

**weekly**  
**worker**



**The relevance of Lenin today: Chris Cutrone examines the paradox**

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SWP: private quarrels and public gagging



# LETTERS



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

## NUM shambles

The National Union of Mineworkers conference opened and concluded on Saturday July 7. Gone are the days of a week-long conference at a premier seaside resort, and agendas which covered world politics. The conference was over in five hours, including an hour break for dinner.

Seven mines remain, all in a precarious existence. UK Coal, the biggest single employer, with three of them, is on the brink. Despite this the NUM has seen unprecedented internal division and a widespread rank-and-file revolt against the sitting leadership, yet this was nowhere evident on the floor of conference. What's it all about? It revolves in particular around the position and power of Arthur Scargill. In a nutshell the incoming leadership of the Yorkshire area under Chris Kitchen and Chris Skidmore wouldn't play ball and let Arthur call the shots or continue to claim the expenses he hitherto enjoyed. They also resolved to discover what exactly the union was paying to whom and for what, but this has proved to be a swamp through which we are still wading.

We have seen Scargill launch legal challenges to rules (which were devised by him) in the courts, as well as a whole string of cases over what the union ought and ought not to be still paying for (these famously include his Barbican luxury flat, car allowances and astronomical phone bills). Many fear that, whatever the merits of the arguments about union functioning and democracy, a victory for Arthur would lead to him riding back into control, if not into formal office (although he certainly wouldn't rule that out).

Apart from this controversy, the biggest issue was the clash with UK Coal over terms and conditions. At the beginning of 2011, instead of the long-awaited wage increases the company demanded reductions and the withdrawal of nationally agreed rates and conditions. It claims to be on the brink of disaster and has called upon the union to sign up to a joint survival plan. The terms of these reductions had been rejected by the national negotiating committee, but Chris Kitchen argued that the company is not in a position to stay afloat without concessions from the miners on their terms and conditions. Eventually a deal was agreed, to come into effect in November. In exchange for the withdrawal of area and local agreements on safety, working in excessive heat, etc, plus the withdrawal of a number of allowances, wage rates will rise by 4.7% this year and there will be a bonus scheme based on production targets for individual collieries. But next year there will be a total wage freeze and a 10% reduction in the concessionary fuel agreement allowance.

The NUM NEC agreed to strongly recommend acceptance of this deal and it went through by 336 votes to 184. This provoked intense anger and a campaign against the agreement, particularly in Kellingley. As a result Yorkshire NEC member Steve Mace and others have been suspended from their branch positions, and Steve from the NEC. He is demanding that Arthur Scargill be allowed to represent him, which the NEC has rejected. Whatever you think of Arthur, it is normal for the accused person to be represented by a person of their choice. Doubtless this one will end up in the courts too.

Then there are the area elections to the NEC, including for the seat vacated by the suspended Steve

Mace. It was like none I have ever experienced before in more than four decades of membership, in that every candidate's election address called for support for one of two rival slates. This marks the ongoing bitter division within the Yorkshire area between Chris Kitchen and his opponents. The bitterness partly relates to Arthur Scargill, with one side condemning the waste of union money, while the other implicitly argues that Arthur should be allowed to retain his free-wheeling influence in the union and that costs aren't really an issue.

Chris lost the position of Yorkshire general secretary to Clint Whitehead, whose slate now has two of the three NEC positions. But the controversy was just starting. The incoming secretary then refuses to take up his position because he believes the salary on offer is too low. My first reaction was: 'You're taking the piss, aren't you?' How can it possibly be right for the secretary-elect to renegotiate the terms of the contract he was elected on?

But then I discover that the secretary's salary is subject to negotiation. It seems we have a rule book written by Mr Scargill, who imposed it by hook or by crook on the union. The same rule book makes him 'honorary president', while abolishing the elected position of national president. The national chair and national general secretary were to be appointed by the NEC and their posts were in theory unpaid. But these officials could appeal to some higher authority - yes, Arthur - and argue for a salary based on their existing post. So, for example, the agent secretary in Yorkshire negotiated a payment in respect of his national position on top of his salary as Yorkshire general secretary.

When Chris Kitchen was elected as both agent/general secretary of Yorkshire and national secretary last time, he did the same thing - at that time with the approval of the trustees and the NEC. The salary was officially £48,997, but because this was less than what he earned at the pit he was allowed to negotiate an increase.

