terms of the party’s own agenda, that would solve nothing. In fact the only concrete measure the draft comes up with is that there should be a “major review” of BEE (p43).

But it is little wonder that Cronin and co are at a loss. Just *how* can “deracialisation” be enforced under a market-based system without risking overt corruption? Most blacks are poor and most whites are not, which in turn means that whites in general continue to enjoy far better education, contacts, employment opportunities and business prospects than blacks.

I am afraid that the inequalities exacerbated by the apartheid legacy can only be removed by seriously challenging the system

that perpetuates them. And that will require more than rhetoric.

## ‘Socialism’

But unfortunately rhetoric is all we get from the SACP. Typical is the slogan, “Socialism is the future. Build it now!” (p32). As we have seen, the SACP claims that socialism is actually being built “now” through an NDR that in reality proposes (1) a more ‘balanced’ economy via state intervention; and (2) greater racial equality through some as yet undisclosed means.

The subsection headed ‘Build socialism now’ (within the section on the NDR) attempts to expand upon this, but in a totally abstract way. We are told that the process of building socialism involves “socialising the economy” (“The socialised economy is that part of the economy premised on meeting social needs and not private profits” - p30). We read that the SACP is for a “predominant and varied public sector”, a “significant and growing cooperative sector” and the “active use of social capital”, such as “worker-controlled pension and provident funds”. But no concrete measures are put forward. For example, in “the struggle to ‘decommodify’ basic needs”, what specific demands for “socialisation” should be raised right now?

It is the same when it comes to “expanding workers’ real ability to impact on workplace decisions” (p30); and “expanding workers’ power over decisions around the allocation of social surplus, including investment policies, budgetary priorities, etc” (p31). Since this is supposed to be happening “now”, it is strange that there are no actual proposals which would result in workers being able to take such decisions. All we are told is that “empowering workers on the shopfloor, rolling back the capitalist market by decommodifying basic needs, advancing a wide array of socially owned and regulated entities, and placing a premium on sustainability - none of these measures requires waiting for the NDR to be first ‘completed’” (p32).

Despite the sometimes powerful indictment of global capitalism in the section entitled ‘Why socialism?’, it goes without saying that there is no mention of the necessary global response. Not just a more balanced capitalist economy, but socialism too, can see the light of day in South Africa alone, it is implied. Of course, there is much talk of “international solidarity”, but this is not discussed in terms of working class power. Rather, “There is a wide array of broadly progressive forces in the world”, taking up issues such as “environmental sustainability, peace, human rights, women’s rights, the third world debt ...” (p14). The SACP should “make conscious and practical linkages” with them, with the aim of “rescuing human civilisation and the natural world from the depredations of capitalism” (p15).

Similarly, we need to aim for “the consolidation of a vibrant, democratic and developmentally orientated southern African regional community” (p26). But there is no talk of striving for socialist unity across the continent or the fight for a workers’ Africa. Quite the opposite, in fact. According to the *SARS*, “Our 1994 democratic breakthrough and our government’s regional and continental initiatives have ... opened up many new investment possibilities for South African private capital. While South African investment in the continent can, potentially, play a progressive role, there is a grave danger that South African capital will simply constitute itself as a sub-imperial power ...” (p17).

So, while South African private capital will play a “progressive role” elsewhere on the continent (but without developing into “a sub-imperial power”, of course), South

African workers will be busy building “socialism now” back home.

But what does the SACP mean by socialism? As you might expect from ‘official communists’, we do have the former “socialist bloc” in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe to look back to. There are the usual phrases about the “many important gains and progressive advances achieved”, notwithstanding the “grievous systemic errors and mistakes”: for instance, “millions of communists were among the victims of Stalin’s purges” (p13).

However, “A socialism of the 21st century will need to think and act differently.” And fortunately we have the “Cuban revolution” to serve as an example. After all, Cuba is “combining the most modern scientific and technological interventions with non-motorised transport, like bicycles and even ox-drawn ploughs. These should not be seen only as emergency measures in a particular situation. Nor should they be seen as a step back into the past. They are, in many respects, a step forward into the only sustainable future” (p32).

If this is the SACP’s glowing example of the socialist “future”, perhaps it is little wonder that in practice the party contents itself with a programme for a more democratic, responsive capitalism. There must be a “state-led industrial policy” to ensure that manufacturing is “built into a much more vibrant and dynamic sector”; the “increasing socialisation of the finance sector” (by supporting current efforts to ‘transform’ existing state developmental finance institutions); a “major state-led infrastructure programme”; etc (p43). That is the long and short of SACP ‘socialism’.

## SACP ‘revolution’

It should be absolutely clear to readers that the leadership of the South African Communist Party is ideologically bankrupt. But it has yet to face any serious internal challenge - either from the right, through Eurocommunist-type calls to abandon the ‘outdated’ Marxist jargon and openly embrace liberalism; or from the left, through the key demand for working class independence and a break with the bourgeois ANC.

The leadership has been forced by the pressure from below to concede that the tripartite alliance (ANC, SACP and the Congress of South African Trade Unions) is not necessarily permanent. For example, it writes: “As an independent political party the SACP has every right to contest elections in its own right - should it so choose.” But it immediately goes on to contradict this by implying that it would need permission from the ANC to do so: “Whether the party does this and how it does it are entirely subject to conjunctural realities and indeed to engagement with our strategic allies” (p37).

However, more and more, the SACP rank and file is coming to the realisation that all is not well with the current strategy. The demand should be for the party’s ministers to resign immediately (either that or face expulsion) and for the SACP and Cosatu to break from the cross-class alliance now. Most of all there needs to be a totally different sort of ‘revolution’ from the one proposed by the leadership. There needs to be a revolution within the SACP itself, to rid it of its treacherous leaders and win it to a genuinely democratic, genuinely internationalist, independent working class programme ●

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## Notes

1. www.sacp.org.za/docs/docs/2012/draftpol2012.pdf.
2. Back in 1993, before the election of the first ANC government, Cronin proclaimed that the real fight would continue to take place “on the street”, not in parliament. But by the end of the decade he had changed his mind and agreed to stand as an MP himself. He told a journalist that he was “tired”.



# IRAN

## Regime change must come from below

Sanctions and malware are preparatory acts of war against Iran. Those who condemn the crimes of the regime should also condemn the crimes of imperialism and its agents, writes **Yassamine Mather**

**A**s the prospect of failure of the third round of talks between Iran and the 5+1 countries looms, the US-led soft war on Iran has been ratcheted up with the threat of further sanctions and the launching of a powerful computer virus targeting Iran's nuclear research facilities. The virus has already spread to the commercial sectors, including the oil and banking industries.

According to an article in *The New York Times*, president Obama secretly ordered increasingly sophisticated attacks on Iran's computer systems at its nuclear enrichment facilities.<sup>1</sup> The plan had originated during the Bush presidency, but its first successful use came with the spreading of the Stuxnet virus two years ago.

The new virus - code-named *Sholeh* (flame) - is supposed to be 20 times more disruptive to computer systems than Stuxnet. Flame's main targets are in Iran and so far thousands of government and corporate computers have been affected. The threat from Flame is disguised by the fact that it appears to unsuspecting users as a legitimate Microsoft program.

