



# weekly worker

**Alexis Tsipras and Syriza celebrate  
stunning second place: stay as a  
party of extreme opposition**

- Bus workers
- Euro crisis
- Police commissioners
- Muslim Brothers

No 919 Thursday June 21 2012

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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## Use stalemate to rebuild





# LETTERS



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

## Phantoms

Pete McLaren bemoans the fact that of the 15 organisations that have been involved to varying degrees with the Left Unity Liaison Committee (including the CPGB briefly), only one - his own Socialist Alliance - replied to the LULC's letter of January 17 (Letters, June 14). This expressed "concern about the lack of any real unity" on the left, a dire situation that "will almost certainly leave our class without the coordination needed to combat" the attacks of the ruling class.

I don't think it will come as too much of a surprise to readers of this paper that the CPGB agrees. Our group has consistently fought for principled left unity and I'm sure that comrade McLaren himself will recall the role we played when we were with him and hundreds of others in the most serious regroupment project of recent years: the original Socialist Alliance. We had many important disagreements with Pete then, but a quick thumb through his copy of Jack Conrad's *Towards a Socialist Alliance* party should at least remind him of the concrete measures and proposals we advanced to overcome sectarianism and draw together the constituent parts of the SA. Indeed, if his time is pinched, he could make do with just casting his eye over the cover blurb of the second edition:

"Some comrades in the SA say we should settle for a loose conglomeration of leftwing groups and local campaigns. Others want a 'relatively durable' united front ... The SA must become a party ... [The important thing is] creating a genuine party ethos ..." (TSAP October 2001).

So this question posed in the January 17 letter seems to us a little superfluous as far as our group goes: "Does your organisation want to help to promote left unity?" Well, yes. But the implication of the next sentence - that if we do then it is some sort of contradiction that we "no longer attend LULC meetings" - does not follow at all.

The CPGB was quite clear that the destruction of the SA represented the temporary victory of sectarian insularity. The left is now fragmented and bereft of any viable unity projects - certainly not a LULC that, as comrade McLaren's slightly forlorn letter makes clear, has become the political equivalent of the Mary Celeste. We take no satisfaction from that and recognise the sincerity of Pete's concerns. It is simply an unfortunate fact of contemporary political life that we must fight patiently to change.

What will *not* help is if we forget that the most basic requirement of a potential forum for left rapprochement is that *serious left organisations actually participate in it*, not the phantoms of alliances past.

**Mark Fischer**

CPGB national organiser

## What decline?

Well, at least Paul Smith has managed to include some actual data in his response to me this time (Letters, June 7). If only to misrepresent it. First, he says the International Monetary Fund argues that Chinese growth will be cut in half (4.2%), then he quotes the actual figure for this year of 8.5% and then he claims it will fall to 7.5%.

In fact, the IMF's forecast was based on a worst-case scenario for Europe, and on China taking no counter-action. But let's assume the worst possible case forecast here. Wow, the world's second largest economy might only grow by 4.2% (about double the average for the UK during the post-war boom) during a severe cyclical downturn. Capitalism

really must be in decline!

In fact, Chinese growth has slowed precisely because the state has reined it back, as the economy was overheating. Comrade Smith claims that China's growth was all a mirage based on unproductive investment in property. So, its massive and growing trade surplus with the US, and many other parts of the world, had nothing to do with the fact that it is now the major producer of many of the world's manufactured goods then. The fact that China exports 30% of its output to the US and Europe, and another 30% to Asia, must also be a mirage then, according to comrade Smith.

Comrade Smith objects to me citing a range of countries' GDP growth. It doesn't help him. According to the IMF, gross world product rose by 5.1%, 5.2%, 3%, -0.5%, 5.1%, 4.3% and 4.5%, respectively, in the years from 2006 on. GWP is estimated to have risen from \$41,000 billion in 2000 to \$70,000 billion in 2011. Of all the goods and services produced in man's entire history, almost 25% have been produced in the last 10 years. This cannot be described even by comrade Smith as unproductive.

Nor can comrade Smith obtain any succour from the labour force data. According to the International Labour Organisation, the global labour force employed in industry has risen by around 30%, and the labour force employed in services has risen by around 35%. In the last 10 years, it has risen by around half a billion. Comrade Smith continues his habit of misrepresenting things when he talks about unemployment, particularly unemployment of rural labourers. He seems to forget that most of these rural labourers were, in fact, previously peasants, and therefore not part of the labour force.

He later questions whether I have read *Capital*, but he doesn't seem to have read the bit in it where Marx describes the way in which capitalism in Britain pushed millions of peasants off the land and into the towns to become the working class. He also doesn't seem to have read the bit there about how during this most productive and dynamic period for British capitalism, it was accompanied by extremely low wages for those workers. He talks about the low wages of Chinese workers, but says nothing about how much their wages have risen. He talks about the lack of a welfare state, but says nothing about how Chinese workers' health has improved markedly over the last 20 years or so.

Having objected unsuccessfully to these statistics, however, comrade Smith is once again able to provide not one single piece of data of his own to show that capitalism is in decline. The best he is able to come up with is: "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." But which is it? Is it a slump, which means large falls in output, a massive amount of unsold commodities and mass unemployment on a wide scale, or is it merely, as he says, "no boom", "no growth"? I'm happy to accept that the EU is experiencing a cyclical slowdown enhanced by the debt crisis, and that US growth has moderated for similar reasons. But slower growth is not a slump, is it? There were at least five such slowdowns in the post-war boom. Unable to show that capitalism has not been growing strongly over the last 10 years, let alone that it has been in serious decline, comrade Smith is forced back into merely claiming that capitalism is experiencing a cyclical downturn. But even that is not producing a global recession.

As for comrade Smith's comments

on abstract labour, I'd suggest it is he that does not understand Marx. In *Capital* volume I, Marx makes clear that abstract labour is concrete labour stripped of all its specific characteristics. It has to be so in order that there is some common unit of measurement of labour-time. Otherwise, how could the one hour of complex labour spent by the brain surgeon be equated with the one hour of simple labour expended by the machine minder or the one hour of labour expended by the electrician? Abstract labour is the essence of exchange value; it is its measure, and by this means creates it; but the source is the concrete labour embodied in the actual commodity. If comrade Smith doubts that I'd ask him whether, if he were to require brain surgery, he would place the same exchange value on it being performed by a brain surgeon or by a machine minder. If not, where does he think the source of this difference of exchange value resides?

Comrade Smith once again makes his strange statement about me not understanding the difference between productive and unproductive labour, but, as with most of his other statements, provides no substantiation for making it. I can only assume that he is referring to his reformist fetish for state-owned production. I am sure that all of the members of the National Union of Mineworkers who were employed by that state will willingly accept the comrade's description of them as unproductive workers. Marx's definition of productive and unproductive was productive of surplus value - ie, exchanging with capital. For Marx and Engels, it does not matter whether this is private capital, joint stock capital, trust capital or state capital.

As I previously cited in response to comrade Smith's reformist illusions in the capitalist state, Engels makes it abundantly clear: "The modern state, no matter what its form, is essentially a capitalist machine, the state of the capitalists, the ideal personification of the total national capital. The more it proceeds to the taking over of productive forces, the more does it actually become the national capitalist, the more citizens does it exploit. The workers remain wage-workers - proletarians. The capitalist relation is not done away with. It is rather brought to a head."

**Arthur Bough**  
email

## Sex Tory

I was interested to see the responses (Letters, June 14) to my letter (June 7) about the sex industry.

Dave Douglass questions the quality of the research on female sexuality referred to in my letter. He might like to look at the following sample: Havelock Ellis (1901) speculated that "a woman can find sexual satisfaction in a great number of ways that do not include the sexual act proper [sic], and in a great number of ways, simply because their physical basis is diffused or is to be found in one of the outlying sexual zones." The Kinsey Institute reports that women rate sexual satisfaction higher than men do and says it's quite common to find standard sex unsatisfying: "If what you mean by 'standard' sex is penis-vagina intercourse, you may be interested to know that quite a lot of women don't orgasm during intercourse" (July 2011). Masters and Johnson (1966) supported Kinsey's (1953) research, as did Hite (1970s), who concluded that 70% of women do not find intercourse satisfactory.

That's a considerable amount of research over more than a century. It all passed Dave Douglass by. Some of it was written by men, though, so is worth taking seriously because they are

obviously better qualified to understand female sexuality. Some work on this subject refers to the historical and social context, including the oppression of women, to explain the ideological dominance of specific sexual practices. That ideological dominance is accepted by all serious commentators. Dave referred to his opinion that it did not apply to any of the women he has slept with. Have you ever seen *When Harry met Sally*, Dave?

John Smithee writes favourably of the great benefits to men of what he calls the "escort" industry. It is probably kinder to refrain from comment, other than to ask how he thinks it benefits women, men with ambitions beyond acting as a life support system for an erection, or the alleged commitment of socialists to gender equality.

In relation to the comrade from the GMB, his associate, Douglas Fox of the International Union of Sex Workers, helpfully outlines the role of the two 'unions': "With regard to our industry, the fact that a major union recognises our work as legitimate labour is very important and *through the GMB we are able to gain access to government and through the TUC to other union and labour rights organisations* ... Myself and a small group were given permission by the IUSW/GMB branch to organise the IUSW as a viable campaigning separate group (but still part of the whole). To do all the work we need we are asking for donations or subscriptions and for people to join and get involved ... We have received nearly £1500 in donations, the largest part being from the Conservative Party."

When Mr Fox refers to "our industry", he is speaking literally - he is the founder of, and a partner in, Christy Companions escort agency, "the market leader in the North East". Apart from the IUSW membership including pimps and punters, the Tory Party funding might indicate a problem with full recognition by the labour movement. Just saying.

I look forward to the inevitable deluge of apologist nonsense.

**Heather Downs**  
Medway

## Power of women

Heather Downs' response (Letters, June 14) to my article, 'End harassment of sex workers' (June 7), failed to address its purpose. However, I will first answer some of the points raised in her letter.

I do believe that women are the gatekeepers of sexual morality, but not in the way she thinks. Of course, women have their own sexual desires, but I agree that demand from men for this industry is neither inevitable nor natural. Yes, the focus has always been on prostitution and, yes, there is a market. Whether it is demand for lap-dancing clubs or prostitution, we live in a commodity system, and if people have a need, there will be producers to meet that need. The sex industry is not a marginal issue and I do not support global capitalism's commodification of the human body.

But in current conditions we have to support women any way we can. And, of course, we have to provide support to women, such as Rebecca Mott, who face dangers and other women who suffer abuse. I don't deny that all studies demonstrating those dangers are invalidated by methodological inaccuracy. However, there are other dangers, which is why the CPGB calls for decriminalisation of prostitution, and these have to do with the reasons why women enter prostitution. They do so for numerous reasons - for example, because it offers the opportunity to work flexible hours if they have children to look after, to pay the bills (and, of course, drug and alcohol problems are included). But women would not consider prostitution

if they were not forced to, just as many workers would not slavishly carry out nine-to-five jobs if they didn't have to. But, with conditions as they are, prostitution offers some women that little bit of control over their lives.

Decriminalisation would also counter other dangers, such as crimes against prostitutes from vigilante groups, which police frequently fail to investigate, and the inability of women to pursue careers if convicted of prostitution. I don't deny that there are victims of sex trafficking and I am sure that organisations such as Survivors Connect do good work. However, women, including migrants, do also work in the sex industry voluntarily.

In relation to rape, Heather Downs quotes Melissa Farley about the incidence of prostitutes being raped by clients. However, I suspect there is an agenda with the type of research Farley pumps out, given the fact that she is part-funded by the US government's anti-trafficking and anti-client programme, which spent \$109 million in 2010. This is not to deny rape, but not to the extent that is reported. I could quote figures about violence in the family - for example, wife beating - and this cannot be denied. But it appears that some people are selecting which crimes to panic about rather than take a balanced view about violence in general.

Furthermore, decriminalisation would afford prostitutes basic human rights, such as particular forms of healthcare which they might not currently access for fear of arrest, and to report non-consensual acts to the police.

Of course, men are not inevitably sexual predators - a Machiavellian primate living in Africa maybe? But what made us human was our ability to overcome dominance through the power of women's collective solidarity imposing an egalitarian morality, and it is only through working class solidarity that we can again overcome exploitation. I am sure that Heather Downs understands this.

**Simon Wells**  
East London

## Student sparks

Michael Copestake's report of the recent Communist Students conference provided an accurate reflection of the opinions and viewpoints expressed over the course of the two-day gathering ('Opposition fails to show', June 14). However, I feel that the caption chosen for his article - "Next spark will not be fees and cuts" - was out of step with both the picture above it (ie, the inspirational Quebec protests against the introduction of tuition fees!) and the general consensus that emerged amongst CS comrades on this question.

Most comrades at the conference felt that, given the turmoil through which the world is currently passing, it would be quite surprising if we did *not* see another series of student walkouts, protests, occupations and suchlike in the coming academic year. While comrades hypothesised about what precisely *could* initiate such stirring on campuses, I do not recall any comrade arguing that anything was automatically ruled in or out - including the question of fees and cuts.

Comrade Copestake's article described this discussion in the cautious language necessary when engaging in conjecture about the future: "... 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" (emphasis added). The only predictable thing about student politics is its unpredictability - especially in times like these.

**Ben Lewis**  
London



## POVERTY

# A bus driver's crisis

On the eve of the June 22 London bus drivers' strike Gerry Downing reports on the plight of one not so untypical worker

**A** head of Friday's walkout by London bus drivers, sections of the media are making ready to attack the strikers for exercising their right to claim a meagre bonus for working during the unusually busy Olympic period. Meanwhile most London bus drivers are struggling to get by. We're reproducing below a synopsis by an advice worker who has been trying to help a driver and his family deal with their horrendous housing crisis.