But now Chris Kitchen has been defeated by Clint Whitehead, the new agent/general secretary, so surely Clint can now renegotiate his salary in the same way as all secretaries have in Yorkshire since the Scargill rule book was imposed? Yes, in theory. But Clint insists that Scargill be allowed to represent him in the negotiations, and this has been refused by the NEC. Secondly it's not just the salary. New terms and conditions have allegedly been imposed, which greatly restrict the role and general authority of the post.

One would have thought, returning to conference, that Mr Whitehead would have stormed to the platform to challenge Nicky Wilson, the national chair, over his report on the debacle, but he didn't. None of these matters were discussed on the day. It is clear that the newly elected officials and NEC members feel the whole apparatus is weighted against them and that they do not have skills and articulation of the old guard - which is why they demand that Arthur Scargill be allowed to represent them. For those of us who fear not these newly elected, raw pit lads, which the membership has chosen to represent them, but the return of the Scargill autocracy, this is not a good sign. If you feel unable to argue your own corner without Arthur how the hell will you argue ours? It suggests that Arthur could be brought back in one capacity or another - not to represent the new leadership, but to be the new leadership.

Where did it all go wrong? First, with the imposition of the new

(Scargill) rule book, and then with the ad-hoc, out-of-sight negotiations over the posts of national secretary and president - as well as the nod and wink to improve the terms at area level over and above what the rules stipulate. These practices are clearly open to favouritism and abuse and are not accountable to the members. Instead of this being resolved at conference, some fool of a judge with a sheep on his head will decide what's best and fair for the NUM - and at considerable cost to the members.

I am hoping to bring out a consultation document outlining draft rule changes, which will secure proper, democratic functioning and accountability of officials at every level. The idea is to copper-bottom some democratic structures and rank-and-file control into the union. On salary the rule ought to clearly spell out what the salary is - if you don't think its enough, don't stand. The level of that salary ought to be fixed at the level of the average wage of the miners represented, with the payment of actual expenses, not a fixed, notional fee as a perk. No purchase of cars or houses - they should be paid for by the officials themselves out of their salary, in the same way as we pay for ours.

Finally, one positive change was agreed by conference - our withdrawal as a union from the phantom 'International Energy Miners Organisation', which Arthur had set up years ago and over which we had never had any control - only masses of endless payments and expenditure. It was a victory a long time coming for me, since I had campaigned for years against this monolith of bureaucracy and financial scams.

I am sure readers will agree that all of this is a long way from the militant, principled tradition of the miners and the NUM.

**David Douglass**  
South Shields

## Sectarianism

Peter Manson's letter (July 5) supports the orthodox definition of sectarianism: that "Sectarian groups put the interests of their own organisation before those of the working class as a whole"; and asks me for my alternative.

On the first point, the passage Peter criticises in my article ('Liquidationism and "broad front" masks', June 28) was directed to simply cutting away the support of the 'proof texts' from Marx used by broad-front advocates. It was not directly addressed to criticism of the orthodox definition of sectarianism.

The formulation quoted in my article was Dave Spencer's 2006 variant of the orthodox definition. I agree that Peter's version is more orthodox. The reason is that Dave had modified his version to make it less vulnerable to criticisms I had previously made of the orthodox version in an e-list discussion in which we had participated.

The underlying criticism is a point Peter makes himself against me (mistakenly): "Mike's first objection appears to conflate the interests of (and 'process of developing') the whole class (and 'movement') with the interests of its current misleaders." The point is that the interests of the class as a whole are not the same thing as the current wishes of the class in its majority, or of the leaders of the workers' movement. This is as true of an individual as it is of a class or a social group like the labour bureaucracy: it would plainly be in my objective interests to stop smoking, but I don't want to stop strongly enough to actually do so.

The problem this poses for the orthodox definition of sectarianism

is this. The whole Marxist left (and a significant part of the non-Marxist left) can all agree without hesitation that the interests of the working class as a whole are primary, that communists "have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole" (*Communist manifesto*). The problem is that we disagree among ourselves as to what the objective interests of the proletariat as a whole are.

Among the Marxist left it is common ground that the working class as a whole needs a political party. Thus Peter: "the party which alone could provide the movement with the leadership that meets its objective interests". But what sort of party could do so? Pretty much everyone except the Spartacists agrees that the Spartacists are a sect. But the Spartacists could perfectly properly say - and do say - that the objective interests of the working class demand a Bolshevik-Leninist - ie, Trotskyist - world party, and that the only such (proto-) party in the world is the International Communist League - ie, the Spartacist international.

The result is that to charge someone with 'sectarianism', meaning that they "put the interests of their own organisation before those of the working class as a whole", means no more than to say that you disagree with them about what the interests of the working class as a whole are. 'I am strong-minded; you are obstinate; he is pig-headed'; 'I defend the interests of the working class as a whole; you are mistaken; he is a sectarian'.