The reaction of Iran's ruling circles had been mixed. One faction of the regime claimed that the US and Israel are abusing a grey area in international law - that of Cyber warfare. They demanded that Iran should complain to the United Nations. Meanwhile, the *Kayhan* newspaper, which is associated with supreme leader Ali Khamenei, followed his defiant line, delivered in a speech on June 3: "Any attack by Israel on Iran will blow back on the Jewish state like thunder."

Last week saw the collapse of the latest round of talks between Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency ahead of the June 18-19 5+1 talks with Iran. The IAEA wanted to visit Iran's Parchin military base, where Iranian scientists are alleged to have tested explosive triggers for nuclear weapons. Iran denies that it has been conducting such experiments, but it has refused to allow IAEA officials near the site since 2005.

For the Iranian people, failure of the talks means continued sanctions, job losses and financial hardship. Bread prices rose by 20% on June 9 and Iran's Central Bank has released a chart which shows a steep rise in the price of most basic foodstuffs during the past year. The price of chicken is 57.1% more than last year, and that of red meat has increased 39% (beef has gone up by 48.5%). The price of vegetables by 78.6%.

Iran's oil sales are down by about 600,000 barrels per day and shipments of Iranian crude are expected to drop



**People's Mujahedin: in the pay of imperialism**

further when a European Union oil embargo comes into effect on July 1. Tehran is already estimated to have lost more than \$10 billion in oil revenues this year.

### Regime change funds

Sanctions and malware are not the only weapons being used in the soft war against Iran. The US, Canada and the European Union are allocating considerable sums of money for propaganda against the current regime and for regime change from above.

Various 'alternative governments' and campaigns (for human rights, women's rights and even workers' rights) are being funded. Several websites, radio and TV stations have come up with proposals for workshops or a tribunal on the regime - fronted by a rainbow of the Iranian opposition, but backed by US/Canadian and EU regime change funds. A number of comrades at the Hands Off the People of Iran conference in April of this year raised the need to name and shame such groups. This article is an attempt to start a debate on the subject.

In the past we had become used to the 'usual suspects' being among the beneficiaries of regime change largesse: the Iranian opposition headed by those *nouveaux riches* Pahlavis, the family of the former shah; liberal bourgeois alternatives, headed nowadays by former supporters of the Islamic regime; and individuals whose fierce support for the market has positioned them in the extreme right of the political spectrum. There are 'personalities' such as Mohsen Sazegara (former Islamist politician turned neoliberal ideologue, a darling of both the Bush and Clinton administrations); and groups like the People's Mujahedin (MEK), rightly compared by Owen Bennett-Jones<sup>2</sup> with the Iraqi National Congress, whose cooperation with the US paved the way for the 2003 invasion.

However, what is new and more worrying is the way in which sections of the left (to be precise, the Stalinist left) attempt to justify acceptance of

financial support from US/EU regime change funds. Of course, regime change against Iran has a long history: a lot has been invested in it and it works in mysterious ways.

As we know from our experience in Hopi, political campaigns, publishing journals and bulletins, organising broadcasts, etc all cost money and clearly the weaker, more spineless sections of the Iranian left have been lured by the prospect of regime-change funding. In general the Iranian beneficiaries of regime change funds can be divided into two distinct categories:

1. Those who admit accepting foreign funds: mainly liberal and rightwing forces, such as monarchists, bourgeois republicans, former Revolutionary Guards like Sazegara and former Islamist greens (nowadays social democratic or liberal activists). These groups and individuals may publicise the source of their funding to 'prove' their importance, their relevance.
2. Those who receive such funds, but refuse to admit it, mainly because they still would like to masquerade as part of the left. These include sections of the Fedayeen Minority, Kurdish groups such as Komaleh, various splits from what was Iran's Communist Party and a number of well-meaning, but dubious campaigns.

Those who supply the funds are often keen to unite this spineless 'left' into single campaigns alongside rightwing forces keen to brag about the source, and that is why even the most secret donations are eventually exposed. One such example is the International Tribunal for Iran,<sup>3</sup> which manages to unite sections of both the left and right, including those proud of their connections with organisations such as the National Endowment for Democracy (see below).

Hopi activists have been approached a number of times to lend their support to this campaign. In the past our response, in line with Hopi's aims and objectives, has been: 'We can only support campaigns against the Iran regime that have a clear policy in opposition to the US-led war drive. Can you give us the assurance

we need - for example, by adding a clear statement against war and sanctions?' This simple request has often been met with silence. In the meantime sections of the Iranian left - mainly comrades formerly associated with the Fedayeen Minority - have traced the funding for this tribunal and denounced its association with regime change from above.

Recent attempts to get Hopi involved in publicising and participating in this event led us to look more closely at the tribunal and its steering committee. Most of what is produced below is from the tribunal's own website, as well as articles written by comrades involved in campaigns to defend political prisoners in Iran, and ex-members of the Fedayeen Minority. I am particularly grateful to former Fedayeen comrade Homayoun Ivani, who has written extensively on this subject.

### 'International tribunal'

Starting in July 1988 and lasting about five months, the systematic execution of political prisoners inside Iranian jails took place. Thousands of supporters of left groups, including the Fedayeen, Peykar, Rahe Kargar and the Tudeh Party of Iran, as well as members of the Mujahedin, were slaughtered.

Leading figures within the Islamic regime, including ayatollahs Hossein Ali Montazeri and Ali Akbar Rafsanjani, have admitted that such a massacre took place and many of us who lost comrades during those terrible few months want to hold leaders of the Islamic regime to account for this and other crimes. However, we do not wish to be associated with some of the forces involved in the tribunal. On the contrary, we see their involvement as an insult to the memory of communists and socialists who sacrificed their lives in defence of the Iranian working class.

The original idea behind such a tribunal came from the left and many of us in Workers Left Unity Iran supported something like the Russell Tribunal from the 1960s to investigate the mass murder of political prisoners

in Iran. However, one of the of the main contributors to the funding of this tribunal is the Iran Human Rights Documentation Centre, whose founder, Payam Akhavan, chairs the tribunal's steering committee. The IHRDC until 2009 received large sums from the US state department's Human Rights and Democracy Fund.<sup>4</sup>

Akhavan is also associated with Human Rights and Democracy for Iran, known as the Abdorrahman Boroumand Foundation, which, according to its own website, relies on the "generous support of a diverse array of funders". Approximately 50% of its support comes from US foundations, 34% from European foundations, and 16% from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), an NGO funded by the US Congress.<sup>5</sup> The NED was set up in 1983 during Ronald Reagan's presidency to 'promote democracy'. It has supported more than 1,000 projects abroad that are 'working for democratic goals' in more than 90 countries. Other beneficiaries of the NED's Iran donations include the Centre for International Private Enterprise, which aims to "raise awareness among Iranians of means in which civil society can pursue reforms that address their economic, social and political problems".

So who is on the steering committee of the International Tribunal for Iran?