What you are about to read may sound like an exceptionally horrific tale of the recession. But the reality of Cameron's Britain is that stories like these are becoming increasingly commonplace. Thousands of families are unable to meet the costs of the bosses' crisis, thousands of children are going hungry or living in cramped conditions, and thousands of parents are struggling to feed them. Some of those parents will be going on strike this Friday.

"I have been working with the ... family for many months trying to help them with their homeless persons application to Brent council. The family consists of Mr and Mrs Counihan and their five children under 15 years. Mrs Counihan was born and bred in Brent, Mr Counihan has lived there for over 20 years. The family have significant health problems: Mrs Counihan is significantly disabled and the youngest child suffers from autism. Mr Counihan works in Brent as a bus driver.

"In 2009 I assisted the family with their housing. Brent council placed them in NW6. The rent was £690 per week. The Counihans were responsible for £230 per week of this rent and housing benefit covered the balance.

"In January 2010 Mr Counihan inherited 9.5 acres of farmland in Ireland from his late father. The land is of poor quality and four acres of it is waterlogged most of the year. It has no planning permission and obtaining planning permission is not possible because of the inaccessibility of the parcel of land. The Counihans attempted to sell the land but failed, not least due to the dire economic situation in Ireland. They realised that all they could do with the land was rent it to a local farmer for grazing purposes.

"The land can support up to 20 cattle at a time. The going rate for land such as this is £1,200 per year and the Counihans managed to secure this sum. The family immediately declared this extra income to housing benefit and working tax credits. This resulted in an increase in their rental contributions and a reduction in their working tax credits. They also lost their entitlement to free school meals and prescriptions. The family accepted these changes.

"In December 2011 they were contacted by the housing benefit department for a review of their circumstances, and again they declared their income from the land. This time, however, they were told that, as they had capital (the land), they were not nor ever had been entitled to housing benefit. Their benefit was immediately stopped and they were given a bill for £69,000 (later reduced to £46,000). Unable to pay a rent of £690 per week on a bus driver's salary, the family became homeless.

"We assisted the family in making a homeless person's application to Brent council in January 2012. Their application was the subject of 'gatekeeping' and the family were



Housing 'gatekeepers'

directed to housing advice instead. The advice given was to get a mortgage. This was of no help as on their income and with five dependants, a mortgage was unobtainable. The family were also incurring a debt of over £1,600 per month in their unaffordable accommodation. We assisted the family with an appeal against housing benefit's decision.

"The Counihans received notice to quit their accommodation by April 27 2012. We again assisted the family in making a homeless persons application. On this occasion, we had to accompany the family to the council to avoid a repeat of the previous 'gatekeeping'. We made it perfectly clear that any housing must be suitable and therefore affordable. The housing department were made aware of the Counihans' ineligibility for housing benefit. The housing department nevertheless provided temporary housing for the family which was neither suitable nor affordable at a cost of £500 per week.

"Despite having all the information necessary to make a decision on the family's housing application, no

decision is forthcoming. We believe the housing department is awaiting a decision on the housing benefit appeal before making their own decision in the hope that they can find the family intentionally homeless. An authority may not delay making a decision in the hope or expectation of a change in circumstances such as might reduce its duties.

"Mr and Mrs Counihan have acted in good faith at all times and the dire situation they find themselves in is not of their making. The family are under considerable stress due to this appalling situation and three of the children are receiving medical care as a result. Mrs Counihan is suicidal and Mr Counihan is finding it very hard to cope."

We understand that Mrs Counihan is awaiting an urgent hip replacement at present, while every day she has to take her children to school in Kilburn from the family's accommodation in South Ealing.

If anyone is able to provide any advice on how to help the Counihan family, please contact Gerry Downing on [gerdowning@btinternet.com](mailto:gerdowning@btinternet.com) ●

## Fighting fund Desperate need

We received a nice little note this week from comrade BW, who, while he has decided to cancel his subscription to the paper, sent us a £15 cheque in the hope that, in some small way, it will help "progress towards the formation of a united Marxist party", for which there is a "desperate need". I'm sorry you're cancelling your sub, comrade, but the sentiment is spot on.

I received three other contributions by cheque for the fighting fund this week - from KL (£20), SJ and TP (£10 each). Then there was a total of £355 in standing order donations (over £300 of which coming from just two comrades - thank you, MM and SK). And I also received a new standing order form for £8

a month from DT - another little boost towards our target of £1,500 each month!

Finally there were two donations made via our website - a welcome £25 from SR, plus a tenner from TP. They were amongst 9,273 online readers last week (yes, our web readership has fallen below the 10,000 mark again). But all that takes our June total to £1,075, which means we still need to raise £425 in just over a week. We need the full one and a half grand just to meet our running costs - and keep up the fight for a united Marxist party.

**Robbie Rix**

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

## 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 24, 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 (continued). 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 26, 6.15pm:** 'How the west was lost: the role of feasting, monumentality and astronomy in the Neolithic transition'. Speaker: Fabio Silva.

Organised by Radical Anthropology: [radicalanthropologygroup.org](http://radicalanthropologygroup.org).

### Labour Representation Committee

**Thursday June 19, 7pm:** Meeting of Hackney LRC branch, Navarino Mansions Community Hall, Dalston Lane, London E8. With Rosemary Sales (Save the NHS).

**Tuesday July 3, 7.30pm:** Meeting of Lambeth and Southwark LRC branch, conference room, Karibu Education Centre, 7 Gresham Road, London SW9.

**Thursday July 19, 8pm:** Public meeting, Ruskin House, 23 Coombe Road, Croydon. The radical alternative to austerity. Speaker: John McDonnell MP.

Organised by Labour Representation Committee: <http://l-r-c.org.uk>.

### Battle of Saltley Gate

**Friday June 22, 7.30pm:** UK premiere 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).

### Afghanistan - 10 years on

**Friday June 22 to Sunday July 8:** Photography by Guy Smallman, St John on Bethnal Green, 200 Cambridge Heath Road, London E2. Sponsored by *Peace News*: [www.guysmallman.com](http://www.guysmallman.com).

### Open City Docs Fest

**Saturday June 23, 2pm:** Film screening, School of Oriental and African Studies, Thornhaugh Street, London WC1. What happens to African migrants granted political refugee status? Followed by panel discussion. Tickets £5.

Organised by Open City Docs: [www.opencitydocsfest.com](http://www.opencitydocsfest.com).

### Picnic and subversion

**Saturday June 23, 1pm to 5pm:** Talk by Kimathi Donkor, followed by game: Guy Debord's *The Game of War*.

**Saturday June 30, 1pm to 5pm:** Talk by Richard Barbrook and Fabian Tompsett, followed by game: 1791 Haitian revolution. McKenzie Pavilion, Finsbury Park, London, N4.

Organised by Class wargames: [www.classwargames.net](http://www.classwargames.net).

### 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 NAEI national agreement

**Wednesday June 27, 6am:** Protest, gate 2, Fawley oil refinery, Fawley Road, Southampton SO45. No to race to the bottom.

Organised by Unite siteworkers: [siteworkers@virginmedia.com](mailto:siteworkers@virginmedia.com)

### Hands off Syria and Iran

**Thursday June 28, 6.30pm:** Public meeting, room G3, School of Oriental and African Studies, Thornhaugh Street, London WC1. Speakers: Jeremy Corbyn MP, Sami Ramadani, Lindsey German.

Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [office@stopwar.org.uk](mailto:office@stopwar.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 Briefing

**Saturday July 7, 12 noon:** Annual general meeting, University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1. *Briefing* readers can attend and vote on whether LRC should adopt *Labour Briefing* magazine.

Organised by Labour Briefing: [www.labourbriefing.org.uk](http://www.labourbriefing.org.uk).

### CPGB wills

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



## GREECE

# Taking up extreme opposition

The victory of the troika's patsies in the Greek elections should be met with determined class resistance - across Europe, argues Paul Demarty

**A**ntonis Samaras, leader of the conservative New Democracy party, has been sworn in as prime minister after coming to a coalition deal with the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (Pasok) and the Democratic Left (Dimar), the current incarnation of the most rightwing faction of Greece's fractious Eurocommunist milieu. These three parties - thanks to the bizarre constitutional regulation that adds 50 seats (a sixth of the total in the Greek legislature!) to the tally of the first placed party - command a majority, despite commanding barely 40% of the vote between them.

The international bourgeoisie has got the result it pulled out every stop to engineer. It started with talk, in the wake of last month's abortive poll, of denying the 50-seat top-up to Syriza on the grounds that it was a coalition rather than a party (Syriza quickly returned the relevant forms to become one). The press screeched wildly about Alexis Tsipras, allegedly some kind of ranting communist lunatic, getting hold of the reins of power in Greece.

It wailed even louder about the consequences of a Greek exit from the euro zone. Initially, the European establishment tried to simulate insouciance - the relevant 'firewalls' had gone up, there was no chance of a Greek 'contagion' spreading to the heart of the euro zone ...

As Syriza looked that it might possibly edge to a narrow lead over ND, however, the tone changed. The very economic existence, not just of Greece, or of Europe, but the *entire world*, it seemed at times, depended on the Greeks swallowing the sick in their mouths and returning that utterly compromised mediocrity, Samaras, to power. Out went the rather abstract portmanteau, 'Grexit', as a name for a Greek exit from the euro; in came the rather more urgent 'Drachmageddon'.

## It's not over

So how grateful is the international ruling class for this last-minute rescue from perdition? The short answer is: not very. Markets rallied for a whole hour on Monday morning; then Samaras's guff about national salvation was entirely drowned out by the Spanish government's pleading for a bailout. The childish spat at the G20 summit in Mexico between American dignitaries and European Commission president José Manuel Barroso over the causes of the euro zone crisis - 'They started it!' - only added to the din. Any sensible person in the world, let alone the financial 'masters of the universe' who insist on speaking in the name of the markets, can see that the euro zone is still circling the drain.

All this is of tangential importance to the Greek masses, for whom - whatever the outcome of the Obama-Barroso slap-fight, the ECB-Spanish bailout negotiations and everything else - the future is presently a bleak one. They were presented with a stark choice: euro or bust. *Just about enough* of them chose the former to hand power to Samaras and ND.

What will they do with this power? Given the high drama of the election, Samaras is doing a pretty unconvincing impression of tough talk. There must be renegotiation of the terms of the Greek bailout. The population will not take any more austerity measures (frankly, it is pretty hard to see what else there is to cut).

Can *anyone* be convinced by this? Samaras and his allies have staked everything on staying in the euro. The 'nuclear option' of unilateral withdrawal - taking France down



Alexis Tsipras: a stunning second for Syriza

with Greece and Germany down with France and the world down with Germany - is not available to him. He has no negotiating position to speak of. He will no doubt squeeze a few trifling concessions from the troika. Beyond that, they will tell him where to get off. (It is all but politically impossible for Angela Merkel, with polls suggesting that 49% of Germans *support* a Greek exit from the euro zone, to give a huge amount in the way of concessions.)

At least he will be able to implement the terms of the infamous memorandum without personal discomfort. Like any rightwing career politician of the last 30 years, Samaras will revel in the slash-and-burn class offensive that awaits - indeed, that has already been going on for years. He promises national salvation - but anyone who has not already twigged will soon learn that the salvation he offers comes at the price of martyrdom.

What, then, of Syriza? Reports indicate that, despite its narrow defeat, the coalition-turned-party is jubilant. Indeed, it has just reason for being so - it has tripled its vote in a matter of a few years, and now sits pretty as the main opposition party, with a substantial share of parliamentary seats. Tsipras and his allies are a far cry from that loud-mouthed radicals portrayed in the bourgeois press - they are canny politicians, who will not be unaware of the *benefits* of opposition, despite their apparent enthusiasm for forming a 'left government'.

"This is only a temporary state of affairs," says Syriza's Panagiotis Lafazanis. "These barbaric measures cannot continue. Very soon everything will change."<sup>1</sup> Commentators, in the media and high finance alike, are united in expecting the new government to be a short one, with yet another election in six months. Syriza will be confident of its chances, should that come to pass.

## Fetishising the EU

The far left has found itself in two minds over Syriza; while the latter's remarkable and sudden electoral ascendancy has rightly been welcomed, as a sign that the Greek masses are not ready to roll over yet and also a sign that the left - for now - is benefiting more than the far right from popular anger (compare France), its political character has caused some consternation. Overwhelmingly, this

hinges on the problem of the EU. Syriza, broadly speaking, wants Europe without the memorandum. Most far-left groups, on the other hand, are committed to calling for a unilateral withdrawal - both for Greece and for everyone else.

This position, to state things bluntly, amounts to a hopeless, petty bourgeois utopianism. In order to *demonstrate* what is, after all, a casually overused polemical dismissal of an opponent's position on the far left, let us take a closer look.

At the core of this policy are two different ideas. In Stalinist and Labourite variants, the EU represents a block on national sovereignty, and thus an obstacle to the fulfilment of a broadly leftist programme of some future social democratic government. In this form, it is quite transparently naive, as a serious look at *Britain's* relation to the world state system will attest. Despite membership of the EU, Britain is in its essentials dependent on the US, with whom it is in close strategic alliance. Its role in the EU, in practice, has been to pursue policies congruent with the interests of the US state department.

The choice *actually* posed for any serious party of government in Europe is not subservience to Germany or full national sovereignty, but rather subservience to Germany or subservience to the United States. A nationalist autarky is simply a direct road to economic devastation; this argument against the EU 'bosses' club falls to the same critique of 'socialism in one country' that has been good all along.

The more 'leftist' variant (where it is theorised at all) posits that the EU amounts to a common bloc of all Europe's exploiters, and a position of strength from which exploitation can be ever-further intensified. Thus, forcing its break-up amounts to a strategic gain for the working class of all countries, who will then be able to enter into more meaningful solidarity with each other.