The point of my discussion of the *Communist manifesto* text is to demonstrate that the passage which is the 'Marx proof-text' of the orthodox definition does not say what the modern usage makes it say. Moreover, it is addressed to a specific phenomenon in the workers' movement which is quite marginal to modern sectarianism: that is, the existence of trends (Fourierists, Owenites, etc) which argue against the existence both of trade unions and of workers' parties like left Chartism. There are groups of this sort in the modern left, like (in their different ways) the Socialist Party of Great Britain and World Revolution. But the far left groups in general are not sects in the *Communist manifesto* sense. The attempt to draw a broader meaning out of the *Communist manifesto* text produces a mere empty insult.

What alternative definition? I cannot offer a 'finished definition', but a rough formulation is: 'Sectarianism is the rejection of united organisation and common action where it is possible on the basis of partial common ground.'

The 'classic' sectarians were sectarian towards the basic mass movement for elementary demands: they refused common action on basic demands. The 'sectarians' Trotsky

complained of in the *Transitional programme* were sectarian variously towards the trade unions, the mass reformist parties, the USSR and the 'official communist' movement: they refused common action on basic demands, or the attempt to intervene in left-right fights in the socialist parties, or the defence of the USSR.

The modern sectarians are sectarian chiefly towards each other: they refuse the common party which would objectively be possible on the basis of their very extensive common programmatic ground, if they were only to abandon bureaucratic centralism. This refusal produces a disorganising role even in the movement for elementary demands, in the form of sectarian broad-front 'unity projects' - Right to Work, National Shop Stewards' Network, Coalition of Resistance, Anti-Capitalist Initiative - with utterly trivial political differences between them, deriving from the ever so slightly less trivial political differences between the Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Party in England and Wales, Counterfire and the fragments of Workers Power.

**Mike Macnair**  
Oxford

## Open to abuse

As a regular reader of the *Weekly Worker* and sympathetic worker regarding your engagement and discussion with the existing left and working class, I was surprised to read about the proposals for non-voting rights for new members of your organisation ('Taking membership seriously', July 5).

This appears undemocratic on the surface, but is made worse by the fact that Provisional Central Committee members will be allowed to cut short the candidate membership of those they see fit. We can only presume this will mean in practice some new members will not have full voting rights within the organisation, while others chosen by the leaders of the organisation will. This, in my opinion, opens up the whole organisation to abuse by the leadership, who could tactically and opportunistically recruit in their specific interest and that of their personal ideas and perspectives.

This seems to be not a method for encouraging new debate and ideas within the organisation, but a potential safety valve for the current leadership to stop any drastically different perspectives gaining hold of the organisation ... like left communism, perhaps?

**Radical Chains**  
email

## Double coup?

Readers of this journal may have learned the distressing news that, at its annual general meeting last week, the magazine *Labour Briefing* was taken over by John McDonnell's

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Labour Representation Committee in a brilliantly organised coup.

Circulated by disgruntled members of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty for reasons best known to themselves ([www.workersliberty.org/story/2012/06/13/labour-briefing-double-coup](http://www.workersliberty.org/story/2012/06/13/labour-briefing-double-coup)), the rumour is utter nonsense. The idea of linking up with the LRC originated within the *LB* editorial board. The resolution to the AGM was publicised and discussed openly prior to the event and, on the day, had already been endorsed by most members of the editorial board. In the event, it was passed by 44 votes to 37 at an unusually well-attended AGM.

If there was a 'take-over', it was a matter of long-standing *Briefing* supporters (most of us with overlapping membership of the LRC) 'taking over' ourselves - in other words, getting our act together in readiness for the momentous challenges facing us in the months immediately ahead.

**Chris Knight**

*LB* editorial board (personal capacity)

## Head tennis

Arthur Bough seems to live in some sort of alternate reality, where capitalism is not in crisis - and, to the extent that it is possible to speak of crisis, it is of no consequence. He says that I have yet to prove that peaking oil production will undermine the current long wave (Letters, June 28).

My reply is that the question of proving is not a matter of debate and theory, but one of practical experience. This is why I won't be calling on Arthur to prove that the long wave will continue to work. In other words, Arthur's method is wrong from the start. The present euro zone crisis and the austerity imposed by the coalition government in Britain are, at bottom, an expression of the world oil production peak, since it relates to economic growth.