● **Payam Akhavan** himself was a legal advisor to the prosecutor's office of the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda at The Hague (1994-2000) and has served with the United Nations in Cambodia, East Timor and Guatemala. He has appeared as counsel in leading cases before the International Court of Justice, the International Criminal Court, the European Court of Human Rights and the Permanent Court of Arbitration. In 2005, he was selected by the World Economic Forum as a "young global leader". One would have thought all that would be enough for the left to keep well clear of him.

● **John Cooper QC**, chair of the tribunal, has advised the government of Slovakia on human rights policy and the Cambodian regime on war crimes trials. In 2004 he was invited to present

**Second edition:  
it's coming soon**





## STUDENTS

a paper on human rights in Beijing by the British Council.

• **Sir Geoffrey Nice QC** has prosecuted several cases before the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. His main claim to fame results from the cases against Dario Kordić and Goran Jelisić - both found guilty of war crimes. Both were undoubtedly criminals, but we all know the US/EU agenda regarding these trials.

In summary, the tribunal is yet another example of a potentially worthy cause corrupted by regime change funds. One day the Iranian people themselves will investigate the massacre of the political prisoners in 1988, but no-one on the left should touch the current 'tribunal'. As Homayoun Ivani has put it, the executions cannot be investigated in a vacuum: the historical background and its occurrence at the end of the cold war should be taken into account. In the tradition of such liberal institutions, there is no mention of the politics of the victims by the organisers. I could not find a single reference on the tribunal's website to the fact that many were communists.

One of the 'left' broadcasters that is publicising the tribunal is Shahrzad News, which is a 'feminist news agency' running a Persian and English-language website. Shahrzad was one of 11 organisations to benefit recently from a €15 million EU fund to "improve reporting of human rights issues", distributed via the Dutch government. Its international solidarity activities include gathering messages of support for the Iranian people from a group of Dutch parliamentarians.<sup>6</sup> These include Liberals and Christian Democrats, not to mention out and out racists.

It is difficult to understand what possessed an organisation, formally of the left and indeed still claiming to be of the left, to broadcast messages of solidarity from MPs whose opposition to the Islamic regime has nothing to do with support for the Iranian people, still less for the Iranian working class, but is driven by nationalistic Islamophobia. The left, and in particular the Iranian left, should steer well clear of such forces.

While some comrades find it difficult to comprehend how sections of the Iranian the left could sink so low as to accept such funding, those of us who remember these individuals' eagerness to accept Soviet and Iraqi money are not surprised. These are no defenders of the working class: they have no understanding of class politics. For them revolution is the act of a vanguard 'leading the masses' at whatever cost: the end justifies the means. Many of us have now witnessed how in reality the dubious means they use can turn out to define the end.

In remembering comrades executed not just in 1988, but throughout the 1980s and later, we should first and foremost remember the ideals and the politics of those who were executed. Many were Marxists, defenders of the Iranian working class, anti-imperialists and anti-capitalists. They would be horrified to discover the kind of funding used to set up a tribunal in their name.

The genuine left in Iran is staying well clear of such temptations. We cannot and will not tarnish the memory of comrades who died so courageously in the dungeons of the Islamic regime •

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### Notes

1. *The New York Times* June 1.
2. O Bennett-Jones, "Terrorists? Us?": [www.lrb.co.uk/v34/n11/owen-bennett-jones/terrorists-us](http://www.lrb.co.uk/v34/n11/owen-bennett-jones/terrorists-us).
3. [www.irantribunal.com](http://www.irantribunal.com).
4. See [www.iranhrdc.org/english/news/in-the-news/3085-silencing-the-watchdog.html#](http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/news/in-the-news/3085-silencing-the-watchdog.html#).
5. [www.iranrights.org/english/foundation.php](http://www.iranrights.org/english/foundation.php).
6. See 'Dutch parliamentarians address the Iranian people': [www.youtube.com/watch?v=c4NDuWcmAf0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c4NDuWcmAf0).

# Opposition fails to show

This year's Communist Students conference took place in London over the weekend of June 9-10 against a background of controversy and intra-organisational struggle - up to and including a recent coup attempt against the elected leadership by comrades in Manchester CS branch around Chris Strafford. As such, the conference was an important opportunity for critical self-reflection on CS as a project and its focus in the future. But it turned out to be rather anti-climactic, with not a single comrade from the Manchester branch turning up to put forward their political views or to engage with the rest of the organisation more generally.

The first session of the conference saw executive member Ben Lewis give his outline of the proposed perspectives for 2012. Comrade Lewis began by noting the instability of global politics. Internationally, the class struggle is intensifying, but, contrary to the predictions of the 2011 CS conference, we have not yet seen a mass anti-austerity movement in Britain.

It seems likely, said the comrade, that the stagnation in the world economy, particularly in Europe, will continue. The current crisis is, however, necessitating the further financial centralisation of the European Union, which in practice can only entail further political centralisation. How the peoples of Europe responded to this would be key, the comrade said.

In conclusion it seemed to comrade Lewis that, while there were huge objective possibilities - and, just as importantly, huge responsibilities - for the left, the possibility of reaction and war was evident in the current crisis. But subjectively the left is in no position to lead the working class and, as CS is part of the left, that includes us. So it is important for CS to be active, dynamic and daring in fighting for the ideas of Marxism.

Comrade Lewis stressed that CS should continue to argue for Marxist principles in the student movement. Regarding the proposal by Revo, the Workers Power youth group, for unity discussions, the comrade said it was important to continue the exchange, even though Revo itself seems to be going through its own version of the recent WP split.

The perspectives for 2012 were unanimously approved. It was agreed to organise a conference on revolutionary unity and the student movement in the new year, inviting groups like the Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Students, Revolution, the Labour Representation Committee youth and so on.

CS executive member Callum Williamson began his introduction to his motion on CS organisation and tasks by noting that some of the problems that the organisation has faced have resulted from the fact that two thirds of the executive was based in London, while the remaining third had been in Manchester, which has had the most active branch. He accepted that the executive had not met regularly enough and had not asserted or re-asserted basic organisational principles such as the paying of dues, national registration of members and so on which had encouraged the growth of an anarchic, federalist approach to CS.

To combat this the motion proposed the election of a treasurer, membership secretary and web editor in order to ensure that



Next spark will not be fees and cuts

organisational questions were not neglected. The executive was mandated to produce a pamphlet condensing the various debates that have taken place in the *Weekly Worker* recently around Lenin's view on the type of party that was needed, with a new introduction underlining 'Why Lenin matters'. The executive will also produce what comrades agreed should be snappy, interesting and thought-provoking materials for next term's freshers fairs. There will normally be weekly executive meetings open to all members.

In the discussion that followed there was agreement that, while CS had never been a large organisation, there was potential for it to grow quickly again. We have to be a lot more confident and a lot more thorough about chasing up contacts and the large number of people sympathetic to our ideas.

The conference also debated the new Anti-Capitalist Initiative project, set up by Workers Power and its milieu. In introducing the discussion, James Turley stated that the ACI is attempting to unite the left around 'action'. However, in practice, the ACI unites only the fragments of Workers Power plus a few others. Compared to where WP was 10 years ago, it is a step backwards in terms of size and even programme. Then they were part of a single organisation committed to some form of Marxism.