In its various Trotskyist and post-Trotskyist forms, this is rendered problematic by its *partial* contradiction with the policy of the Bolsheviks.<sup>2</sup> Lenin uses a telling example, arguing against pacifist opposition to World War I:

"The bourgeoisie makes it its business to promote trusts, drive

women and children into the factories, subject them to corruption and suffering, condemn them to extreme poverty. We do not 'demand' such development, we do not 'support' it. We fight it. But how do we fight? We explain that trusts and the employment of women in industry are progressive. We do not want a return to the handicraft system, pre-monopoly capitalism, domestic drudgery for women. Forward through the trusts, etc - and beyond them to socialism!"<sup>3</sup>

This is not a fatal problem - even the most robotic 'Leninist' in the world would accept that Ilyich was wrong on this or that. What *is* fatal is that, in this instance, Lenin merely concretises with a couple of examples what is quite straightforwardly a fundamental principle of Marxist theory - that it is *capitalism*, in its fullest development, which makes communism possible.

If the break-up of the European Union is 'progressive' by virtue of divesting the class enemy of a key weapon, then the same is true of the break-up of transnational corporations, which equally use the divisions between states to heighten exploitation. From there, there is no reason to consider *national-scale* big capital progressive with regard to local, medium capital; and so on, until we are left with individual family enterprises, whereby a petty bourgeois is at least only able to exploit his wife and children.

The conclusion is thereby inescapable - where Marx argued that socialism was *made possible* by capitalism, through its progressive socialisation of production, and through its (limited) tendency to overcome national barriers, one would (on this argument) have to say on the contrary that capitalism makes socialism *more remote*, and the whole theory and practice of historical materialism must thereby be junked.

Nobody - except certain Greens - would actually make these arguments; but the truth is that the left's fetishism of EU withdrawal is *at the most fundamental level* a petty bourgeois, anti-Marxist position, which can only be 'reconciled' with Marxism through an equally petty bourgeois eclecticism. The inadequacy of this perspective is crystal-clear in the Greek case. It is simply not true that the Greek crisis is something that is being done

to Greece by Germany with the EU as a weapon. It is a product of a properly *global* crisis, which in turn results from global and highly uneven relations between states.

## Greece and Europe

If some truly dreadful misfortune should befall Samaras in the next few days, and Syriza is propelled into government, it will face - in reality - the same unpalatable choices. There is no serious possibility of a Greek national autarky; any return to the drachma will be accompanied by runaway inflation; and the social devastation that results will be quite as terrible, if not more so, than anything Samaras or the troika could dream up.

Getting out of this impossible choice means breaking working class political action out of its various national cages, and building united action and organisation *across the continent*. This is not some far-fetched pipe dream. At a time when strikes and protest movements are popping up everywhere, the failure of our side to coordinate action - and the blasé attitude of the far left to this task - represents a criminal waste of opportunity. Such European unity must be accompanied not by foolish attempts to form a Syriza-type 'workers' government' in a single country, but a position of extreme opposition - not just to austerity, but to the capitalist state and the entire bourgeois order.

In the next six months - or however long the new Greek government can put up with the work of 'national salvation' - Syriza and the Greek far left will not be kicking their heels. Neither should any comrade on the continent. No nationalist delusions should be entertained - from the EU, as from all the products of capitalist society, the only way out is through ●

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## Notes

1. *The Guardian* June 19.
2. Partial, due to Lenin's polemics against the 'United States of Europe' slogan along similar lines. That slogan, however, was later adopted by Comintern, without any apparent dissent on his part.
3. [www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/miliprog/ii.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/miliprog/ii.htm).



## ECONOMY

# High noon for the euro

The G20 summit has seen desperate, last-minute moves to prevent debt catastrophe engulfing Spain and Italy, writes **Eddie Ford**. But is it just more rhetoric?

Once it became apparent that 'pro-bailout' New Democracy had beaten the anti-bailout Syriza in the June 17 Greek parliamentary elections, albeit by an uncomfortably small margin, the international bourgeoisie gasped in relief. The prospect of a very messy Greek exit from the euro seemed to have receded.

But, regardless of the political horse-trading that has been taking place in Athens, the same essential underlying problems remain. For example, in the two weeks prior to the election, some €4 billion was withdrawn from Greek banks by panic-stricken investors and ordinary depositors - on top of the estimated €20 billion that took flight following the May 6 election (though in reality the rich 'unpatriotically', but sensibly, took all their money out a long time ago). Unemployment has jumped to 22.6% from 20.7% at the end of 2011. According to Giorgos Zanas, the finance minister in the caretaker government, the country has enough cash to survive until July 15 - then what?

Slightly frighteningly, the Open Europe think-tank estimates that the European Union countries have a total exposure of €552 billion to the toxic Greek economy - quite a sum. Unsurprisingly then, many think that Greece will have to ask for a third bailout - or at least some sort of substantial cash injection - within the relatively near future: not to do so could put Spanish, Italian and French banks in the firing line. No surprise then, the Merkel administration in Germany is under extraordinary pressure to relax the fiscal targets previously laid down by the European Commission, International Monetary Fund and European Central Bank troika. Nonetheless, Berlin is still insisting that now is not the time to be giving "discounts" to Greece, not least because to do so would place the main burden for saving the world economy from disaster on Germany.

So, yes, the Eurocrats might have got the election result they wanted in Greece. Yet it could well turn out to be a Pyrrhic victory, promoting the dangerous illusion that the Greek establishment - and the Eurocracy as a whole - can somehow muddle through. The money will be found. 'Responsible' governments will navigate the stormy waters. Unfortunately for them, however, the European sovereign debt crisis refuses to go away. In fact, if anything, it looks set to escalate.

### Critical

Proof positive of this was dramatically displayed by the market 'rally' that we saw on the morning of June 18, which lasted *less than two hours*. Then reality intervened, as it always does, with the markets gripped by a persistent suspicion - and fear - about the condition of the global economy and the financial health of the other euro zone countries.

Markets were also rattled by the news that the full audit of the Spanish banks commissioned by the government of Mariano Rajoy has been delayed until September on the grounds that it needs more time to "gather information". What on? The ever deteriorating non-performing loan figures? Nor did it particularly help, from the viewpoint of general



**G20 Mexico: platitudes**

psychological well-being, that Germany's constitutional court upheld a complaint by the Green Party against the ESM - ruling that Angela Merkel's government had not consulted parliament "sufficiently" about the exact configuration and remit of the new body due to replace the EFSF in July (the court judgement will have no *practical* effect or consequences, of course).

Hence confidence in Spanish government bonds slipped yet further, yields nudging up to the unsustainable pre-June 17 levels, almost as if the Greek election had never happened. By the afternoon, the yields on 10-year bonds (effectively the interest rate on government IOUs) was back over the 7% mark - reaching at one point a potentially crippling 7.26%, a new euro-era high. Next day the rate hovered around the 7.1% point, dipping ever so slightly to 6.96% the following morning, but then rising to 6.99% as the day progressed. Inevitably, the yield on Italy's 10-year bonds also started to rise in a perverse display of market solidarity, bouncing around between 6.04% and 6.1%, then mildly improving to around 5.87%. But still far too high.

Spain's perilous position was also highlighted by the two debt auctions that were held on June 19 - definitely a tale of two countries. Denmark sold 1.6 billion krone (€215 million) of debt maturing in 2014 at a *negative* bond yield of -0.08%, compared to the average yield of 0.31% at the last auction - meaning that investors are essentially paying the country to lend it money. Spain, by contrast, sold €640 million of 18-month bills with an average yield of 5.1%, as opposed to 3.3% at the last auction - additionally it sold €2.4 billion-worth of 12-month bills at an average yield of 5.07%, compared with 2.98% at the last auction. Not that Italy fared much better, selling three-year bonds at an interest rate of 5.3%, sharply up from the 3.91% paid at a similar sale a month ago.

Speculators are prepared to buy Danish bonds with a negative yield for a simple reason: in the event of a euro break-up, and in view of the fact that the krone is pegged to the euro, they are envisaging a tidy little profit. Or, to put it another way, they are desperately seeking a relatively safe home for their money, given the paucity of attractive-looking investments.

To really paint things black, Spanish banks' bad loans ratio rose to 8.72% in April from 8.37% in March, the highest since April 1994. Lending declined to 3.5% in April from last year and deposits fell 5.39%, whilst the mortgage default ratio climbed from 2.4% in December to 3.01% in March. Furthermore, Spanish banks borrowed a record €324.6 billion from

the ECB in May, up from the €319.9 billion in April - making them by far the biggest users of ECB funding, accounting for about 30% of the latter's outstanding liquidity (having said that, as we would not want to be unfair to the Spanish bourgeoisie, it is important to remember that the banks in the other 'bailout countries' are even *more* reliant on ECB largesse). Obviously, this data casts extreme doubt over the proposed €100 billion bailout - apologies, "credit line" - for Spain supposedly agreed to much fanfare on June 9. Will it be anywhere near enough? And, indeed, the ING banking group has calculated that Spain may in the end need a €250 billion bailout - although the Bank of America thinks that is understating things: it estimates that some €450 billion may be needed to see Spain through the next three years or so.

No wonder that Cristóbal Montoro, the economy minister, warned that the country was now in a "critical" condition and pleaded with the ECB to act with "full force" in order to fight off the attacks beating down daily on Spain and the euro zone as a whole. Ill-omens are everywhere. On June 14 Moody's rating agency slashed Spain's credit status to just one notch above 'junk' - arguing, quite logically, that the June 9 plan to recapitalise Spain's banks would merely increase the debt burden, and this in a country whose GDP is contracting, not growing. Meaning that Moody's might reduce Spain's rating again within the next three months - perhaps much sooner. If that were to happen, some index-tracking investors would be *forced* to sell off their bonds. That would, of course, straightaway add to the pressure on yields and force Spain's overall financing costs up higher - thereby further necessitating a full-blown (or second) bailout. A vicious cycle.

While we have yet to see the ECB move into decisive action, despite Montoro's imploring, the Swiss National Bank - to name one formidable financial institution - issued a stern statement on June 14: it "will not tolerate" any further appreciation in the value of the Swiss franc, which has become a major safe haven for investors, as they dump risky Spanish or Italian bonds. A wildly over-valued franc, continued the statement, would have a "serious impact" on both prices and the economy in Switzerland - ie, its export industries would suffer massively. Therefore the SNB will enforce with the "utmost determination" the minimum exchange rate of 1.20 francs per euro and is prepared, if push comes to shove, to buy up foreign currency in "unlimited quantities" for this purpose.

Naturally, all eyes turned to the

G20 summit held over June 18-19 in the luxury resort of Los Cabos, Mexico. Surely the world leaders could not keep on kicking the battered can down the road: something had to be done. The press was alive with rumours that some sort of bold action was being planned, once again raising expectations that governmental leaders had awoken from their slumber and were going to tackle the crisis. A new fiscal Marshall plan or perhaps even *direct* ECB intervention to rescue ailing European banks?

Rather unexcitedly, however, a draft communiqué issued on the first day of the summit talked about taking "all necessary measures" to hold the euro zone together and break the "feedback loop" between sovereign states and banks - but, as per usual, no details were forthcoming. The final G20 statement, due to be released on June 20, is expected to call for a "coordinated global plan" for job creation and growth, according to Reuters; and if growth falters the document will state that countries without heavy debts should "stand ready to coordinate and implement discretionary fiscal actions to support domestic demand". Furthermore, we shall read - apparently - about the magnificent "steps towards greater fiscal and economic integration that lead to sustainable borrowing costs", encompassing banking supervision, recapitalisation and some sort of deposit insurance scheme. Not to mention increased resources for the IMF.

Striking an upbeat note, EC president Herman Van Rompuy reassured us that at the G20 summit we saw "support and encouragement" for the euro countries and the EU as a whole - and steps to "overcome this crisis". But how many times have we heard such talk? Similarly, a separate statement for the June 28-29 EU Brussels summit vowed grandly to "mobilise all levers and instruments", though the details were frustratingly thin - what a surprise. Though time will tell, the Italian government has said it would push for a "semi-automatic mechanism" at Brussels - probably involving the ECB - to cap the bond yields of those member-states in serious trouble. But trying to pin down concrete details, let alone actual *real* money, of course, is like trying to nail jelly to the ceiling.

But almost at the very last minute, as the G20 summit came to a close, it seems there were desperate moves to prevent debt catastrophe engulfing Spain and Italy. Maybe rather prematurely, *The Guardian* headline proclaimed: "Germany surrenders over euro zone bailout fund". The paper claimed that at a private meeting with Barack Obama, Merkel had agreed to allow the euro zone's bailout

fund, most generously estimated at €750 billion, to *directly* buy up the bonds of crisis-hit governments.

As our readers will know, Berlin has long opposed such direct funding, fearful - not without reason - that the German government, and more crucially still the German taxpayer, would end up footing the bill for the financial 'profligacy' of other euro countries (especially those 'lazy' Greeks and Portuguese). Current EU rules say that the bailout funds should not take on the risks associated with buying up the debt of a member-country unless it is part of an official EU/IMF programme. Are the rules of the German-dictated game finally changing?

If so, that is precisely the show of 'shock and awe' that the markets have been crying out for - mustering the collective financial fire-power of the euro zone to drive down Spain's rampant borrowing costs below the dangerous 7% level arrived at over the last week. Berlin might be realising that it is confronted by a stark choice that can no longer be avoided or denied - support emergency action to prop up the euro zone's fourth biggest economy or see the euro slide into the abyss, taking a good chunk of the world economy with it. And earn the opprobrium of tomorrow's history books.

On the other hand, could it be mere summit-induced rhetoric? A Merkel spokeswoman coolly remarked that "nothing has been decided yet" although various G20 officials have strongly hinted that an announcement could be made by the euro zone in the next few days. In the same vein, a White House official confirmed the euro zone is working on a plan to unveil at the Brussels summit - here we go again - and suggested that the "framework" they are building - as "they described it to us" - amounts to a "more forceful response than they've contemplated to date". Talk about damning with faint praise.