The next point relates to Arthur's account of the transition from wood-based energy to coal in England, which led to the industrial revolution. He takes a one-sided view, when he says that the transition resulted from rising industrial production. There were other factors at work, such as the little ice age bringing on a colder climate. As people struggled to keep warm, the demand for wood rose. There was also rising population which increased this demand. As wood became more costly, a cheaper source of energy was needed - ie, coal. Arthur argues that this earlier energy transition did not lead to "the kind of Malthusian calamity which Tony Clark envisages" in regard to oil depletion. But wood could be replaced with cheaper, superior coal, oil and gas. Where is the cheaper energy to replace these latter? In any case, I have never argued that calamity was inevitable. It would only be inevitable without the transition to an ecologically sustainable socialism.

Arthur now writes: "I do not at all believe that the long wave can necessarily overcome such problems, still less in worshipping demand and supply economics." Recognising that rising prices, including fuel, can end a boom, Arthur claims that we are a long way from that in the present cycle. He ignores the fact that many economies have been in recession since 2008. He has yet to develop an understanding of the relationship between capitalism, energy and economic growth and is unable to see that, without the ability to raise global oil production to support economic growth, capitalism is faced with a long-term crisis.

Arthur compares the oil shocks of the 1970s and rising oil prices in the 1990s, which led to recessions, with more recent spikes in oil prices, where the global economy continued to grow at around 4%-5% annually. The explanation for this is that cheap oil made globalisation possible, which

in turn gave access to cheap labour. It is mostly in the low-wage economies that growth was possible with rising oil prices. For a period low wages made it possible for these countries to afford expensive energy.

Arthur turns to nuclear fusion as a possible saviour. Whether it is possible or not, since the 1950s scientists have been saying this technology was 40 years away. They are still saying the same today. Arthur also says my claims about gas production were factually and dramatically wrong. What people believe about oil and gas depletion depends on what organisation they trust most. Since governmental organisations and business corporations usually lie about energy to keep share prices high, I prefer to go along with organisations like the Association for the Study of Peak Oil and Gas, which projects a gas peak around the year 2020.

Arthur, not yet grasping the essence of the oil and gas depletion issue, doesn't realise that Britain faces a potentially serious problem. His view is that we can buy cheap energy on the market from anyone who wants to sell it. The problem is that energy prices are set to increase, as decline sets in. Cheap coal, oil and gas are the foundations of capitalism, and with declining fuels and rising energy costs there is not going to be a lot of economic growth around.

Arthur believes that peak oil will not be a problem for the reasons Marx set out against the Malthusians. The law of value will save the day. Arthur uncritically adopts Marx's view that the law of value has operated throughout human history

and its basic requirement is to reduce labour time, and spur on innovation and development of new productive forces and relations of productions. And Arthur claims that this is why we moved from wood to coal. The truth is that for thousands of years humans hardly made any technological progress at all. In pre-Roman times carriages were pulled by horses, and this remained the same for thousands of years, right up until the industrial revolution. It was utilising a new source of energy which made the difference, not the law of value.

As his thinking is based on old-style economics, which does not take account of the role of energy in production, Arthur says that during the last long wave, Japan, a country with limited energy resources, became the most dynamic, fastest-growing economy in the world. The last long wave was also a time of cheap, abundant oil, which goes a long way in explaining Japan's success. His point about Iceland, which has plenty of energy, but is still dependent on fishing, makes little sense. Iceland is a country with a tiny population with little to export.

Finally, Arthur should know that it is only on the basis of intensive, industrial agriculture that it is possible for the world to sustain a population of over 7 billion people. What he ignores is that modern industrial agriculture is completely based on oil and gas production. As these deplete, food prices are rising, and this is already sparking riots and revolutions around the world.

**Tony Clark**

email

## Summer Offensive

### Relax (do it!)

**C**omrades, I'll admit it. There were moments when, huddled as I was with four other CPGB comrades, under a one-person, wind-crippled, pound store umbrella outside the SWP's Marxism event, as seemingly unrelenting blankets of rain beat down, I did feel the need to revisit some my life priorities.

I was just being old and grumpy, however. Despite the profoundly adverse weather conditions, we raised over £300 on said stall - particular congratulations need to go out to comrade SM for her sterling £33 raised through a series of what looked to me like profoundly undiplomatic interventions of one sort or another, but which clearly didn't seem to put off punters in the slightest. Comrades SK and PM are also mentioned in despatches for their chunky donations this week, which has kept a good momentum up for the campaign to raise £25k by August 26, the last day of our annual fundraising campaign, the Summer Offensive.