A comrade gave an account of a local branch meeting of the ACI he had attended the previous day. At Peckham ACI's inaugural meeting there was lots of talk of 'saving the NHS' and calls for the ACI to approach local churches and a Labour councillor in a campaign against betting shops and pay-day loans. But it seems that in order not to scare off the vicars they will present themselves as a 'local group of trade unionists'. The conference was unanimous that it would be a waste of CS comrades' time to build the ACI - whether at a national or local level.

Of course, that is not the view of comrade Strafford, who had been invited to explain why he believes the ACI should be supported. He had also put forward a motion, which conference had agreed to hear despite the fact it had been submitted well after the deadline. But he and the other Manchester comrades boycotted the conference - none had sent apologies (although comrade Strafford did so the day after).

In light of the heated internal disputes - over, for example, editorial access to the website - the

outgoing executive majority had originally decided to limit conference attendance to its existing membership and not allow the possibility that previous non-members would join on the day and be able to sway the vote. When it was pointed out that this would mean that two comrades is Manchester, themselves not actually nationally paid-up members of the organisation, could not attend, the executive then decided to open conference to all those currently on the CS internal email list (which included the two comrades, former members and those still sympathetic). Any of these comrades who paid the registration and membership fee would be eligible to take part with full speaking and voting rights. But it was not to be.

Comrade Strafford's motion advocated the abolition of the executive in favour of "open national meetings"; the creation of a "writing committee" to supervise the production of a pamphlet on "how to fight austerity"; affiliation to the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts; and the joint organisation of a day school to discuss "what kind of student and youth organisations we need" with the Revo group. The motion was put to conference in comrade Strafford's absence, but was unanimously rejected. It

was, however, accepted that we should keep an eye on the NCAFC and intervene where possible. But comrades generally agreed that, unless there was another change in government higher education policy, the 'spark' for renewed student activity was unlikely to be fees and cuts.

Comrade Laurie Smith introduced a motion on Iran which committed CS to maintain its affiliations to Hands off the People of Iran and Stop the War Coalition, to sponsor Hopi meetings on campus, seek joint meetings with STWC where possible, to mandate the executive to try to forge links with "revolutionary students" in Iran and feature an interview with an Iranian student on the CS website. This was passed unanimously.

The conference ended with the adoption of a motion that dealt with the organisation's internal problems. It concluded by stating that those "who do not recognise the annual conference of Communist Students, its decisions and elected national executive place themselves outside of our ranks". The motion was unanimously approved. All those seeking to join or rejoin CS will be asked if they accept the decisions of this conference as binding.

**Mike Copestake**

## Fighting fund

# A bargain!

Our June fighting fund received a big boost this week with the donation of a tremendous £200 from comrade YM. The comrade knows of the *Weekly Worker*'s financial difficulties and was determined to help us out, for which we are more than grateful.

I also received a resubscription letter from II, which not only contained a donation of £20, but a standing order form for £15 a quarter - £3 more than the subscription rate. Thanks very much indeed, comrade. Talking of standing orders, the regular donations that came in this week amounted to £125, including AM's generous monthly £50, £25 from GD and £20 from DV.

But once again I have to report no donations received via the website - the number of visitors fell below 10,000 for the first time in a

long while (we had 9,550 readers last week), but I would have thought that a few of you might have made use of our PayPal facility. Despite that, we now have £630 towards our £1,500 target.

Finally, let me remind the dozen or so comrades who have still not upped their standing order subscription that we really do need you to return the form I sent out in order to meet the sharp increase in postage needed to deliver your *Weekly Worker*. I shall be writing again shortly asking you to increase your payment to £12 a quarter. It's a bargain, comrades! You're still getting the paper for less than the cover price! •

**Robbie Rix**

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



## REVIEW

# Strategy and freedom of criticism

Daniel Bensaïd, Alda Sousa, Alan Thornett and others **New parties of the left: experiences from Europe** London 2011, pp202, £7

In the first part of my review of this book last week, I worked through the individual chapters of the book with the addition of João Machado's article on the Fourth International's experience in the Brazilian Workers Party.<sup>1</sup> This second part of the review asks the question: what general lessons can be learned from these experiences?

To summarise these. First are a couple of immediate empirical lessons which the Mandelites themselves draw, quite correctly. The first is that united political action of the left makes a profound difference to the impact of the our ideas and the ability to mobilise. The Mandelites - with the partial exception of the Portuguese - tend to underestimate the significance of the element of *political action* in this statement. But it is nonetheless clearly true that 'unity is strength' and, conversely, that the wilderness of competing grouplets leads to demoralisation.

The second is that to have this effect, open and democratic functioning is essential to the morale of the militants (as well as to maintaining unity). Bureaucratic control tends to sterility, demoralisation and a rightwards dynamic. The Mandelites have not quite got what open and democratic functioning implies, for reasons to be discussed below; but the lesson is still an important one.

Next, and definitely secondary, are questions of judgment of the recent political situation. The Mandelites' assessment of the evolution of the political situation, on which their tactics were founded, was unsound in a paradoxical way. It was simultaneously *both* insufficiently dynamic *and* supposing excessive fluidity; with the result that, again with the partial exception of the Portuguese comrades, it presumed more possibilities than actually existed.

Second, and closely connected, the comrades took the 'old left' - the cadre of the existing parties and groups and their implantation and ideological influence - insufficiently seriously. The 'new parties' paradigm is confusing in this respect.

Last is a group of lessons of strategic importance, which the Mandelites do not, or only partially, draw. Salvatore Cannavo in his chapter on Rifondazione Comunista in Italy argues (among other things) that the

leadership of Rifondazione never really settled accounts with Stalinism and the meaning of 1991.

In the first place, this is symptomatic of a certain reality which the Mandelites' policy in the 'new parties' did not recognise. This is that the fall of the Soviet and similar regimes does not take us completely back to a blank slate: it does not mean that all of the strategic questions which have divided the left at various points since 1870 have become obsolete.

This was already apparent when the post-2001 war drive and in particular the lead-up to the war on Iraq largely marginalised the Social Forums movement and showed that political attitudes to war and imperialism are still live issues. The 2003-05 splits in the Workers Party (PT) and Democracia Socialista in Brazil, and the 2008 fall of the Prodi government and defeat of Rifondazione, showed that the old question of participation in coalition governments - Marx's and Engels' critique of Louis Blanc in 1848, and the issue of Millerand and Millerandism in 1899-1904 - is equally still a live problem.

Secondly, however, to a considerable extent *the Trotskyists* have never really settled accounts with Stalinism and the meaning of 1991.

## Unity is strength

'Unity is strength' is an old motto of the workers' movement (though it has antecedents going even further back in history). It is the elementary basis of trade unions and other workers' organisations: the capitalist class wants the workers to compete against each other, whether as individuals or as sectional groups; to get decent wages, working and living conditions, workers need to organise the maximum possible unity.

The history of the 'new parties of the left' is yet another demonstration of this very elementary point. *By uniting*, the left has shown itself able to grow and have an impact well beyond its initial numbers. In contrast, the *disunity* of the small groups of the far left renders us politically impotent and ineffective. Because it is opposed to the most elementary interests of the working class, and hence to the instincts of the broad layer of trade union, and so on, activists, disunity *opposes* the groups to the class which they aim to organise.