Yet, insofar as these putative 'rescue plans' have any reality, it is based on a fundamental contradiction or flaw. Everyone is calling on Germany to do something, but just imagine if Merkel did decide to do what many want - acceding to the creation of Eurobonds. Interest rates would then be equalised and Germany would suddenly find itself paying rates in the region of 3%-4%, as opposed to the minuscule rates it is paying now - ie, the yields on two-year German bonds recently sank to -0.012%. It would only be a matter of time before *Germany* started to suffer from rising unemployment, stagnation and so on - no more the European economic powerhouse.

Under those conditions, what would happen to the US and the flat-lining British economy? (Last week the UK government jointly launched with the Bank of England its so-called 'Plan A-plus' to stimulate the economy to the tune of £140 billion by offering money to high-street banks on the 'condition' that they kick-start mortgage and small business lending. As Martin Wolf acerbically asked in the *Financial Times*: will it work this time? His answer was this it is "unlikely". Instead he urges the government to "prepare" a Plan B "now" ●

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## POLICE

# Police commissioners or citizen militias

Jim Moody of Labour Party Marxists contrasts state policing with extreme democracy

In November, electors get to choose a police and crime commissioner (PCC) for each of 41 policing areas in England and Wales, though not for the Metropolitan Police (in this area, police and crime commissioner powers were transferred to the mayor of London in January). While there was previously opposition to the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition's whole plan of replacing police committees with individual PCCs, including from within the Labour Party, there are nonetheless to be Labour candidates in all these elections. As members of the party might be aware, those hoping to bear the Labour banner were busy trying to whip up support during internal elections earlier this month.

It was simplicity itself if you fancied yourself as one of the great and the good heading a police force. Would-be Labour candidates had merely to apply as individuals by the end of February (no party organisations were asked to nominate as part of the selection process), following which a national executive committee-appointed panel long-listed them. In many areas only a handful of members self-selected anyway. Following interviews by panels comprising NEC representatives and individuals hand-picked from regional party organisations, short-lists were voted on by all members. Most short-lists consisted of only two candidates. There has been no democratic debate in the Labour Party about the criteria for candidates for commissioner posts or what is to be achieved by putting forward candidates - in other words, no coherent programme upon which they must stand. Without evidence to the contrary, the inescapable conclusion has to be that all Labour's PCC candidates stand on an iron cage default position that is solidly of the Labour leadership's making.

Given the complete lack of branch, constituency or affiliate involvement, it was unsurprising that any hint of a working class approach toward policing was absent from Labour hopefuls' supporting statements. None of them present any kind of challenge to what police forces always have been and will still be after the PCCs are in place: a cohort of paid servants of the state, helping to secure capitalist rule. Indeed, to admit that the police force is a class weapon is anathema to Labour's would-be commissioners and their leadership puppeteers.

Of course, the leadership wants no truck with anything that gets in the way of fostering illusions in the state. Many rightwing Labour 'ideologues', such as they are, take inspiration from such dire rags as the Blairite Progress think-tank produces, thanks to funding from Lord Sainsbury. (Hilariously, Progress members openly wept when their boy wonder, David Miliband, was pipped at the post in the 2010 Labour leader elections by the Brownite rightwinger, his brother Ed, thanks to trade union bureaucrat support.) Labour's left is almost completely invisible, though a few stalwarts bear its banner via such means as the Labour Representation Committee and *Labour Briefing*. But when it comes to attitudes to the police, even most of the left is found sorely wanting, failing to grapple with the nature of the state and its enforcers.

An example of the failure of sections of the left to expose the class nature of the police appears in the 2005 *New Left Policy Forum: criminal justice* by Harry Fletcher.<sup>1</sup> Here we read: "Policing should be community-based and intelligence-



Us and them

led. Government targets set for the police should be realistic and not conflict with those of other criminal justice agencies. The number of priorities and targets need to be rationalised. There should be real local accountability to boroughs and local authority areas. Decisions to stop and search should be based on intelligence, the quality of the intervention and the outcome. Consideration should be given to encouraging all new police officers to spend a minimum period of time in community liaison ... All contact with the same ethnic minority groups should be positively improved and indicators developed to maximise visible presence in the community."

Well, no, actually, this is not what the working class or its movement needs or should in any way endorse. This and other left calls to modify what the police do sows the very illusions in the state that Marxists decry. The prime role of the police is not to safeguard the "community" in some neutral way, but to uphold 'property rights' - ie, the current class order.

In relation to establishing PCCs there were initially some timid Labour squeaks about accountability to an elected police authority. As if not only police authorities were a 'good thing', but Labourites becoming embroiled in them would in and of itself democratise them. Playing the fake accountability card in its turn, the Con-Dem coalition's big lie has been that directly elected PCCs were more democratic; but, of course, they are no such thing. One might as well

argue that directly elected mayors are more democratic, when in fact they are a means of ensuring that formal accountability is kept to the absolute minimum; this is especially so, given the weakness of the working class movement and the democratic pressure it can exert currently in Britain.

The home office claims that by having PCCs instead of police committees the government is replacing "bureaucratic accountability with democratic accountability".<sup>2</sup> While it is true that police authorities "currently exercise significant powers relating to force budgets and strategic control without direct and visible accountability to the public",<sup>3</sup> PCCs, who will be elected for a four-year term, will hardly be subject to democratic control, and neither will the police.

Apart from being able to appoint and dismiss their chief constable, each PCC will publish a five-year police and crime plan, determine local policing priorities, and set both a local precept and the annual force budget in consultation with the chief constable. The precept will be in addition to state grants, so the PCCs will be bound to the policies and programme of national government. Doubtless each PCC's plan will have to take account of national policing challenges, being set out in a new "strategic policing requirement".

### Class strategy

Were a revolutionary to stand in the November elections, he or she might

use the opportunity to challenge the whole notion of the state pretending to bend to the popular will by inserting its placemen (of whichever party) in PCC posts. This is unlikely to happen in any of the 41 policing areas, so it can only be down to those of us outside the process to expose the whole shebang for the establishment stitch-up that it is. Apart from the three main parties' candidates, there will be a smattering of Plaid Cymru and English Democrat ones, with the occasional independent (which usually means a Tory in disguise).

What we have to do is develop our class's strategy and tactics to match those of the class enemy. The PCC elections in these policing

areas provides but the most current instance of doing so. For, while we must certainly demand the right of policemen and policewomen to organise and strike, we recognise that the bourgeoisie is never going to 'democratise' one of its main means of oppression. Our approach must be a call for replacing the police and armed forces by a popular militia.

If nothing else the miners' Great Strike (1984-85) showed the true role of the police, as the tactics learnt in Northern Ireland were brought home. Uprisings in British cities in 1980 and 1981 jolted the bourgeoisie into further kitting up its mainland police. These events gave bourgeois law and order much food for thought that has been thoroughly digested. One example of this in recent years has been the kettling of undefended student and other demonstrations: a punitive form of outdoor detention that has become yet another weapon in the police armoury of containment. Yet this year even police officers have found it necessary to demonstrate over work grievances resulting from Con-Dem cuts (though, strangely, no police-on-police violence was reported).

However, the working class movement does have the duty, right and potential to engage in collective solidarity, defend itself and, at the end of the day, prepare for revolution. Knowing the enemy means you can overcome it, and that is what Marxists are about. We do not appeal to the bourgeois state nor invite the working class to do so: instead, we need to look to the time when demonstrations, strikes and occupations are politically and physically able to defend themselves against police attack. It is only then that we would expect to see wavering in their ranks.

What we must conclude is that preparing to organise popular and workers' defence is an essential part of building a Marxist party. Citizen and workers' defence is nothing new. It is just that its legacy in Britain and around the world has been erased thanks to the social democratic and Stalinist betrayers in the working class movement over many decades; even many on the Trotskyist left have given up on the idea ●

### Notes

1. 'Criminal justice policy paper', the result of New Left Policy Meetings co-sponsored by the New Left Unions and the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs, and available in the 'Policy' section of the Labour Representation Committee website at [http://l-r-c.org.uk/files/criminal\\_justice\\_policy\\_paper.pdf](http://l-r-c.org.uk/files/criminal_justice_policy_paper.pdf). The author, Harry Fletcher, is an assistant general secretary of Napo, the "trade union and professional association" for family court and probation staff.
2. [www.homeoffice.gov.uk/police/police-crime-commissioners/questions/pcc-powers/index.html](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/police/police-crime-commissioners/questions/pcc-powers/index.html).
3. *Ibid*.

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## EGYPT

# Use stalemate to rebuild

Homayoun Azad sees a parallel with Iran in the Egyptian presidential election



**Muslim Brotherhood: protest**

The critical illness of former Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak adds an ironic twist to the political crisis unfolding in the aftermath of the presidential elections. While the deposed dictator (apparently) ebbs away, the army he was once a commander of seeks to impose Mubarak-style repression and is vigorously reasserting itself in the face of the Islamist-dominated parliament that emerged in January.

After Egypt's supreme court dissolved that parliament on June 13, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces issued a constitutional decree just as the polls were closing for the presidential run-off on June 17. The decree granted the SCAF wide budgetary, legislative and military decision-making powers, including over internal security. Transparently, this is a 'soft' coup to render the office of president impotent and to undercut the Muslim Brotherhood's power base in parliament.

In purely formal terms, the supreme court may have a point about possible foul play in the parliamentary elections. Egyptian and international observers reported a number of voting irregularities in the second round, with the MB accused of "systemic violations", including bribes, intimidation and threats against supporters of its opponents (although blaming the MB alone would be a little rich, given the machinations and anti-democratic shenanigans of its opponents too).

But the court's key complaint is that a third of the parliament's members were illegitimate, in that they were elected for the section reserved for independents, while actually being members of a political party, most

notably the MB. This may have some basis in fact, but the blatant cynicism of the ruling clearly provoked widespread anger. The truth is that this practice was rife under Mubarak and his predecessor, Anwar Sadat.

For instance, in the November-December 2005 elections (rigged, naturally), the MB stood as independents and, for tactical reasons, only contested 170 constituencies. It gained an impressive 88-strong faction in the People's Assembly, a phalanx that represented around 20% of the available seats and an increase from just 17 in the previous parliament. The MB's deep social roots have been confirmed once again by the latest elections.

Today's situation is very fraught and is extremely unlikely to be resolved one way or another by the announcement of the presidential winner on June 21. Mass protests and possible clashes are predicted. A large protest against the clampdown took place in Cairo's Tahrir Square on June 19 and there was a sizable demonstration in Alexandria. More of the same is promised.

It seems fairly clear from anecdotal evidence and *ad hoc* exit polls (admittedly mostly conducted by MB supporters) that in any straight contest the MB's Mohamed Mursi would be the victor. If the army rig the result and the erstwhile Mubarak crony, Shafik, is shoehorned into office, what will be the reaction of the masses? Will they be simply content to accept the result - an outcome that in effect would be a defeat for the mass movement that saw off Mubarak last year?

Clearly, the events of the past week or so have shown the centrality of the demand for a democratic people's militia in Egypt to replace the corrupt,

anti-democratic bulwark that is the military. But like so many other demands of a democratic programme that the workers' movement and its allies should be fighting for now in the fluid context of post-revolutionary Egypt, the problem is precisely one of *agency*. In other words, after the years of oppression under Mubarak - let alone those imposed by the British until 1952 - the workers' movement has been denied the light and air it needs to consolidate, thrive and enlighten itself.

Of course, the protests against the SCAF soft coup will continue. And any attempt to rig the result of the presidential election will cause outrage too. However, if Mursi is declared the winner, that would be no victory for the working class or progressive forces. The reality is that the electorate was faced with a choice between two reactionaries in the second round of the poll.

There is no question that a vote for Shafik was a vote *against* the revolution. On the other hand, a vote for the Muslim Brotherhood's Mursi was a vote for the reactionary element of the opposition to the old regime that is the vehicle of counterrevolution *within the popular movement itself*. Those comrades such as the Socialist Workers Party and its co-thinkers in Egypt who advocated such a course made a huge mistake.

Perhaps the best outcome under these circumstances would be a general stalemate between the two reactionary contending forces, with neither side able to gain undisputed control of the state apparatus - a prolonged state of fragile balance that allows the workers' and progressive movement to gather strength. Certainly, there are signs that leaders of the MB are prepared

to compromise with the army. This is, after all, a political movement that has historically been characterised by a strategically patient approach to the realisation of its reactionary programme - it will think long and hard about any full-on confrontation. A stand-off may allow a certain breathing space for left and democratic forces to regroup.

Certainly, the high rate of abstention in the presidential election indicated a real feeling of alienation and the dissatisfaction of many Egyptians with the choice on offer. Some observers claimed that just 15% of eligible voters went to the ballot boxes on June 16, with an even smaller proportion doing so the next day (official excuses apparently included the hot weather). Even the head of Egypt's Supreme Presidential Election Commission, Farouk Sultan, was only claiming a 40% turnout. That would represent a 6% drop compared to the first round in May and a significantly lower turnout than the parliamentary elections. There was a call for a boycott of the second round, particularly in Cairo, from the Mobteloon ('vote-spoilers') group, and this would have struck a chord: many felt revulsion against both candidates.

Perhaps the political figure that personified this mood best was Hamdeen Sabahi, a candidate in the first round of the presidential elections who publicly announced his intention not to vote in the second. The vote for this left Nasserite - 22% and top of the poll in Cairo, Alexandria and Port Said - was encouraging, the severe limitations of his programme notwithstanding. Sabahi called for a raised minimum wage, opposition to austerity and solidarity with the poorest sections of Egyptian society, giving

partial expression to a potential base of support for a genuine working class alternative - "something to build on", as Paul Demarty has observed in this paper (June 7).

In Iran, there was considerable sympathy for the Mobteloon. Many comrades there see a parallel between MB's success in these elections and the referendum that consolidated the power of another Islamic movement riding on the back of a revolutionary upheaval. In April 1979 the Iranian people - recently freed from the shah's dictatorship - were presented with the following simple question: "Do you want a constitutional monarchy? Or do you want an Islamic Republic?" The answer then seemed obvious. Hardly anyone could be found who wanted anything to do with a monarchy, constitutional or not. Presented with this 'either-or', the majority of Iranians who had participated in the revolution voted in favour of the Islamic Republic.