Overall therefore, I am pleased to say that comrades have resuscitated my revolutionary spirit - which was slightly dampened over the weekend - with a magnificent week's total for our Summer Offensive over the last seven days of £2,691, taking our running total to £4,656.

It is clear - from the comments and messages comrades have sent through - that much of the momentum for this week's success has come from the buzz around the relaunch of the CPGB's website. This has been reflected in a sharp rise in the number of visitors - last week we had 12,203, an increase of

a couple of thousand, compared to the last couple of weeks before the relaunch. Overwhelmingly, the responses have been positive - indeed, many comrades have possibly been *more* positive than the core team and party members who have actually been responsible for the work directly.

Comrades more upfront and personal with the whole, long-running project are, naturally, more aware of its failings. There are two things I would say about that, however.

First, relax. What we do have in place, for the first time ever, I would contend, is a site whose architecture facilitates the presentation of the vast, educative body of work of the *Weekly Worker* - and *The Leninist* before it - to the movement, in a much more accessible and logical form. This is a fantastic step forward for us.

Secondly, relax *again*. The website is still a work in progress - we hope the comrades who visit it recognise that it is a modest, unfinished project, but one with a clear mission and, hopefully now, a clearer way of presenting that politics, that political method.

When you donate to the CPGB's Summer Offensive, you donate to this project; to the campaign for Marxist unity on a principled and solid basis, made accessible, explicit and clear. So, come on, comrades - let's hear from you! ●

**Mark Fischer**

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 July 8, 5pm:** Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by open discussion and *Capital* reading group. This meeting: Vol 1, chapter 3, part 1. Caxton House, 129 St John's Way, London N19.

Organised by CPGB: [www.cpgb.org.uk](http://www.cpgb.org.uk).

## Paraguay solidarity

**Thursday July 12, 6.30 pm:** Emergency meeting, 'Discus' room, Unite House, 128 Theobalds Road, London WC1 (nearest tube: Holborn.) Please register in advance: [info@venezuelasolidarity.co.uk](mailto:info@venezuelasolidarity.co.uk). Organised by Venezuela Solidarity Campaign: [www.venezuelasolidarity.co.uk](http://www.venezuelasolidarity.co.uk).

## Bent Bars

**Thursday July 12, 7pm:** Open meeting in support of LGBT prisoners, London Friend, 86 Caledonian Road, Kings Cross, London N1. Organised by Bent Bars: [www.bentbarsproject.org](http://www.bentbarsproject.org).

## Tolpuddle Martyrs

**Friday July 13 to Sunday July 15:** Festival and celebration, various times and venues, Tolpuddle, Dorset. For details see [www.tolpuddlemartyrs.org.uk/index.php?page=programme](http://www.tolpuddlemartyrs.org.uk/index.php?page=programme). Organised by Tolpuddle Martyrs Museum: [www.tolpuddlemartyrs.org.uk](http://www.tolpuddlemartyrs.org.uk).

## Stop the EDL

**Saturday July 14, 11am:** Protest march against English Defence League. Assemble near fountains, Bristol city centre. Organised by We are Bristol: [WeAreBristol@gmail.com](mailto:WeAreBristol@gmail.com).

## Durham Miners Gala

**Saturday July 14, 9am onwards:** Annual festival, Racecourse Ground, Green Lane, Durham City. Organised by Durham Miners Gala: See [www.thisisdurham.com/whats-on](http://www.thisisdurham.com/whats-on).

## Rebellion

**Saturday July 14, 1pm:** Meeting, Nailour Hall Community Centre, Blundell Street, London N7. 'Building grassroots resistance and discussing alternatives for austerity Europe'. Organised by Anti-Capitalist Initiative: <http://anticapitalists.org>.

## Smash arms industry

**Monday July 16, 1pm:** Protest. Assemble middle of the level, Brighton for citizens' weapons inspection of EDO Corporation arms manufacturers. Organised by Smash EDO: <http://smashedo.org.uk>.

## Labour Representation Committee

**Thursday July 19, 8pm:** Public meeting, Ruskin House, 23 Coombe Road, Croydon. The radical alternative to austerity. Speaker: John McDonnell MP. Organised by Labour Representation Committee: <http://l-r-c.org.uk>.

## Left politics in the age of austerity

**Thursday July 19, 7pm:** Public meeting and book launch, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Speakers include: Kate Hudson, author of *The new European left*, Dimitris Tzanakopoulos (Syriza), Philippe Nadouce (Front de Gauche), Daithi Doolan (Sinn Féin). Organised by London Respect: [LondonRespect@mail.com](mailto:LondonRespect@mail.com).