The history also shows something else which follows from the last point. This is that disunity and the multiplication of small groups is not a *result of* separation from the broader class movement, but rather tends to *produce* this separation. In a certain sense this should already have been obvious from the history of hostile, competing far-left groups within the British trade unions and Labour Party. But the inability of the Trotskyists to unite as such *within* the PT a n d

within Rifondazione demonstrates, yet again, that involvement in a broader movement - in the PT, clearly a class movement - does not solve the problem.

I address this point to the Trotskyists, because *New parties of the left* is by and to a considerable extent about Trotskyists. But it is, of course, equally true of 'orthodox' Maoists and of those non-Maoist anti-revisionist trends which cling to the conception of the monolithic 'party of a new type'. Anarchists have always been ultra-fissile, since this is merely the logic of their ideas.

## Trap

However, 'unity is strength' contains within itself an implicit potential trap. This is the idea that if we all *thought* the same way and *spoke* the same way, we would be stronger still. This idea is instantiated in the form of the ideas of the monolithic party, and of the party which keeps its own differences hidden and speaks in one voice only to the outside world.

It is also instantiated in 'strict unity of will', which carries with it forms of 'labour monarchy': the idea that unity is to be achieved through the role of a single, charismatic, central leader. Or, in other words, the cult of the personality: of Ferdinand Lassalle, of the dead Lenin, of Stalin - and, on a smaller and declining scale, of Lula in the PT, of Bertinotti in Rifondazione, of Tommy Sheridan in the Scottish Socialist Party or of George Galloway in Respect.

The capitalist regime prefers workers' organisations to have such a single identifiable leader. Such leaders *de facto* promote the ideology of the necessity of one-man management, which is part of the ideology of capitalist rule, and is expressed in the 'single person' - monarch, president or prime minister - found in all capitalist state constitutions. Single leaders are also more amenable to corruption, integration in the normal capitalist political circus, blackmail or 'exposure' of this or that scandal, than collective leaderships. Hence, the capitalist media will positively promote the 'single identifiable leader': Krivine's essay in the book shows the difficulties the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) in France experienced in trying to resist this tendency.

The conceptual trap arises from a misunderstanding of the nature of workers' unity. This is not an organic, spontaneous unity like the unity of a family, a tribe or a peasant village. It is a unity *consciously constructed*, among people who are members of diverse families and from diverse localities and often enough national backgrounds, in order to achieve specific goals in the everyday struggle with capital. Put another way, it is a unity constructed *out of and on the basis of* the real degree of individual liberty - to choose your employer, landlord, and so on, to migrate - which is provided by capitalist impersonal market relations.

The consequence is that real, effective workers' unity *must be* unity in diversity: *must be* accompanied by variety, disagreement and discussion. Otherwise the unity will break up, whether in splits or in the attrition of individual members leaving or merely retreating from activity. That means open, democratic functioning. Here, again, the Mandelites draw a correct balance sheet of the 'new parties'.

Stalinist monolithism worked

because it was backed by the combination of the prestige of the Russian Revolution and of direct and systematic intervention in the 'official' communist parties by the Soviet state, both with the carrot of subsidy and the stick of exclusions (and in the Soviet-style regimes, police action). Attempts to copy it by groups without state backing merely produce small cults and endless splits.

In the Labour/socialist parties, attempts to create strong monolithism have been rarer. The recent history of the British Labour Party is a fairly striking example. It is perfectly clear that the effect is attrition of the party's ability to mobilise at the base. This is, again, in the interests of the capitalist class, because it produces increased dependence on the capitalist media in elections.

There is a second element of the trap. Suppose that the leadership of the workers' organisation is *in fact* captured by the capitalist class through corruption or integration into the regime; and that it has sufficient power, with the backing of the bourgeois state, to suppress or marginalise dissent. In this case, to choose unity is to choose silence and compliance with capitalist interests. This does not only occur with *parties*, but also with trade unions: the 'new unionism' of 1880s Britain and the Congress of Industrial Organizations of the 1930s US both involved partial union splits.

Hence, above, I said 'maximum possible unity'. It is not an absolute given that unity is possible. Whatever judgment one might make of the tactics and of the failure to *prepare* for the possibility of a split, the anti-governmentalist wing of Democracia Socialista was right to split with the governmentals; Sinistra Critica was right to split Rifondazione; the French Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire was right to insist that any left unity had to reject outright minority participation in a 'social-liberal' government, even if the result has isolated it and the NPA has proved to be a failed rebranding.

The question this poses is: what sort of unity is possible and can work? The Mandelites make this question, as they make all questions, into one of the characterisation of the political conjuncture. In doing so, they dodge tackling the long-term strategic issues, which then come back to bite them in the leg. In the case of 'new parties' they also got the political dynamics wrong.

## Political dynamics

At the beginning of the first part of this review I quoted Fred Leplat's preface to *New parties* saying that in the last 25 years the rightwards evolution of the socialist and 'official' communist parties has changed the political landscape on the left; and "This has opened up a political space to the left of social democracy which the radical left and revolutionary Marxists have a duty to fill. This task cannot be carried out by these currents simply continuing in their traditional forms without seeking new levels of unity. What is therefore necessary are broad, pluralist parties embracing both the radical and Marxist left to restore independent working class organisation."

This makes the question of unity into a question of the current state of political dynamics, rather than - as I have treated it above - a long-term strategic necessity of the workers'

movement. The current state of political dynamics is then said to have "opened up a political space to the left of social democracy"; and the resulting need is for "broad pluralist parties embracing both the radical and Marxist left". What is *meant* by the 'radical left' is not explored.

There is a sense in which it is bizarre for comrade Leplat to pose this as a *new* question. After all, the International Socialist Group, forerunner of Socialist Resistance, was created as a regroupment project round *Labour Briefing*; this project began to break up as the Mandelite wing became attracted to the broader left unity project of the Chesterfield conferences. In 1977-79 the International Marxist Group, forerunner of the ISG, ran election candidates under the name, Socialist Unity. The *Theses on Britain* drafted by Mandel in the early 1972 and eventually adopted in a heavily amended form in 1976 urged the creation of a 'class-struggle left wing' uniting Marxists and left social democrats. In the 1960s, the Labour Party paper *The Week*, sponsored by the very early IMG, was a broad-front project.