Thirty-three years later, after the appalling experience of the corruption, the nepotism, the repressive barbarity of that religious state, few Iranians would do the same again (it is hardly surprising that in Egypt Shafik used the scare tactic of warning voters that the MB was "trying to turn the country into another Iran"). Yet to this day, the Tehran regime claims legitimacy through that referendum - it continues to use it to justify the horrors it has imposed on the people of Iran.

So when comrades in the SWP tell us that "despite revolutionary activists' anger at the Brotherhood, voting for Mursi ... is an important step in building a revolutionary movement" (*Socialist Worker* June 12), we who have been through that experience in Iran can only shudder at the thought ●



## BACKGROUND

# A blunder of historic proportions

Voting for the Muslim Brotherhood was a vote for a party of counterrevolution, not the revolution. Jack Conrad examines MB's origins, ideas and evolution

**S**adly, for the Socialist Workers Party the choice was immediately "clear": Mohammed Mursi of the Muslim Brotherhood had to be supported. "A vote for Mursi is a vote against the legacy of Mubarak and for continuing change in Egypt. Now it is time to put Mursi to the test - and to continue struggles over jobs, wages, union rights and for radical political change," wrote *Socialist Worker's* Phil Marfleet.<sup>1</sup>

In justification, Mursi was presented as a vacillating reformer, a reed willing to bend before mass pressure. By contrast, to vote for Ahmed Safiq - Mubarak's last prime minister and effectively the candidate of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces - would be a vote to finally snuff out the revolution.

Worse, instead of rejecting lesser evilism, and joining a clear majority in a 'pox on both sides' boycott, the SWP's Egyptian co-thinkers, the Revolutionary Socialists, pleaded for Mursi and MB to declare themselves in favour of a "national front" government, a government which would include representatives from "across the whole political spectrum". In other words, a grand coalition uniting all classes, all interests, all parties - excepting only the "fascists" of the "old regime".<sup>2</sup> If only by implication, the tiny Revolutionary Socialists would, if asked, participate in this cross-class abomination.

In terms of defending the standard Marxist argument against participating in any government as a minority party, in any government not committed to carry out the full minimum programme of Marxism, I will limit myself here to showing how, throughout its long history, MB has been a counterrevolutionary organisation. And, therefore, why, despite numerous tactical shifts and feints, MB remains an enemy of democracy, secularism, religious toleration, women's rights and the working class. Hence, surely, the necessity of constituting the left, and crucially the working class itself, as a party of *extreme* opposition to any MB-led government.

### Foundations

While constantly referencing the *Koran* and drawing inspiration from the prophet Mohammed and the Rashidun caliphs of the 7th century, MB is a thoroughly modern formation. So while there are medieval reference points, MB is best seen as originating as a strand of the Egyptian national independence movement. Religion being infused with and driven by national feelings, the two forming an ambiguous and contradictory unity.

Though dominated by the Mameluk class of slave-warriors till the early 19th century, Egypt constituted an integral part of the Ottoman empire. However, Albanian mercenary troops rebelled and put their leader, Muhammad Ali, into power. He ruled as

*khedive* (viceroy) of Egypt and Sudan from 1805-49. British forces occupied the country in 1882 - putting down Egypt's nationalist army and popular democratic movement in the process. The British considered it politic to maintain the Muhammad Ali dynasty and Egypt's place within the disintegrating Ottoman empire. Only in 1914 did Egypt officially become a British protectorate.

Prior to the outbreak of World War I anti-British agitation was confined to elite circles and had little impact. However, with the British administration conscripting one and a half million Egyptians into labour gangs and requisitioning crops, buildings and animals, discontent steadily rose ... till boiling point was finally reached. In March 1919, after demands for independence had been flatly rejected, strikes and mass demonstrations erupted throughout Egypt. It amounted to a national uprising. British military installations were attacked and at least 3,000 Egyptians were killed, as order was painfully restored.

Yet, given the balance of forces, the British had to make concessions. Independence was granted in February 1922. However, this status was purely formal. The extravagant, incompetent, debauched, pro-fascist king had to be flattered, bribed and occasionally threatened, but British rule continued. With the bureaucracy and the big capitalist and landlord classes safely in harness, a form of neo-colonialism could be imposed. Mired in debt, the Egyptian state remained hopelessly dependent on the City of London. Egypt continued to be both a "market for British manufactured goods and a cotton plantation to service the Lancashire mills".<sup>3</sup> In other words, economic development was skewed and capital accumulation proceeded mainly in the interests of Britain. To underwrite that exploitative relationship British naval bases in Alexandria and Port Said were maintained by binding treaty, along with an army garrison on the Suez canal. In the event of war British forces were to be free to move anywhere across Egypt.

The Society of Muslim Brothers (*al-Ikhwan al-Moslemoon*) was founded under these conditions of disappointment in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna (1906-47). A primary school teacher and son of a small

landowner, who also served as the local imam, al-Banna inserted Egyptian national humiliation into a wider narrative. Islam was portrayed as having been corrupted over the course of many centuries. That is what led to the occupation of Egypt by British infidels. That is what led to the carving up of the Ottoman empire in the aftermath of World War I. The nadir was the abolition of the caliphate by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1924.<sup>4</sup> A catastrophe for the religiously pious.

It is clear that the 'puritan' Wahhabite sect - the dominant form of Islam in Saudi Arabia - served as something of a theological-political blueprint. Following its example, al-Banna taught that Islam is "creed and state, book and sword, and a way of life". He urged political activism and insisted that Islam went beyond the four walls of the mosque: "There is no meaning to faith unless it be accompanied by works, and no profit in a doctrine which does not impel its possessor to bring it to fruition and to sacrifice himself for its sake."<sup>5</sup> Put another way, Muslims were urged to patiently find their way back to taking state power.

Al-Banna looked to the pristine certainties of the *Koran*, the *Sunna* and the revitalising spirit of Mohammed. His Islamic renaissance would deliver Egypt from "decadence, corruption, weakness, poverty and humiliation".<sup>6</sup> He wanted Egypt to be genuinely independent, freed from economic dependence and put on a par with the leading countries of the day. Simultaneously a rebellion against imperialism and a bid to join imperialism.

Holy curses rained down upon the head of king Fuad, his parasitic family, his grasping ministers and his British masters. MB called for land redistribution, the nationalisation of Egypt's natural resources, the nationalisation of financial institutions, including the Egyptian-owned Misr bank, the abolition of usury and the introduction of a *zakat*-based system of social security. However, proletarian socialism and democracy were emphatically rejected as un-Islamic. MB was therefore in rebellion against the future too.

Al-Banna imagined destiny's hand had selected him for greatness and so got himself appointed *murshid al-amm* ('general guide'). MB was run according to the *Führerprinzip* ('leader principle') and Al-Banna openly expressed admiration for Adolf Hitler and the Nazis. MB willingly distributed *Mein Kampf* and pro-German propaganda. Of course, rightwing nationalists did much the same in India, Ireland and South Africa, the Third Reich being seen as a potential liberator from British chains. Al-Banna wrote glowingly to Hitler on many occasions. He too hated Jews, he too wanted to see the overthrow of the British empire. During the initial stages of World War II MB was considered a valuable asset by Germany. MB had its military wing, *al-nizam al-khass* ('special organisation') and its fighters were meant to rise up on cue.

Rommel's Africa corps would then cakewalk into Egypt. Exposure of secret contacts with Germany did MB little harm. Such was the popular loathing of Britain.

The Brotherhood

began by setting up supplementary, or parallel, educational institutions which would give its male adherents *jihad* training. Winning hearts and minds has always been seen as a necessary precondition for re-establishing the caliphate: first in Egypt and other Muslim countries, eventually over the whole globe.

While Egypt is expected to play a key role, narrow nationalism is eschewed. The Brotherhood is pan-Islamic. Included amongst key aims is building *khilafa* (basically unity between Islamic states) and "mastering the world" with Islam. Each MB national branch being obliged to draw up programmes for "Islamising" government after what are called "realistic studies".<sup>7</sup> For those who see MB as hell-bent on world conquest, the findings of the Carnegie think tank should provide a calming corrective: MB poses no "security threat" to the US and ought to be "welcomed as a legitimate party".<sup>8</sup>

The Brotherhood calculates that it would be too risky to rule over a population which has not internalised Islamic law. Incidentally, with this in mind, psychologists have long claimed that sadomasochistic pleasure can be gained from submitting to and/or enforcing authority: "the first defining trait of a sadomasochistic dynamic" being the "existence of a hierarchical situation".<sup>9</sup> The merits of such arguments aside, the fact of the matter is that in pursuit of its goals MB has constructed a steeply graded hierarchy of power and dependence. Indeed via the media, parliament, mosques, charity work and specifically Islamic trade unions, professional associations, health centres, student societies, women's groups, etc, MB has built a hugely powerful organisation that amounts to a state within the state.

However, there is also currying favour from established state powers. MB looks benignly upon those who preside over what are called "true" Islamic governments. They deserve "support and help".<sup>10</sup> While that never included upstarts such as Mubarak, Assad or Gaddafi, the Saud, Hashem, Sabah, Nahyan and other such 'authentic' Arab dynasties are another matter. Time legitimises. Time consecrates. "What is grey with age becomes religion/ Be in possession, and thou hast the right/ And sacred will the many guard it for thee!"<sup>11</sup> Benefits flow in return for "support and help". Hence the description of MB as an "ideological protectorate of Saudi Arabia".<sup>12</sup> An exaggeration, no doubt. Nonetheless, there is abundant evidence showing the closeness of the MB-Saudi relationship. Eg, the Islamic University of Medina has been generously financed by the Saudi monarchy. From its beginning, in 1961, the institution has been considered a centre of Brotherhood teaching (approximately 70% of its 22,000 students are non-Saudi).<sup>13</sup>

### Politics

Let us apply the typology of Helmut Richard Niebuhr (1894-1962) to the Islamic movement.<sup>14</sup> MB is an Islam of the *transformation of culture*. A revivalism or conversionism which seeks to redeem humanity through returning it to an imaginary ideal. Needless to say, all such attempts necessitate *radically* refashioning social realities in the here and now. By definition something which requires a well-tuned political antenna and ability to rapidly manoeuvre in force.

Not a purist withdrawal from society and separatism (*Islam against culture*) nor accommodation and loyalty to the existing state (*Islam of culture*).

Some include MB under the heading of 'political Islam'. Political Islam being contrasted with religious or ethical Islam. Political Islam is sometimes dated from 1979 and the coming to power of ayatollah Khomeini in Iran: this "turned political Islam from a dream into a reality".<sup>15</sup> Of course, MB has rather older antecedents. But leave aside this quibble. 'Political Islam' is a highly problematic term and those who use it certainly need to acknowledge that there is nothing new about the fusion of Islam and politics. Mohammed established and ruled over an Islamic state in Medina and his immediate successors built an extensive Islamic empire. Obviously running a state is a political act by definition, which is why I prefer nomenclature which conveys both continuity and commitment to change. Not that we should get hung up on terminology.

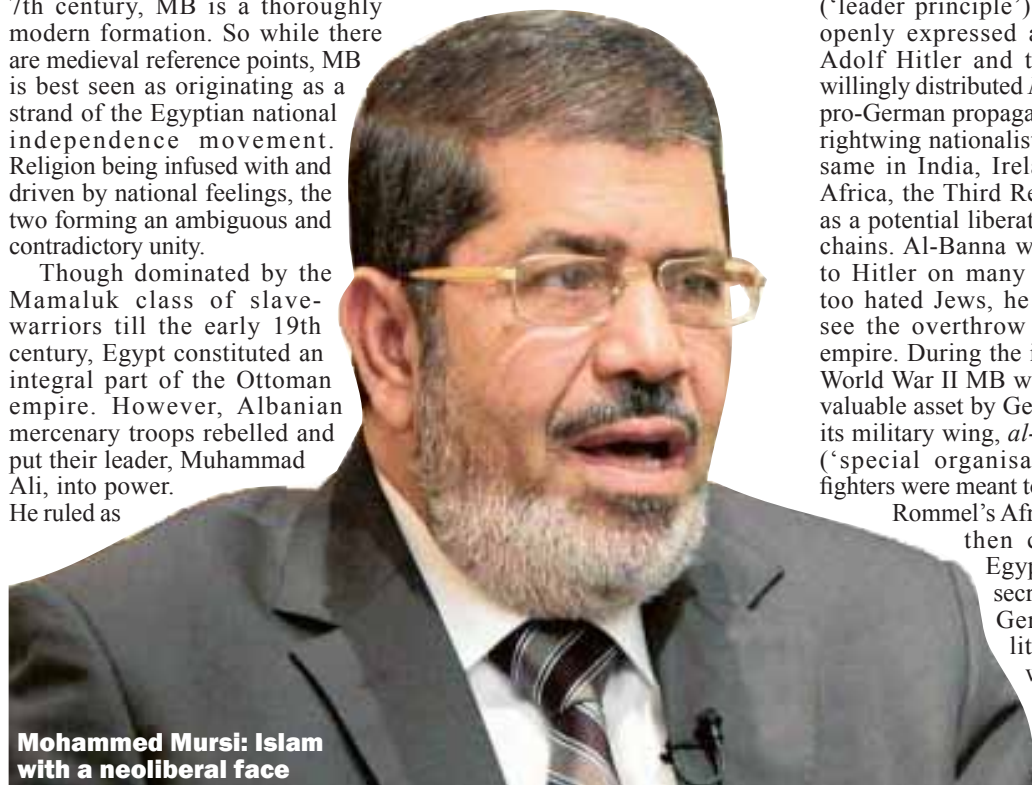
Suffice to say, from the first, MB combined faith in its largely mythical 7th century ideal with the patient, solid, practical work needed to secure a mass base. From beginnings as one of many squabbling Islamic grouplets, membership was to soar and soar again: from 800 in 1936 to 200,000 in 1938. MB voiced its politics through a number of fronts, but also the explicitly named Party of the Muslim Brotherhood. By 1948 the organisation had an estimated half million members and an equal number of close sympathies - the biggest political organisation in the Arab world.<sup>16</sup>

MB fashioned this human material into a social battering ram - ultimately in the heavily disguised interests of those classes and strata which both opposed British imperialism and feared proletarian socialism. From the start students and ex-students were the vital mediation between the MB's leadership and the masses. Students lived in the vast shanty towns and often came from the countryside.