## No deportations

**Tuesday July 24, 7pm:** Film screening, 3 Feet East, 150 Brick Lane, London E1. Detention and deportation documentaries: *How long is indefinite?* and *Hamedullah: the road home*. Tickets free, but please book here: [www.eventbrite.com/event/3866320268](http://www.eventbrite.com/event/3866320268). Organised by National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns: [www.ncadc.org.uk](http://www.ncadc.org.uk).

## Alternative opening ceremony

**Friday July 27, 7pm:** Olympics party, Rich Mix, 35-47 Bethnal Green Road, London E1. With comedy, music, art, dance and ideas. Organised by Philosophy Football: [www.philosophyfootball.com/view\\_item.php?pid=630](http://www.philosophyfootball.com/view_item.php?pid=630).

## Build rank and file

**Saturday August 11, 2pm to 5pm:** Unite construction national rank and file meeting, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Organised by Unite construction national rank and file: [siteworkers@virginmedia.com](mailto:siteworkers@virginmedia.com).

## Home from home?

**Ends Friday August 31:** Exhibition, Swansea Museum, Victoria Road, SA1. Forced to flee because of violence or persecution. In collaboration with Swansea City of Sanctuary, Swansea Bay Asylum Seekers Support Group: [www.swansea.gov.uk/swanseamuseum](http://www.swansea.gov.uk/swanseamuseum).

## Organise building workers

**Saturday August 11, 2pm:** Unite construction national rank and file meeting, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Organised by Siteworker: <http://siteworker.wordpress.com>.

## Anti-Deportation Campaigns

**Saturday September 8, 10am to 5pm:** National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns annual general meeting, Praxis Community Projects, Bethnal Green, London E2. Organised by NCADC: [www.ncadc.org.uk](http://www.ncadc.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.



**MARXISM**

# Private SWP quarrels and public SWP gagging

The main role of the annual Marxism festival seems to be making new recruits and attempting to buoy up the rank and file. **Peter Manson** reports

Over 5,000 comrades attended the Socialist Workers Party's July 5-9 Marxism festival in central London, according to *Socialist Worker*. As usual, there were several large rallies, as well as dozens of smaller meetings - on the Saturday and Sunday there was a choice of 12 to attend at any given time.

Although most sessions allow contributions from the floor, the emphasis is very much on the SWP central committee laying down the line. Each meeting is restricted to a mere one hour and a quarter, usually starting a few minutes late. So, especially where there is more than one platform speaker, the time allowed for contributions from the floor is very pinched - most of the session is taken up with platform speeches, including replies to the 'debate'.

At the rally-type meetings, often attended by over 1,000 people, the space for speakers from the floor is reduced to no more than five or six, and those called to speak have usually been primed in advance - although Marxism stewards still go through the motions of handing out speaker's slips and the chair inevitably apologises for having failed to call so many who wanted to join the discussion. At the smaller meetings though, speaker's slips are often dispensed with and it is possible for a dozen or so people to speak from the floor - although you have to ensure your points are very concise if you are to make them in your allotted three minutes.

It goes without saying that the SWP is not interested in debating with other groups on the revolutionary left - we are at best tolerated - although it has to be said that for the last two Marxisms other groups have been allowed to hire stalls within the main quad at University College London. Perhaps reflecting the SWP antipathy to other left organisations, however, this has yet to take off - only two or three non-SWP stalls were there.

## Rallying the troops

One of the packed-out rallies in Friends Meeting House - 'The Egyptian revolution: results and prospects' - was addressed by national secretary Charlie Kimber and Egyptian Revolutionary Socialists leader Hossam al-Hamalawy.

It was not, of course, billed as a rally, but that is most certainly what it was. Comrade Hamalawy must have been speaking for a good half of the time, and he knew what was expected of him. SWP comrades may sometimes become disillusioned on their Saturday morning stalls, he said, but they should think of their International Socialist Tendency comrades in Egypt, who risk getting shot when they hand out their leaflets and talk to workers on the street. Every paper you sell counts, he said - it is an act of solidarity with the Egyptian revolution: "What you do matters for us and for workers around the world."

There were no more than four or five speakers 'from the floor' - among them a young SWP comrade who told of her inspiring experience when she recently went with her mother to



**Differences cannot be aired in public**

Tahrir Square; a Sudanese comrade who talked of parallel events in his own country; and two senior SWP figures who spelled out the line, not least on supporting the Muslim Brotherhood in the second round of the presidential elections.