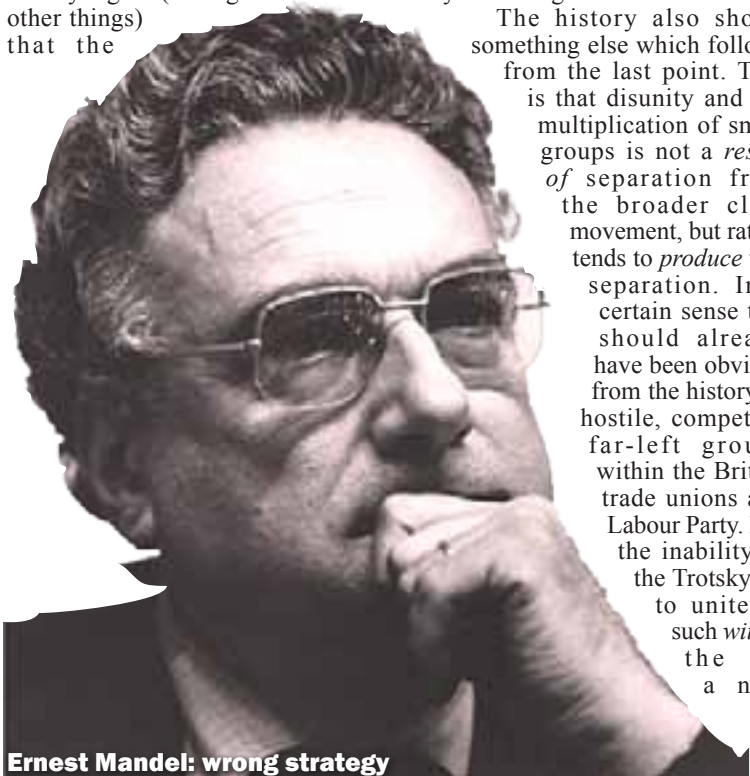
As I said above, the Mandelites always pose such questions in terms of the conjuncture. Mandelism as a distinct tendency within Trotskyism began in the 1950s with the *refusal* to confront the possibility that the outcome of World War II required the rethinking of strategy - either in the direction of the 'state capitalism' theorists or that of Pablo and his co-thinkers. Instead, Mandel aligned with Pablo on the ground that the *political conjuncture in France* (and some other countries) required entry into the Communist Party, while rejecting his attempt to think strategically.

This dodging of strategic questions through elaborate analyses of the political conjuncture has been a hallmark of the tendency ever since. It allowed the comrades to remain committed to Trotskyist verities when it suited them, and certainly not to re-examine them seriously, but to depart a long way from them in practice on grounds of tactics in the current conjuncture.

In the case of the analyses which have supported the tactic of the broad, pluralist party 'not programmatically delimited between reform and revolution', there is an additional problem, which is that the political dynamics of the recent past are misunderstood.

The problem goes back to the 1970s, in two ways. The first was that the FI majority at this period became broadly 'new leftist'. The symptom was the theory of the 'new mass vanguard': supposedly, the old workers' vanguard organised by the socialist and communist parties had been exhausted, and a new layer of militants - student youth plus wildcat strikers in Europe; Guevarist guerrillas in Latin America - was emerging; a revolutionary party would be created by giving a lead to this 'new vanguard'.

The formal theory of the 'new mass vanguard' was dropped in the mid-1970s, without real public explanation, after both the central role of the socialist and communist parties in the politics of the Portuguese revolution, and the rise of the Labour broad left in Britain, demonstrated its falsity. But the current generation of Mandelite leaders (and, indeed, of



Ernest Mandel: wrong strategy



the leaders of most of the far left) were formed in the youth radicalisation of the late 1960s and early 1970s and still think in terms of the presupposed bankruptcy of the ‘old left’ and finding ‘newly radicalising forces’ to latch onto. The idea can be seen in caricature form in the arguments of the Socialist Workers Party for and around Respect - as in Chris Bambery’s review of this book.<sup>2</sup>

The result is a persistent tendency to underestimate the real weight of the traditional workers’ vanguard - the activists of the trade unions, large workers’ parties and so on. It is also a tendency to flit from one set of ‘newly radicalising forces’ to another, disregarding the *long-term* effort involved in constructing a political party which organises a *section of* the workers’ vanguard on the basis of a *strategic* orientation.

The second was that Mandel and his co-thinkers made the profound misjudgement of thinking that Eurocommunism represented a move to the left under the pressure of the west European working class, when it was actually - as should by now be utterly obvious - a move to the right under the pressure of the capitalist class. This error was repeated in relation to Gorbachevism and - ridiculously - Yeltsin.

This error is interlocked with the Mandelites’ tendency to make everything a matter of the conjuncture in order to ‘save the phenomena’ and maintain Trotskyist verities, since it involved clinging to the possibility of ‘political revolution’ in face of its becoming obvious that the underlying dominant dynamic of Soviet society had been *for a long time* towards capitalism.

The consequence in terms of the judgement of the political dynamics of the 1990s-2000s is what I have described above as being simultaneously *both* insufficiently dynamic and supposing excessive fluidity. The insufficient dynamism is the failure to recognise the profound and general global shift to the right, starting with the US ‘human rights’ offensive under Carter, and accelerating after the fall of the USSR. In Mandelite accounts this is represented as *simply* an offensive of the capitalist class, exploiting their control of the traditional mass organisations of the working class. It needed *also* to be grasped as involving deep disorientation and demoralisation of the workers’ movement at the base, and movement to the right of not only the SPs and CPs, but also the far left.

The excessive fluidity comes from the same source: since the underlying dynamics - the failure of the ‘socialist bloc’ as a general disorienting and demoralising factor - were not grasped, the Mandelites have supposed that reserves of militancy lie just below the surface, waiting to be captured by the “broad, pluralist parties embracing both the radical and Marxist left”: this is the real meaning of “opened up a political space to the left of social democracy”.

To some extent the several chapters of *New parties of the left* show comrades in several countries getting beyond this approach and recognising the long haul ahead. But - as can be seen from the first part of this review - there does not yet appear to be a systematic and general self-critical approach to the problem. And, in particular, beyond the question of government, the strategic issues which *could* form the basis of effective unity remain unaddressed.

### Stalinism

I said earlier that to a considerable extent *the Trotskyists* have never really settled accounts with Stalinism and the meaning of 1991. This is because in general they *believe* that they had already done so, merely by virtue of being Trotskyists. The Mandelites also claim that their Eurocommunist resolution, ‘The dictatorship of the proletariat and socialist democracy’, originally drafted in the late 1970s and adopted in 1985,<sup>3</sup> takes them further towards such a settling of accounts.

But they and most of the ‘orthodox Trotskyists’ remain unable to confront the main underlying truth which the fall of the USSR shows us: that socialism in a single country (meaning, in Trotskyist terms, the

dictatorship of the proletariat in a single country) is a strategic blind alley. The result is a concrete political unrealism, the ‘fight now’ perspective; this is reflected, as I said in the first part of the review, in the defeat of the FI in Democracia Socialista in Brazil and in the electoral marginality of Antarsya, in face of *acute* crisis, in Greece.

This is in some ways the most striking example. But the same is true of the policy of the united front, in which the major Trotskyist organisations apply Dimitrov’s idea of an agreement involving the suspension of criticism, from the 7th Congress of the Comintern, *as opposed to* Trotsky’s ideas and those of the 3rd and 4th Congresses of the Comintern, which argued for unity in action *with freedom of criticism*. In relation to the subordinated (‘third world’) countries, ‘orthodox Trotskyists’ have carried these choices to the point of people’s frontism.

And it is also true of the idea of the ‘party of a new type’, in which ‘orthodox Trotskyist’ organisations routinely use the arguments which were deployed by Stalin and his co-thinkers against Trotsky and his co-thinkers in the 1920s, rejecting the arguments to be found in the 1920s opposition platforms and in *The Third International after Lenin*,<sup>4</sup> and operate regimes which are *less* transparent and democratic than the western ‘official communist’ parties were.