MB continues to represent dissident imams, bazaar merchants, better-off peasant farmers, shopkeepers, the urban middle classes, small capitalists, etc. And especially since the fall of Mubarak, MB has grown a bloated body of full-time functionaries: professional politicians, advisers, teachers, trade union officials, security guards, publishers, journalists, hospital managers, technicians, accountants, business operatives, etc. Inevitably they have developed their own caste identity, concerns and aims.

Needless to say, MB leaders strive hard to give the impression of putting aside their own particular interests. Instead the sufferings, fears and dreams of the masses are highlighted and given an Islamic coloration. In terms of religious doctrine nothing could be easier. After all, oppression, greed and exploitation are forthrightly condemned in the *Koran*. Rich Muslims are told that they have binding obligations towards the downtrodden, the poor and the unfortunate.

MB was used by the British against the Jewish national movement in Palestine following World War II. Members of the Brotherhood were provided with military training.<sup>17</sup> With the foundation of the state of Israel in 1948, king Farouk's government was accused of displaying criminal passivity in face of the Zionist foe; the Brotherhood mobilised some 10,000



**Mohammed Mursi: Islam with a neoliberal face**



volunteers to fight alongside the beleaguered Palestinians. MB's special organisation began terrorist attacks in Egypt itself, which led to a swift ban. A Brotherhood assassin gunned down the prime minister, Mahmud Fahmi Nokrashi, on December 28 1948. Tit for tat, al-Banna himself was killed by government agents.

Throughout its existence, MB has faced stiff competition from various liberal, nationalist, pan-Arabic, 'official communist', leftist and youth movement radicals. At times this competition has seen uneasy alliances; at other times bloody confrontations. Nevertheless, when it comes to winning mass support, the Brotherhood has often proved more successful. Rivals are typically technocratic and envisage social change brought about from above: ie, through the state. By contrast, in the here and now, MB provides practical relief and speaks in easily understood terms and phrases.

The Brotherhood supported the officers' revolution in 1952 - government posts were accepted. Within a matter of weeks, however, relations soured. After general Mohammed Naguib was elbowed aside, Gamal Abdel Nasser was widely credited as being the moving spirit behind the declaration of Egypt as a republic and the promise to nationalise the Suez canal. However, as a pan-Arab socialist, Nasser refused to generalise sharia courts: indeed in 1956 he summarily abolished them. His mantra was modernisation: eg, nationalisation, industrialisation, secular education, land redistribution, the advancement of women and a strong military. A hugely popular package, which implicitly threatened classes and strata reliant on neo-colonial, pre-capitalist and religious forms of exploitation.

Unable to navigate these *forward-moving* currents, MB began to lose coherence. Hope was on the march. Increasingly its doctrines appeared anachronistic. The popular tide ebbed away. Exposed, confused, fearing social extinction, MB's core constituency opted for either cringing accommodation with Nasser or violent confrontation. Ruinous internal battles and debilitating rifts followed. The national HQ in Cairo was physically fought over. Embracing the cult of death, various breakaway factions transformed terrorism into their *raison d'être*. MB members co-organised the botched attempt on Nasser's life in 1954. Immediately thereafter the Brotherhood as a whole was subjected to a wave of repression. Four thousand members were arrested and many more fled to Syria, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Lebanon. What had been a mass organisation all but disintegrated. MB would only recover under president Anwar Sadat, Nasser's successor, who gradually released its activists from jail and allowed exiles to return.

## MB socialism

Because of Nasser's mass round-up of MB activists, Sayyid Qutb (1900-66) found himself imprisoned. He is, let us note, still considered one of the "most influential and controversial Muslim and Arab thinkers".<sup>18</sup> With the luxury of time, provided courtesy of Nasser, Qutb carefully plotted revenge. First and foremost by studying, moulding and applying the seminal ideas of Syed Abul A'ala Maududi (in 1941 he established the revivalist party, Jammaat-e-Islami, in British India). But Qutb developed his own unique programme and strategy. Freed from prison in 1964, he was almost immediately rearrested ... then tried and, presumably on Nasser's direct orders, executed.

Qutb's most important work is *Ma'alim fi al-Tariq* or *Signposts on the road*<sup>19</sup> - first published in 1964. The basic thesis being that

humanity faces a crisis of leadership: "All nationalistic and chauvinistic ideologies which have appeared in modern times, and all the movements and theories derived from them, have ... lost their vitality" - Nazism, fascism, Peronism, Nasserism, etc.<sup>20</sup> Marxism, he declared, had failed too. Not a "single nation in the world is truly Marxist", because "the whole of this theory conflicts with man's nature and its needs". Marxism only prospers in a "degenerate society or in a society which has become cowed as a result of some form of prolonged dictatorship". As proof of his contention that Marxism had floundered, Qutb pointed to the increasingly dysfunctional Soviet economy and how the USSR was "suffering from shortages of food".

What of the west? It is, he said, "now in decline". Not because its culture has "become poor materially or because its economic and military power has become weak".<sup>21</sup> Rather, Qutb believed that the west had become morally decadent: it is "deprived of those life-giving values which enabled it to be the leader of mankind". He visited the US on behalf of the Egyptian government over 1948-50. A lifelong bachelor, and one presumes sexually repressed, he recoiled from the supposed libidinal wantonness and promiscuity of America's women. As an aside, Qutb claimed a link between what he saw as sexual riot and the unnatural chastity of monastic Christianity. One excess provoking the other. Qutb argued that Christianity had still to fully free itself from paganism.

Not that the Muslim world was let off the hook. Using a combination of hard facts and dehistoricised koranic quotes, *Signposts* castigated all existing Muslim countries. None were Islamic. "If Islam is again to play the role of the leader of mankind", Qutb insisted, "it is necessary that the Muslim community be restored to its original form." The first step had to be washing away the "debris of the man-made traditions" and "false laws and customs", which are not "even remotely related to the Islamic teachings". Qutb said Muslims were living in the midst of a new "*jahiliyyah*" - effectively everything they disliked. The *jahiliyyah* was the period of ignorance corresponding to life in Arabia before the prophet; the new *jahiliyyah* was a "rebellion against god's sovereignty on earth".<sup>22</sup> He and other MB leaders were equated with Mohammed and his close companions. They must form a "vanguard" amongst the youth and single-mindedly fight to destroy the *jahiliyyah*. Not for nothing has *Signposts* been described as the *What is to be done?* of revivalist Islam.<sup>23</sup>

Qutb reckoned his programme might take many years - perhaps hundreds of years - to complete. His followers were urged to approach their mammoth task of winning global leadership through a series of strategic stages: hence the *Signposts* or *Mileposts* title of his book.

Once in power, in their first national outpost, they would not simply return to the conditions of the 7th century, but creatively adapt a purified Islam to fit in with the demands of modern technology - industrial production, air travel, telephones, etc. In other words, monopoly capitalism would be embraced. Despite that, in the meantime, Muslim socialism serves to hoodwink: part mythologised past, part protest against existing conditions, but always hostile to working class interests. Social aid is combined with MB moral-purity campaigns directed against women, the Coptic minority and militant workers. Such campaigns have a material base in the patriarchal economy. Shopkeepers, peasants and artisans exploit not only themselves. They traditionally rely on the labour of family members - mainly wives and

children, who work endless hours for no pay. Moral-purity campaigns serve to keep them in their place - under the thumb of the head of the family. Their exploited position being sanctioned by the *Koran*. To rebel against the patriarch is therefore to rebel against Allah.

What of militant workers? The Brotherhood systematically acts to weaken and divide. In the words of the *Communist manifesto*, what the Brotherhood lambastes capitalism for is not "so much that it creates a proletariat", but that it creates a "*revolutionary* proletariat".<sup>24</sup> Muslim trade unions are established and pitted against secular trade unions and *united* with Muslim employers. Workers and employers are told that they have mutual rights and obligations - in return for "punctually" paid wages, workers are expected to work "fully and faithfully".<sup>25</sup> Strikes against Muslim employers are in effect outlawed as running counter to Islamic law: eg, the right to strike is recognised, but only as long as it "does not disturb work".<sup>26</sup> Working class unity is thereby broken in practice, while leaving religious and state structures intact. The Brotherhood has insisted from the beginning that Islam "does not tolerate divided loyalty, since its very nature is that of total unity".<sup>27</sup>

Qutb's ideas proved inspirational, and not only for fellow Sunnis. The Islamic movement in Iran - which climbed to power in 1979-81 - drew many of its theological innovations from Qutb. Khomeini himself translated Qutb's book *In the shade of the Koran* (1952) into Farsi.

Khomeini, in essence a Bonaparte figure, successfully mobilised a broad section of the urban poor, first against the shah, then against the left. Those who had fled from an impoverished countryside and scratched a living in the sprawling shanty towns of Tehran flocked to his banner. The left was hopelessly outmanoeuvred, not least because of an elementary failure to grasp the politics of the Khomeinists. Anti-Americanism was confused with anti-capitalism. With this grossly false notion clouding minds, most left groups willingly backed Khomeini. Disgracefully, in defence of the so-called 'imam's line', that included some justifying the execution of fellow leftwingers, the crushing of the women's movement and the banning of strikes and workers' councils.

Yet the simple fact of the matter is that the Khomeinists accepted capitalism. Indeed the top clergy quickly merged with finance capital to form a single social amalgam. As for the rest of Iranian society, it was restructured along the vertical lines of religion. Independent working class, minority nationalist and secular forces were driven underground and a suffocating theocratic dictatorship imposed. The only tolerated institutions were Islamic institutions.<sup>28</sup>

Back to the main thread. Like the prophet and his close companions, Qutb said MB needed to know when to withdraw from, and when to engage with, existing society. The Islamic vanguard "should keep itself somewhat aloof" from the "all-encompassing *jahiliyyah*"; it should "also keep some ties with it".<sup>29</sup> His dual approach was modelled on Mohammed's withdrawal from Mecca in 622 and then his engagement with the Median city-state.

Subsequently, in Egypt, one group of Qutb's acolytes developed an ever more rarefied purism, rejecting objective natural laws. Militant irrationalism being closely related to nihilist self-destruction. Those around Shukri Mustafa designated as infidel the whole of Egyptian society. They alone were authentic Muslims. A refusal to pray in 'infidel' mosques followed (government-appointed imams were not recognised).

Mustafa's sect also refused to serve in the armed forces. In effect it formed a semi-autonomous counterculture. The Egyptian press dubbed the lot of them the *Takfir wa al-Hijra* (literally 'excommunication of holy emigration'). Shukri was executed in 1977 after the kidnapping of a religious functionary.

Another group, led by Abd al-Salam Faraj, adopted a variation of this *Islam above culture*. Four members of Islamic Jihad were responsible for the assassination of Anwar Sadat in September 1981. He became widely unpopular when he signed the Camp David peace deal with Israel in 1979. The *jihadists* were, however, completely quixotic in their expectations. Led by lieutenant Khaled Islambouli, they infiltrated a commemorative victory parade with the intention of wiping out the entire Egyptian government. They thought the population would spontaneously rise up to back their organisation's bid for power. The town of Asyut was briefly seized. But apart from that essentially minor incident there was a smooth transition from Anwar Sadat to Hosni Mubarak. A not dissimilar attempted putsch occurred in Syria - members of the Brotherhood seized Hama in 1982. Around 10,000 died, as the Ba'athists re-established control.

Not that the *jihadi* groups should be thought of as mere isolated fanatics. After Mubarak's forced departure many of them helped form the Nour party - an unstable combination of religious traditionalists, populists and hate-mongers. And, at least in terms of my initial expectations, they did shockingly well in the post-Mubarak elections. However, other *jihadi* groups continue to target the Copts (the mainly poor, 10-20% Christian section of Egypt's population). Churches torched, congregations attacked, etc. On new year's day 2011, for example, an Islamic suicide bomber killed 23 worshipers at the church of St Mark and Pope Peter in the Sidi Bishr district of Alexandria. Many more such horrors followed.

To the disgust of the puritanical Salafists, MB appears to be making the precarious transition from noisily heralding paradise to embracing westernised-type parliamentary democracy and even trying to come to a cautious accommodation with the armed forces. Certainly MB's leaders are skilled politicians. So in the second round of the presidential election campaign Mursi presented himself as the candidate of the revolution. However, in the first round he made a direct appeal to the Salafists. Mursi promoted himself as the best-placed Islamic candidate, called for an index of sharia law-compliant companies, insisted that his political programme promoted the values of Islam and frequently peppered his speeches with quotes from the *Koran*.

## Lip service

True, MB pays lip service to democracy. However, a fully consolidated MB regime would be an MB dictatorship with all that that would entail for independent trade unions, a free press, women's rights, the Coptic minority, etc. Moreover, almost needless to say, an MB regime would not combine Islam and socialism, but Islam and monopoly capitalism. MB voices advocating egalitarianism have been bureaucratically silenced over recent years. Mursi explicitly pledged himself to preserve the so-called "free market" and rescue the tottering Egyptian economy by drawing on the \$3.2 billion International Monetary Fund loan facility (agreed with MB participation). Naturally, MB's present-day economic 'renaissance' would involve restructuring according to Islamic principles - in truth that can only mean further privatisations,

further cuts and further suffering by the Egyptian masses.