Comrade Hamalawy himself was strangely reticent on that question - although his speech overall was informative and useful. On the MB he said that it was "not a homogenous bloc": its leadership was from a bourgeois background and is "reactionary", but many young MB members have joined the militant anti-regime actions organised by the RS among others. While Brotherhood leaders are "even more neoliberal than Mubarak" (some are multimillionaires, he said), for the MB youth and working class membership, "sharia means social justice". As a result of the pressure from below, "the leadership was forced to endorse the uprising".

But comrade Hamalawy did not explain the RS position of calling for a vote for the MB candidate, Mohammed Mursi, in the June 16-17 second round. In fact he did not mention it. He concentrated instead on the central role of the Egyptian working class.

Just as in Britain, people in Egypt often used to say, 'Our country is the last place where you'll see a revolution'. What is more, even amongst the left the working class would be written off. When workers did go on strike - both during the

Mubarak era and afterwards - their actions would be dismissed as non-political, he said. However, during the mass strikes of September 2011, 750,000 workers were involved and they *did* raise anti-regime slogans, as well as demands relating to the workplace: "Down with military rule" has been the cry. He did concede that this is partly linked to the fact that many of the factories and complexes where workers suffer such appalling pay and conditions are *owned* by the military (a proportion that accounts for 20%-25% of industry, he said).

Comrade Hamalawy noted that the MB scabbed on a fresh wave of strikes in February of this year, between the parliamentary and presidential elections - what we need is stability, was the cry. Meanwhile pessimists on the left were once again saying, 'The revolution is lost, now that the Islamists have won.'

However, strikes are continuing, but they are still "largely spontaneous". If there had been "a fighting organisation rooted in the workplace, the situation would be very different". While the RS claims it has played a major part in mass mobilisations in Cairo and elsewhere (and is influential in many universities), paradoxically it admits to playing no significant role in workers' struggles, even though it claims that those struggles have actually been central in the revolutionary upsurge - "Square and factory - one fight" is the RS slogan. But in his reply to the discussion he gave the opposite impression: he stressed that the middle

class and petty bourgeoisie has been "very organised" - "it's the working class that's not organised". He also reminded us that there are only around 25 million workers in Egypt out of a population of 90 million.

So what is this talk from comrade Kimber about the "completion of the revolution" and the winning of "full workers' power" in that country? Surely the situation - in Egypt as elsewhere - calls for a long, patient struggle to build up working class strength and combativity. In the meantime we should not sow illusions in the imminence of workers' revolution: what is called for is a period of extreme opposition - to both the military and the Muslim Brotherhood.

But that is not the message the SWP leadership wants its membership to hear. The SWP method demands a belief in the enormous potential of the latest action - whatever it is. That is why it ensured that the young comrade who had experienced the masses thronging in Tahrir Square read the poem she had been inspired to write: "I want some of this. I want revolution."

In the absence of any comment from comrade Hamalawy, it was left to a couple of other SW speakers to outline the official position on voting for Mursi (a position which has caused not a little concern within the RS itself). One comrade said that, while admittedly the MB is "part of the counterrevolution", its victory "allows us a bit of space".

Another made a less passive argument for voting for Mursi: when the struggle is "uneven", electoral politics become "more important" - in fact we *must* participate in them in such circumstances. Indeed those who had called for a boycott of the second round had "almost handed the elections to the military". It seemed to escape the comrade that 'participation' can take many different forms and most certainly does not necessarily involve voting for the lesser evil - and for what is at this stage an *imaginary* ally.

Comrade Kimber in his reply was even more direct: it is essential to "form a bloc to defend the revolution" (even with a force that is "part of the counterrevolution", it seems). He thought it was "disgraceful" that "some sections of the left could never bring themselves to vote for a Muslim". Some were so infected by this Islamophobia that they had even called for a vote for Ahmed Shafiq, the military's candidate.

Taking his cue from the poetic comrade, he pointed out to other young activists what they should do if they wanted "some of that here": why, join the SWP, of course!

## EU: in or out?

Another country that featured a lot in Marxist sessions was, obviously, Greece, which came up in the session entitled 'The euro zone and the European project: a Marxist analysis'. How Marxist it was proved a little difficult to discern, as the sound system in the lecture room was not working and the SWP speaker, Sarah Young, appeared unable to raise her voice above a level that was barely audible.

Her speech seemed, however, to be a largely uncontroversial history of the European Union. Quoting the late Chris Harman, she noted that the EU had always been anti-democratic. It was a "business arrangement" serving the interests of capital, and not about the "integration of peoples". In fact it remained a "coalition of competitive states", for whom "nationalism never went away". The kind of integration favoured by Germany was one that "suited the needs of German capital".