The ‘party of a new type’ and the Dimitrov conception of the united front are interlinked. If the basis of the ‘revolutionary party’ is to be unity of *thought* and the absence of public criticism, it inevitably follows that a united front can only exist with (at least partial) suspension of criticism. Put another way, in the ‘Dimitrov united front’ the big bureaucrats of social democracy and the trade unions, and the lesser bureaucrats of the CPs, scratch each other’s backs, keeping differences private and away from the masses. In forms like Respect and the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition the same dynamic operates between the lesser bureaucrats of the ‘official left’ and the micro-bureaucrats of the SWP, Socialist Party in England and Wales, and so on.

The Mandelites preserved, where the ortho-Trots abandoned, the idea that dissent *within* the party is normal, and *partially* (not completely) rejected the use of factitious disciplinary charges to expel opponents. Until the mid-1970s, they shared with the ortho-Trots the idea that *public* dissent is unacceptable. The rise of Eurocommunism, however, led to more or less open factional battles within the communist parties, and in these conditions the Mandelites were led to a *degree of* open dissent: it was obviously untenable that the Trotskyists should be visibly *less* open than the ‘official’ communists. At first public disagreement was usually rationed, in the sense that public disagreement was limited to faction ‘tribunes’ *in pre-conference discussion periods*; gradually, though still incompletely, it has become wider.

The Mandelites have, nonetheless, retained the fundamental Dimitrov conception of the united front, and the existence of large classes of disagreements which are kept private in the leaderships, not disclosed to the membership (or, *a fortiori*, to readers of the party press). The open expression of disagreement is avoided, not usually by disciplinary measures, but by the construction of a spurious unity through diplomatic documents and resolutions. This is true *both* in the internal life of their own organisations *and* in broad-front projects to which they are party. The chapters in the book on Brazil, Italy and Britain make clear where this policy leads: in the end to *confused and demoralising* splits.

It is, of course, *possible* that these choices to ‘go Stalinist’ are right and (as their proponents argue) realistic. But they make it clear that the Trotskyists can no more be said to have settled accounts with Stalinism and with 1991 than the former Stalinists - and in some respects less.

The fall of the Soviet regime and its imitators does not take us back to a blank slate. But it does destroy, or more exactly render irrelevant, Trotskyist arguments that there could be a ‘political revolution’ against these regimes in advance of the

restoration of capitalist regimes (and similar arguments made by ‘state capitalist’ theorists). Hence it necessarily calls into serious question *how far* communists today should think of 1917-21 in Russia as a model for a future workers’ socialist revolution, or the lines of the first four Congresses of the Comintern as defining strategy for today.

(Note: I say *how far*, not *whether*: workers’ revolution was plainly a real and important element of what happened in Russia, and I agree with the fundamental communist judgment that the working class *could have* taken power in western Europe in 1918-20; if it had done so it would have made very fundamental differences to what was possible in Russia.)

About this issue the ‘orthodox Trotskyists’ refuse all thought; the Mandelites, by and large, draw a leftish version of Eurocommunist conclusions, overlaid by a certain fetishism of strikes, demonstrations and uprisings, without much real, explicit theorising.

### Strategy

The problem with the “broad, pluralist parties embracing both the radical and Marxist left”, the ‘parties not programmatically delimited between reform and revolution’, turns out to be that some of the old strategic political differences between social democracy and communism, between Stalinism and Trotskyism, are actually not differences which have to wait for conditions of revolutionary crisis until they materialise, but are live political questions in current parliamentary and electoral politics - like minority participation in government, like backing or rejecting your own state’s overseas adventures, and so on.

Hence it is necessary to settle accounts with Stalinism, not in the sense of wiping the slate clean, but of *re-examining the strategic issues* between social democracy and communism, between Stalinism and Trotskyism, to decide what to retain and what to discard in the ‘traditional’ positions of the left.

This re-examination needs certain basic coordinates. First, of course, is the failure of the USSR and its satellites and imitators. Second is the fact that the concessions to the working class made by the capitalist nation-states since the late 19th century are being gradually clawed back, and that social democracy has been (as the comrades correctly judge) dragged to the right.

Third is recognition that the ‘party of a new type’ concept is both founded on a historical *myth* about Bolshevism (as is apparent from Lars T Lih’s work, but also that of others) and proves to be completely useless for working class (as opposed to peasant-based) parties not backed by an existing state. It produces only a sterile wilderness of competing groups which are as useless under conditions of revolutionary crisis as they are in more ordinary political conditions.

I have attempted to *begin* on this task in my book *Revolutionary strategy* (2008). I am sure the book, of which I am working on a second edition, is not the last word that can be said on the subject. But its fundamental point is that parties need to be organised on the basis of strategic and programmatic coordinates for the long term, not tactics seen as growing out of the immediate conjuncture. This is, I think, negatively and dreadfully confirmed by the histories in *New parties of the left* of the Mandelites and others’ experiments with new parties on the basis of *tactical* agreements. It is equally negatively confirmed from the same histories by the utter incapacity of the groups committed to dogmatic adherence to Trotskyism to do anything more than ... produce more splits ●

Mike Macnair

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### Notes

1. ‘The Fourth International and failed perspectives’, June 7.  
2. <http://internationalsocialist.org.uk/index.php/2011/09/renewing-the-left-a-look-back-to-move-forward>.  
3. [www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article921](http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article921). I characterise this resolution as Eurocommunist primarily because of its commitments to ‘socialist legality’, which is code for the ‘rule of law’, which in turn is and can only exist as the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.  
4. Chapter 11: [www.marxists.org/archive/rotsky/1928/3rd/t07.htm#p2-11](http://www.marxists.org/archive/rotsky/1928/3rd/t07.htm#p2-11).

# What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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# weekly worker

## In Europe lies the answer

# Be careful what you wish for

On Sunday June 17, the Greek population will march once again to the polls - this time in even more dramatic circumstances. The polarisation of support between the rightwing New Democracy and the Coalition of the Radical Left (Syriza), and the background of a €100 billion, no-strings European Union bailout of Spanish banks, has charged this contest with a truly climactic feel - although, given that neither party looks likely to be able to form a government outright, Sunday's poll is hardly likely to settle things in itself.

The western left in general, meanwhile, is also polarised - but obviously not on the same basis. The question is: critical support for Syriza, or action independent of it? This is posed most immediately because the various Trotskyist 'internationalists', from the Fourth International itself to the Socialist Workers Party's International Socialist Tendency, have their own groups and thus small stakes in Greece; but also because it is blindingly clear that, so far as the European masses are concerned, we are 'all in it together'.

Many of the left organisations are grouped in Antarsya, an explicitly anti-capitalist (inasmuch as 'anti-capitalism' can be called explicit) formation that joins the Greek SWP (SEK), the Mandeliste Organisation of Communist Internationalists of Greece-Spartacus (OKDE-S) and various other currents, including most importantly a radical youth breakaway from the Communist Party of Greece (KKE). Syriza, meanwhile, includes two breakaways from the SEK.

The only known quantity about the Greek political landscape come Monday morning is its uncertainty; one can speak, however, with much more assurance about the far-left discourse on events there. The left is polarised on a secondary question; it uniformly gets the main questions wrong.