Doubtless, this 'neoliberalism with an Islamic face' reflects the influence of big capital and its personifications within MB. Indeed, till he was barred by the election commission, MB's chosen presidential candidate was Khairat al-Shater - widely credited with being the main "architect" of MB's current economic policy.<sup>30</sup> Equally to the point, this millionaire's considerable business empire is said to be one of MB's main sources of finance.

Shater is far from being a new phenomenon. During the period of persecution under Nasser a number of leading MB figures, such as Omar al-Talmasani and Said Ramadan, took refuge in Saudi Arabia. Thanks to the self-interested help from the royal house of Saud - terrified by Nasser's pan-Arabism - they became very rich. When Sadat turned his back on Nasserite socialism and the Soviet Union, and opted instead for US patronage and the so-called free market, he found it expedient to allow these exiles to come back into Egypt. Sadat relied on them to counter the influence of his leftist, Nasserite and pro-Soviet opponents. As a by-product the returnees could only but transform the MB. They might have been few in number, but they had millions of dollars in the bank to ensure social leverage. Eg, thanks to their wealth and Saudi patronage, MB can provide a non-state, alternative system of healthcare, social security, religious education and source of credit in Egypt.

The forces of the working class, socialism and communism are pitifully weak in Egypt. But to have called for a vote for Mursi and an MB-dominated government can do nothing to strengthen those forces. The working class cannot gain strength by opting for the lesser evil - let alone tying itself to MB in the hope that it will, almost in spite of itself, create the benign conditions needed to continue the fight for better living conditions, trade union rights and radical democratic change ●

## Notes

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2. Statement by Revolutionary Socialists *Socialist Worker* June 2.
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16. See P Mitchell *The Society of Muslim Brothers* London 1969.
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18. AA Musallam *From secularism to jihad: Sayyid Qutb and the foundations of radical Islamism* Westport CT, 2005, pxi.
19. Another translation would be *Mileposts*.
20. www.pwhce.org.qutb.
21. *Ibid*.
22. *Ibid*.
23. See G Kepel *The prophet and the pharaoh* London 1985, p43.
24. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 6, New York 1976, p508.
25. Quoted in P Mitchell *The Society of Muslim Brothers* London 1969, p253.
26. www.tahrirdocuments.org/2011/04/the-muslim-brotherhood-one-hand-builds-one-hand-protects-the-revolution.
27. Hassan al-Banna *The messages of al-Imam-u-shaheed* - see www.glue.edu/~kareem/rasayil.
28. See A Mehrdad *Radical Islam: a preliminary study* London, nd.
29. www.pwhce.org.qutb.
30. www.opendemocracy.net/fawaz-gerges/new-capitalists-islamists-political-economy.



## HALLE

# Grigory Zinoviev at his best

Ben Lewis and Lars T Lih (eds) **Zinoviev and Martov: head to head in Halle** November Publications, 2011, pp229, £14

**T**he Thrilla in Halle! A ringside seat, just for you, as Grigory Zinoviev (in the red trunks) and Julius Martov (his are pale pink) duke it out before delegates of the 700,000-member Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (USPD). The stakes: should the USPD join the Communist International (Comintern)? Here at last, after 92 years, the full text of their historic speeches to the October 1920 USPD congress in Halle, Germany, translated and edited by Ben Lewis and Lars T Lih.

Zinoviev's four-hour speech provides a unique view of how the Comintern, founded the previous year, explained its character and purpose to a sceptical audience. In addition, it helps us understand Zinoviev himself, a little-studied and much-criticised figure who was the Comintern's central leader from 1919 to 1926. The speech captivated not only his supporters, but his opponents, one of whom wrote that it showed Zinoviev to be "the first orator of our century". His efforts contributed to convincing a majority of delegates to affiliate to the Comintern. As the congress ended, the anti-Comintern minority broke away, retaining the USPD name.

Lewis and Lih round out the Zinoviev-Martov exchange with three analytic essays, two other documents by Zinoviev, the text of the Comintern's 'Conditions for admission', an extensive glossary and an index.

Taken as a whole, the thrust of *Head to head in Halle* is to rehabilitate Zinoviev's reputation. To be sure, the editors cite Zinoviev's flaws as a political thinker: "He lacks the depth, nuance and sophistication of a Trotsky or a Lenin" (Lewis); Zinoviev's writings display "anti-charisma", "tactical errors" and "an inability to present his views in organised form" (Lih). Still, the torrent of criticism - "no-one seems to have a kind word to say about him" - seems overwrought; Lewis and Lih note evidence of Zinoviev's high reputation among his contemporaries.

The book's dedication to the United Opposition calls to mind Zinoviev's role in 1926-27, together with Lev Kamenev and Leon Trotsky, in leading this bold initiative, the broadest and most concerted attempt by Bolsheviks to halt the party's Stalinist degeneration. This effort marked the three leaders (and the many thousands of Bolsheviks who supported them) for execution during the years of Stalin's frame-up purges.

James P Cannon, a prominent leader of US communism in the 1920s, thus had good reason to comment: "I have always been outraged by the impudent pretensions of so many little people to deprecate Zinoviev, and I feel that he deserves justification before history."<sup>1</sup>

## More than minions

In Lewis's view, the negative assessment of Zinoviev is rooted in a "great leader" approach to the Bolshevik party that views its leaders - apart from Lenin and perhaps Trotsky - as "mere minions."

Specifically, Lih refutes charges that Zinoviev was "intellectually and political inconsistent". Quite the contrary, Lih says: Zinoviev's writings from 1918 to 1925 display a "striking and demonstrable consistency". Zinoviev was "under the spell of the Leninist drama of hegemony, but with



**Grigory Zinoviev: consistent**

a decidedly populist bent".

By "hegemony" Lih is referring to the process through which the Bolshevik Party aimed to achieve leadership over the working class as a whole and that of the working class, in turn, over the peasantry, which then made up a large majority of Russia's population. Lih uses the word *populist* "in its American sense" to signify "someone who has a genuine concern for the problems of ordinary people, who has a simplistic tendency to blame those problems on the machinations of elites, and who sees full democratisation as the ultimate solution to all issues".

Lih's analysis is stimulating and persuasive, providing many insights not only into Zinoviev's role, but regarding key issues in early Soviet politics. Rather than pursue these questions, however, I wish to subject Zinoviev's speech in Halle to Lih's test of consistency: how does its content relate to Zinoviev's narrative of communist and working class hegemony?

The many points made by Zinoviev at the Halle congress can be ordered into three categories: (1) founding principles of the Comintern; (2) extensions of the Bolshevik hegemony strategy; and (3) the struggle against 'Menshevism' in Germany.

Zinoviev told USPD delegates at the Halle congress that "if a split comes about [in their party], then it will be because you do not agree with us on the questions of world revolution, democracy and the dictatorship of the proletariat". Regarding "world revolution", he argued that despite some setbacks, there were still good prospects for workers to win power in major European states in the near future. By "democracy and the dictatorship of the proletariat", Zinoviev referred to defence of the workers' state in Soviet Russia and the advocacy of the example it provided for workers' struggle in other countries.

Aspects of his presentation on these points displayed both realism and flexibility:

- Zinoviev was blunt regarding conditions in Soviet Russia, which was only beginning to recover from invasion and civil war. "It really is looking bad in Russia," he said. "There is not enough bread. In the cities, the heating and housing situation is bad."

- Zinoviev forthrightly rejected charges that the Comintern was commanding its German supporters to take revolutionary initiatives in order to aid the Soviet state (a notion that USPD rightwingers called the "Moscow diktat"). "Do not help us: help yourselves," Zinoviev said. "In the first instance, take care of the working classes of your own countries."

- He also told German workers not to copy unthinkingly the forms of workers' rule established in Russia: "Should the German working class create a different form of the dictatorship of the proletariat, then we will gladly welcome it. We have always said that things do not have to be like in Russia."

## Strategy for hegemony

Other aspects of Zinoviev's speech present extensions of what Lih identifies as the central theme of his activity in Russia: a strategy for revolutionary leadership of all exploited and oppressed social layers. For example, Zinoviev rejected charges from the rightwing forces in the USPD that the Comintern promises too much to the peasantry. He defended land distribution to peasants and insisted on the need to form peasants' councils. He contrasted the failure of the more inflexible policies of the short-lived revolutionary government of Hungary in 1919: "At the head of the revolution stands Béla Kun and the proletarian government. But the peasant has received nothing and hasn't noticed that anything has changed."

The most eloquent passages of Zinoviev's speech take up the Comintern's support for liberation struggles of oppressed peoples in Asia, a support that provoked sarcastic criticism from the USPD right. Zinoviev dismissed this opposition as reflecting merely "the narrowness, the old small-mindedness, the old prejudices of the bourgeoisie which we have absorbed with our mother's milk". To "thunderous applause on the left", Zinoviev presented an amended version of Marx's and Engels' celebrated appeal: "Oppressed peoples of the whole world and proletarians of all countries, unite against your exploiters!"<sup>2</sup>

It was in this context that Zinoviev made very brief reference to the oppression of women.

On a small and seemingly secondary point, Zinoviev extended this approach to Germany in a manner that prefigured the Comintern's later policy of the united front. German communists had come under attack from the USPD right wing for favouring the recruitment to workers' councils of members of Christian trade unions. "We definitely need to have such elements in the councils," Zinoviev stated. "In the soviets we have the opportunity to teach them better." This inclusive approach, he said, went hand in hand with firm opposition to the Christian union leaders' pro-employer policies.

Yet Zinoviev rejected calls for workers' organisations to "join together in one front against the bourgeoisie". That would be "very good and desirable", he said. "Yet unfortunately that is still impossible." The barrier to unity, in his view, was the strength of German 'Menshevism'.

By this he meant the current within the German workers' movement that was defending and fortifying the bourgeois state: the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the pro-SPD union leaderships, and the right wing of the USPD. He termed the trade union component of these forces "the only real weapon that the bourgeoisie still possesses against us".

How then was German Menshevism to be destroyed? For Zinoviev, the answer lay in drawing together in a single party all the genuine revolutionaries: those in the Communist Party (KPD), the left wing of the USPD, and the "best element" in the ultra-left Communist German Workers Party (KAPD), while driving out the Menshevik misleaders. With characteristic optimism, he projected winning 90% of the USPD members and most of those in the KAPD; in fact, the united Communist party created by the Halle congress included only a third of the USPD members and very few from the KAPD.

## Lessons of the Kapp putsch

Yet even had the revolutionary unification succeeded to the degree projected by Zinoviev, the resulting party would initially have been weaker than the SPD in membership, trade union influence and electoral support. How could it overcome the entrenched strength of SPD reformism? This question was not addressed in Zinoviev's speech or in the Halle congress as a whole. Perhaps engaging with this issue was simply impossible. How could Zinoviev advocate a united front with the right USPD forces while helping to drive through a split in the party? Perhaps the revolutionary forces had to break away *first*, establish their own party, and *only then* consider the policies necessary to achieve workers' unity in struggle.

Nonetheless, the question of workers' unity in struggle had already been posed in life, seven months before the Halle congress, in the events surrounding the Kapp putsch - an attempt by rightwing forces to impose a military dictatorship. In Germany, the debate on workers' unity was already underway.

Zinoviev's description of German Social Democracy as the main buttress of bourgeois rule applied fully to the initial months after the German November revolution of 1918, when the authority of the bourgeois state had been shattered. It was the SPD, assisted by the USPD, that rebuilt the fundamentals of bourgeois rule - the army, the police, the state administration - through a brutal war against revolutionary workers.

But in the process the bourgeoisie acquired some buttresses of its own and grew less reliant on the SPD. In March 1920, rightist forces in the German army revolted against the government and seized the capital. The army high command folded its arms, refusing to oppose the coup. The Social Democratic trade union leadership headed by Carl Legien called a general strike, which was massively effective. Workers seized control in strategic areas. The coup was quickly overturned. Workers' unity then broke down, and the rightists regained much of the ground they had lost.

Following the Kapp events, a debate broke out within the Comintern

as to their meaning. Béla Kun and his co-thinkers considered the unity of Social Democratic and revolutionary organisations during the Kapp events to have been a weakness; KPD leader Paul Levi and his co-thinkers viewed it as a strength. (See my 'The origins of united front policy'<sup>3</sup>).

In his Halle speech, Zinoviev made only one passing reference to the Kapp events, as follows: "Who saved the bourgeoisie during the Kapp putsch, when all the working class parties failed? Was it not the trade union leaders led by Legien?" Zinoviev's comment was both misleading and enigmatic, and he did not develop it further. On the face of it, his words suggested a tilt to Béla Kun's viewpoint.

After the Halle congress, the USPD left and the KPD joined to form the United Communist Party (VKPD). Lack of clarity on the lessons of the Kapp experience came back to haunt the new party. Supporters of Béla Kun's adventurist views, with encouragement from Zinoviev, took the leadership of the VKPD. In March 1921, they led the party to a disastrous defeat that destroyed much of what had been gained through the fusion.

Zinoviev's adaptation to an ultra-left course in 1920-21 seems to me to be inconsistent with the commitment to the "Leninist drama of hegemony" identified by Lih. In fact, none of the main figures in the Comintern executive at that time show evidence of shaping their actions in the light of Bolshevik experience. Zinoviev and his colleagues seem rather to be responding to stimuli from the front lines of struggle in central Europe. The Bolsheviks' rich experience in striving for working class unity in struggle, which Zinoviev knew so well, was not brought into play - not until the intervention of Lenin and Trotsky at the Comintern's 3rd World Congress in July-August 1921, by which time the damage could no longer be made good.

In summary, it is a many-sided Zinoviev that we encounter at the Halle congress: often brilliant, sometimes superficial, occasionally misleading. Although flawed, his role at the Halle congress was among his finest achievements. Publication of *Head to head in Halle* is thus an important step toward gaining a balanced view of the Comintern's first president.