## SWP and Syriza

The terms of the left debate on Greece are usefully summed up in a dispute among comrades of our very own SWP - an interesting development, as the SWP is the very last place one looks, under normal circumstances, for signs of overt disagreement (even its splits these days look more and more politically threadbare).

Yet here is Richard Seymour, blogger at *Lenin's Tomb* and an increasingly persistent democratic dissident in the SWP, coming out very cryptically for Syriza.<sup>1</sup> Under different circumstances that might not be controversial in the SWP; but its comrades are today slogging it out in Antarsya, whose vote looks to be extremely pinched.

Comrade Seymour provides a thumbnail analysis of Syriza and its vote, concluding that it cannot straightforwardly be called 'reformist'; that its dual commitment to pro-Europe and anti-austerity stances is "inconsistent" and "an ambiguity whose resolution will depend significantly on the continuation and outcome of struggles in which Syriza is partially embedded". Rather than this, it is its commitment to forming



Alex Tsipras: government?

a left government that has won the support of "millions of workers and, at that, *the most radicalised workers*" (emphasis in original).

He criticises the KKE in most vigorous terms for its absolute refusal to countenance forming such a government, to the point of 'third period'-style denunciations of Syriza. It refuses to acknowledge that the "choice is between a New Democracy-led austerity government, which would be immensely demoralising, and a Syriza-led anti-austerity government, which would give the whole continental left a massive shot in the arm and open up a host of new possibilities". On Antarsya, he has little to say at all.

John Molyneux, the SWP's premier 'loyal oppositionist' (these days rather more loyal than oppositional), responds on his own blog to professions of incredulity that the SWP can call for a vote to the Muslim Brotherhood's presidential candidate in Egypt, yet refuse support to Syriza.<sup>2</sup> His first response is to reject this "mechanical" counterposition - it is perfectly permissible to advocate radically different electoral tactics in different situations.

In this, he is quite correct. 'Critical support' has been reduced by some to an algebraic formula, and there is no hard and fast law against limited electoral cooperation between communists and bourgeois parties - the Bolsheviks came to an electoral agreement with the liberal Cadets, and profited from it far more than the latter.

The problem with the SWP's call for a vote to the MB is not that it crosses a line of principle, but rather that it is utterly wrong in its own terms.<sup>3</sup>

What, then, of tactics in Greece? Comrade Molyneux makes the point that "the entire historical experience of 'left' governments in times of serious crisis shows that this is a perilous situation for working people", citing the obvious cases of Chile under Allende, the Spanish popular front and so on. This is apparently not a reason to "oppose" Syriza or left governments in general, but is a reason to "maintain and build a clear, independent, revolutionary alternative". This, apparently, is the aim of SEK in this period.

The issue is: what is the "clear, independent, revolutionary alternative" offered by Antarsya? The contributors to the SWP debate converge on a single answer: mass mobilisation in the streets, to make sure the government does what it was ostensibly elected to do, and keep the momentum going. This is a dodge - what is Antarsya to mobilise people for?

What distinguishes revolutionary policy from reformism in this case? For all practical purposes, according to the SWP, it is the demand for a full break with the EU, whereas Syriza are 'reformists' because they wish to 'reform' the EU. This is in fact a shibboleth - a particularly stupid shibboleth - and no guarantee of revolutionary consistency at all.

## Wrong question, wrong answer

The far left, then, has become obsessed with electoral tactics - what matters first and foremost is the *programme* for which it fights.

Central to this in the Greek context is, firstly, the obvious issue on which this election is being contested - Greece's relationship, present and future, to the EU. Nowhere is this problem as thorny as in Greece at the present time: if it stays in the EU, all things being equal, it faces sadistic economic punishment at the hands of the troika. On the other hand, if it

leaves, it faces the flight of capital, a stillborn drachma and austerity of a very different sort. Some estimates see 20% being knocked off the value of the Greek GDP overnight.

All those who pose one alternative as somehow preferable (or more 'revolutionary') to the other, *in those terms*, are propagating cretinous fantasies. The 'Greek question' is transparently a *European* question - it poses the necessity of common working class organisation and action *across the continent*.

There is a second and perhaps more important issue, obscured by a great fug of conventional wisdom in which the answer is taken for granted. This is the question of *government*. Should we demand - like Richard Seymour - a 'left government', or a 'workers' government', and advise our Greek comrades to form one? In reality, comrade Molyneux gets closer to the answer. If a government of the workers takes power and is unable to impose its programme, the result is invariably repression and demoralisation. Those who raise the spectre of military rule, or even fascism, as arguments for the left taking power have failed to notice that black reaction is quite invariably the main beneficiary wherever the left presides over social devastation.

In Greece alone, the choice is between semi-colonial dependency on Germany and an endogenous social catastrophe. A 'left' government, a New Democracy-led coalition, a new regime of the colonels - all will have to pick between them. The idea that a Syriza government in this situation will be a 'shot in the arm' for the continental left is only true if the shot in question is of deadly poison. Merkel will tell Spain, Italy and whoever else - fine, play hardball; you'll only end up like Greece.

The way out is to fight, from a position of extreme opposition, for a government that *could* implement a revolutionary programme (which, again, means fighting for power on a *continental* scale). Comrade Pham Binh declares this attitude to be a 'Marxist' version of John Holloway's *Change the world without taking*

*power*<sup>4</sup> - this is an obvious folly. It is entirely orthodox Marxism and consistent with the strategy pursued by Marx, Engels and, for that matter, Lenin, who could, after all, have taken power during the July days ... It has been confirmed by the experience of pretty much every government with far-left participation in history - including the manner in which revolutionary Russia ultimately succumbed to its own isolation.

This, ultimately, is why the narrow issue of the Greek revolutionary left's electoral tactics for this Sunday is an issue of secondary importance. There are very real arguments for critical support for Syriza on the European question. Tsipras and co have been most energetic in highlighting the European dimension of the Greek struggle, and engaging with solidarity groupings throughout Europe. That he is so keen to form a government is the fundamental basis of a serious criticism of Syriza.

On the other hand, it is perfectly permissible to run candidates independently of Syriza. Never before has the risk of splitting the far-left vote been more negligible - Antarsya and the KKE will be lucky to add up to 5%, the way things are going. In such circumstances, obviously, one can make propaganda for whatever programme one wants.

Without a serious strategic approach to the European Union, and to the question of government, the left's electoral musings are so much hot air ●

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## Notes

1. [www.leninology.com/2012/06/challenge-of-syriza.html](http://www.leninology.com/2012/06/challenge-of-syriza.html). While his piece originally appeared on the *Lenin's Tomb* website, it has been republished by the American International Socialist Organization, which was expelled from the IST over a decade ago, and whose immediate Greek co-thinkers are a component of Syriza.
2. <http://johnmolyneux.blogspot.co.uk/2012/05/normal-0-microsoftinternetexplorer4.html>.
3. See my article last week: 'None of the above' *Weekly Worker* June 7.
4. <http://johnriddell.wordpress.com/2012/05/31/change-the-world-without-taking-power-marxist-edition>.

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