As Ben Lewis suggests, a better knowledge of Zinoviev helps us understand the Bolshevik Party as a whole and "its role in developing articulate, dedicated leaders". Large-scaled in both their abilities and their weaknesses, the Bolshevik leaders, including Zinoviev, complemented each other as part of an effective team, whose collective capacity to unleash the creative power of working people still inspires us today ●

**John Riddell**

## Notes

1. JP Cannon *The first ten years of American communism: report of a participant* New York 1973, pp186-87. Also available at [www.marxists.org/archive/cannon/works/letters/fall56.htm#zin](http://www.marxists.org/archive/cannon/works/letters/fall56.htm#zin).
2. Zinoviev was repeating comments in his summary speech to the Baku Congress of the Peoples of the East, held the previous month. See J Riddell (ed) *To see the dawn: Baku, 1920* New York 1993. The slogan originated in the Soviet publication *Narody Vostoka* (Peoples of the East). For Lenin's endorsement of it, see VI Lenin *Collected works* Moscow 1971, Vol 31, pp453, or do an internet search for 'Lenin speech at a meeting of activists December 6 1920'.
3. <http://johnriddell.wordpress.com/2011/05/04/the-origins-of-the-united-front-policy-3>.



REVIEW

Manifesto for disobedient writers

Lisa Goldman **The no rules handbook for writers** Oberon Books, 2012, pp256, £14.99



Lisa Goldman: know the rules so you can break them

“If the law is unjust ... break it”: so says John Carter, the eponymous hero of *The king of Prussia*, a play by the late Nick Darke. Anyone who really thinks that this glorious Kneehigh Theatre production was merely a historical romp about Cornish smugglers clearly was not paying attention. *The king of Prussia* is a text about second-home owners destabilising and destroying communities - *now*; it is a text about how to organise and drive a wedge between the state apparatus of oppression and the ruling class - *now*; it is a text about how to triumph - *right now* - by the simple strategy of bearding injustice in its lair.

Lisa Goldman’s *The no rules handbook for writers* is in the same tradition. It is an invitation to writers, both new and established, to join in with a literary form of civil disobedience. From the gnarled hack, gurgling out yet another sterile episode of a ‘returning series’, to the tyro about to take flight, here, at last, is a self-help book that is *practicable*. Comrade Goldman’s strategy is simple: identify the so-called ‘rules’ of narrative, character, etc, and then offer the means to subvert them.

When all is said and done, the self-help genre is a singularly unpromising one. Should you wish, you could hand over responsibility for almost any aspect of your life to a more or less qualified guru. Having trouble with a new regime at your place of employment? No worries; get yourself a copy of *Who moved my cheese?: an amazing way to deal with change in your work and in your life* - by Spencer Johnson (Spencer who?). Prefer to find yourself a guru with a familiar name? Look no further than Noel Edmonds and his *Positively happy: cosmic ways to change your life*. And, if you are a writer who may have a problem, then you can look just beyond Edmonds’ cosmos to that realm where the Almighty Himself, aka Robert McKee, bestrides the screenwriting multi-verse clutching his sacred text, *Story: substance, structure, style and the principles of screenwriting*.

Comrade Goldman provides an antithesis to McKee (not simply by eschewing the obligatory colon and subtitle for her book cover). Where McKee’s structuralist prescriptions do the writer’s

thinking for her, Goldman puts her at the centre of an agile, dynamic thought process.

*No rules* sets up a sequence of dialectic positions. The ‘rules’ of creative writing, which serve as the headings of each chapter, are followed by a consideration of their precise value: each chapter is completed by an anti-heading, a counterposition to the ‘rule’, which Goldman calls a ‘rule-breaker’. So, for example, the first ‘rule’, ‘Write what you know’, is eventually counterposed by its breaker: ‘Write to discover what you don’t know yet’.

Occasionally, Goldman’s ‘rule-breakers’ stray towards the gnomic. With the exhortation to ‘Let the meaning find you’, there is a sense that this might be a self-help book of the cheese-moving kind. She also sets up a straw man or two. Rule 31, for example, takes David Mamet’s dictum, ‘The purpose of art is not to change, but to delight’. Goldman, understandably, neglects to speak to this mimsy proposition; rather, she uses it as a springboard to argue that the purpose of art is to inspire change. It is surely no accident that one hears Marx’s 11th thesis on Feuerbach behind her ‘rule breaker 31’: ‘The purpose of art is to change, not simply delight’.

The tone of the book is honest and direct. While remaining free of bombast, this is an authoritative piece. *And Goldman undoubtedly knows whereof she speaks*. She draws on her own experiences, as a writer, with a simple and engaging humility. She also makes detailed and illuminating reference to her substantial career as a theatre director working with new writing. Both with The Red Room, and, more recently, at the Soho Theatre, Goldman has been responsible for developing a dizzying array of important new work.

*No rules* enlivens its discussions of each aspect of bringing creative ideas from the thought-cloud to the page, by interpolating the reflections of contemporary writers whom Goldman has interviewed for the book. She keeps great company. It might be Lucy Prebble speaking about the institutional power of the BBC in promoting self-censorship; or Bryony Lavery pointing out that, as ‘the only story-making species in the natural world’, we should feel safe to trust our instincts

about narrative. It might be Anthony Neilson challenging what can or cannot be addressed in theatre by pointing out that ‘the fourth wall which needs to be broken is the one in the audience’s minds’; or Philip Ridley generously allowing us insight into his genius: ‘a play or novel usually takes me by surprise. For me, preparation - the way something comes together - is like an explosion in reverse.’ Robert McKee’s assertions are exposed as sterile, corporate formulae.

Given Goldman’s own professional background, theatre writing inevitably occupies the centre of this book. I read *No rules* days after seeing Philip Ridley’s play, *Tender napalm*. I was fresh from witnessing how two actors, two chairs, and one continuous lighting state, can relocate an audience in a very other world: language and sweat is all it takes. Goldman is a superb advocate of the immediacy and power of live theatre: however, she makes strong connections to other literary forms, such as the novel, and, more notably, film. There is an attractive inclusiveness in her attitude to a wide range of fiction sub-genres.

*No rules* works as a handbook. You can dip into it to tackle a particular issue, and browse for a writing exercise that might bust you out of a locked position. It also makes a satisfying survey of the writer’s craft, tackling the entire process from researching to drafting, to redrafting, to finding an audience.

Neither does Goldman neglect the bigger picture: the point of *being* a writer. A section entitled ‘Principles of freedom’ offers a powerful vision of the writer’s role. Her reference to Iranian film-maker Jafar Panahi, under house arrest and being ‘accused of the thought-crime of imagining a film about the post-election demonstrations’, is particularly moving. She adds his response to his interrogator: ‘I don’t know what kind of film I will make in the future. But now you are in my consciousness, maybe you’ll even be in the film. I wonder how you’ll end up - a hero, or a villain?’

When I read those words, I found myself smiling, and thinking how Nick Darke would have enjoyed that ●

Simon Turley

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

## Syrian uprising hijacked

# Arab spring in retreat

All the evidence points to the ascendancy of counterrevolutionary forces in Syria, writes **Peter Manson**

Over the last few weeks *Socialist Worker* has finally admitted what has been obvious for months: the uprising in Syria is not purely and simply a popular revolution. Editor Judith Orr concedes that there are “competing forces” involved and that the imperialists, together with reactionary Arab regimes, are bent on imposing their own ‘solution’. “But at the same time,” she concludes, “we must support the mass popular revolt from below that aims to bring down Assad’s brutal regime” (June 23).

Back in March *Socialist Worker* published a highly critical article by Sami Ramadanani, who commented that, for the Socialist Workers Party, “Wishful thinking has replaced materialist analysis. We have to recognise that the imperialist-backed Arab counterrevolution has, in the short term, regained the initiative and is on the offensive.” While the protests in Syria “began spontaneously and were mostly led by progressives demanding radical political reform”, it is now clear that, “as in Libya, pro-Nato factions have captured the initiative” (March 24).

The point about Libya is well made. Apart from social-imperialists like the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty, just about everyone on the left was soon able to see that a victory for the National Transitional Council would represent a defeat for the Libyan revolution. Of course, in Libya the imperialists intervened directly and blatantly, using Nato air power to ensure that the forces of Muammar Gaddafi were destroyed. No-one could seriously deny that the new regime was placed in power by the west, and is totally bereft of democrats, progressives and working class partisans.

However, in Syria, a Libya-type military intervention does not seem to be on the cards. Nevertheless, as Ramadanani pointed out, “Lebanon’s US-French-Israeli allies, pro-US Iraqi forces, Jordan, Libyan terrorists and Nato special forces are all assisting counterrevolution in Syria.” Groups such as the Free Syrian Army and the Syrian National Council are being funded by Turkey and Saudi Arabia. And, “Shaken by the uprisings, Qatari and Saudi sheiks provide funding for sectarian Muslim Brotherhood leaders and Salafi clerics.” But, remarks comrade Ramadanani, “*Socialist Worker* astoundingly implies that FSA Nato-backed gunmen are revolutionaries.”

It was a short but clear indictment of the SWP’s criminally simplistic line. But Simon Assaf’s response, published immediately below it, gave us more of the same. Entitled ‘Revolutions show that ordinary people have the power to change the world’, comrade Assaf’s piece naively described “those making the revolution” as “local committees, the youth, workers, peasants, the left, neighbourhood campaigners and Facebook activists”. While “Regime supporters point to the charlatans of the western-backed Syrian National Council”, he wrote, all those actually making the revolution “reject outside



**Free Syrian Army: paid for by Saudi Arabia**

intervention”. Comrade Ramadanani may have his faults, but implying he is a ‘regime supporter’ is taking things a bit far.

Recently, however, *Socialist Worker*’s line has been more nuanced. Comrade Assaf, writing in the June 16 issue, stated: “The revolution in Syria is entering a critical phase, marked by mutinies, strikes and a growing insurgency - as well as renewed attempts by the west and other outside forces to intervene.” However, retaining his rose-tinted view of the anti-regime forces, he commented: “... revolutionaries are swelling the ranks of the armed rebels, bringing with them the anti-sectarian politics that lie at the heart of the popular movement” (June 16).

In this week’s issue, comrade Orr pays more attention to the aims of the imperialists: “Of course, western rulers are not interested in representing the millions of ordinary people yearning for freedom ... Their aim was to hijack

or subvert the Arab revolutionary movements to ensure that pliant, western-friendly regimes replaced the old dictatorships.” The imperialists, together with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, are engaging in “covert operations”.

Comrade Orr is now also prepared to admit that all those fighting the Ba’athists of Bashar al-Assad may not be progressive: “As with any revolution, there are competing forces. Some are ready to cut a deal with the Assad regime. Some, including the exile-dominated Syrian National Council, are happy to work with and facilitate the interests of western powers or their allies in the Gulf.”

But we should remain optimistic: “The revolutionary wave sweeping north Africa and the Middle East ... is still unfolding.” What is more, “the Syrian revolution is rooted in the same revolutionary process at work in Tunisia and Egypt. It reflects the same

desires of ordinary people to rise up against poverty and injustice. And it stems from the impact of neoliberal capitalism - the growing gap between rich and poor and abandoned promises of political reform.”

Comrade Orr concludes: “Socialists have to stand firm against our rulers’ attempts to derail the revolutionary wave to pursue their own interests. We are against any intervention, however it is spun. We have to expose the imperialists’ lies about their motivation” (*Socialist Worker* June 23).

The problem with such warnings is that they are based on a false perception and continued “wishful thinking”. The balance of evidence clearly shows that those leading, those exercising hegemony over the anti-Assad movement are hard-line Islamists and Sunni sectarians of one kind or another, crucially the Muslim Brotherhood, who are, for their own reasons, prepared to present a pro-western face. Apart from this bloc, the opposition is highly fragmented and politically incoherent. A bickering melange of adventurers, French-educated sons of the middle class, exiled businessmen and left nationalist idealists. It is no surprise that Syria’s Kurdish, Alawite, Druze and Ismaili populations have largely kept their distance from the Syrian National Council.

So, it might well be true that the anti-Assad forces are really made up overwhelmingly of revolutionary “youth, workers, peasants, the left” (not to mention “neighbourhood campaigners and Facebook activists”). But who is acting as the leadership? Who is giving political direction? If it was the left, if it was the forces of secularism, democracy and socialism, would the imperialists be siding with them? Would the US and the UK not prefer the Assad regime, if only as the lesser evil? Foreign secretary William Hague talks of the “savage” and “grotesque” crimes of Assad and

speaks admiringly of the rebels. And why is the benighted house of Saud pumping in money and arms, while the European Union imposes an embargo on weapon deliveries to the Assad regime?

This week the Russian ship, MV Alead, was prevented from taking its cargo of alleged “attack helicopters” intended for the Damascus regime to Syria after the UK government saw to it that its insurance cover was revoked. It seems David Cameron had even been contemplating sending an armed contingent to board the Alead to ensure the consignment could not be delivered. But now Cameron says that Russia has agreed to “key principles” for a “transition” in Syria: ie, the replacement of Assad and his immediate entourage by a regime more amenable to imperialist plans for the region - including, of course, the Islamist-dominated rebels. To do this the US and UK are touting the so-called ‘Annan plan’ - whose six points amount to nothing more than a UN-supervised ceasefire, plus the release of prisoners and a vague acceptance of democratic freedoms.

None of this is to say that the Arab spring faces inevitable defeat. There is a mass, hugely healthy sentiment against the corrupt, nepotistic, self-seeking ruling cliques that litter the whole region - a sentiment that is entirely laudable. But working class forces must strive to win hegemony over the movement for change, which means firmly opposing the reactionary ideas that are contesting for domination at the moment, not creating illusions in them.

And that means honestly assessing the balance amongst the “competing forces” involved in the rebellion. If the SWP did that, it might conclude that comrade Ramadanani is correct: the “imperialist-backed Arab counterrevolution has, in the short term, regained the initiative” ●

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