But comrade Young, as far as it was possible to make out, did not say what position the left ought to take up in relation to the membership of, say, Greece or the UK. What *policy* should the working class adopt? Her Marxist analysis did not apparently extend to drawing practical conclusions.

First up in the debate was comrade Toby Abse - perennial figure on the left and *Weekly Worker* writer on Italy - who raised Greece's membership. How would a bankrupt state be able to survive in isolation without having to suffer even worse austerity? The break-up of the EU would hardly be progressive, he said. What would be the gain for workers in Greece or any other EU member-state of a return to a situation where European countries were (in the terminology of comrade Young) purely "competitive" and not part of a "coalition"? We would still need to fight capitalism within those separate states.

Speaking from the floor, Alex Callinicos, the SWP's international



secretary and *de facto* leader, commented that it was “not good enough to say the enemy is capitalism”. Capitalism’s “concrete form” is the EU, he said. But does that mean that in every EU country socialists should demand that their government pulls out? His answer was no, that would be incorrect - it “depends on the circumstances”. For example, here in Britain we do not call for withdrawal - that is why Bob Crow and the ‘No to the EU, Yes to Democracy’ coalition that contested the 2009 EU elections were wrong. However, in Greece we “have to have answers”. And leaving the euro zone would be “a start”. It would, of course, not be enough, he said. Greece would, for example, also have to “nationalise the banks under workers’ control”.

So an isolated Greece, having left the euro (and no doubt having been booted out of the EU as well), would be in a better position if it nationalised the banks, repudiated the debt and perhaps adopted a range of Keynesian measures too, despite the massive reprisals it would have to endure?

Another SWP comrade thought that staying in the EU or euro zone amounted to “reformism”. It implies we just have to accept things as they are, whereas revolutionaries demand the smashing of the state. Replying to this, I said that, to the extent that the EU adopted state forms, it, like current nation-states, would have to be smashed. So neither leaving the EU nor remaining in it was revolutionary in itself. Yes, the EU is a “bosses’ club”, but so too is the UK, Germany and Greece.

It was all very well comrade Callinicos talking about the adoption of different policies according to circumstances, I continued, but what should be our overall trajectory? Capitalism has its progressive side, in that it creates its gravedigger and internationalises the working class. Our task is to take advantage of that progressive side, not attempt to return to the past.

What was interesting about this session was that comrade Callinicos was clearly against a UK withdrawal from the EU, yet the SWP rank-and-file comrades who spoke seemed to be under the impression that what applied to Greece should apply across the board. And in a way the position of No2EU and the Communist Party of

Britain makes more sense - either the working class should fight together, through the formation of united trade unions and a single revolutionary party across the continent, as I proposed, or we should *all* follow our own separate, left-nationalist roads.

### ‘Lively democracy’

In the session called ‘The problem of organisation’ (part of the ‘Leninism’ series) comrade Callinicos was this time the platform speaker. His main thrust was to insist on the need for a disciplined party based on (his version of) democratic centralism - as opposed to ‘horizontalist’, consensus-type forms of organisation.

As far as it went, it was a good presentation. He pointed out that the capitalist class attempts to act in coordination, including internationally, and the working class must obviously do the same. The “collective revolutionary subject” must achieve the necessary centralisation - without replicating the forms of “anti-democratic hierarchy” employed by the bourgeoisie. While the working class party may sometimes “lag behind” the spontaneous action of the working class, we cannot expect such centralisation to happen spontaneously.

However, as well as centralisation, “democracy is so important in the revolutionary party”. It was “essential to avoid a top-down command structure” and to facilitate democratic debate - the only way to “identify problems arising with our practice”. So, while democratic centralism “emphasises leadership”, it actually represents “majority rule” in action.

Comrade Callinicos contrasted this form of organisation (which, it goes without saying, the SWP practises, he would have us believe) with the ‘non-hierarchical’ forms of consensus decision-making common in the ‘spontaneist’ anti-capitalist movement. He himself had been involved in such groupings, he said, and he knew from that experience that there were *always* people controlling them behind the scenes.

This was obviously a reference to the now almost defunct European Social Forum, which at the time the CPGB had criticised for exactly the same reasons that comrade Callinicos outlined. However, the SWP had refused to criticise the practice of

‘consensus’ and actually opposed our attempts to democratise the ESF. Now, a decade later, we discover that comrade Callinicos actually agreed with us all along.

(Or did he? In his reply to contributions he said that consensus “sometimes makes sense”: for example, if three or four people are discussing which film to go and see. Fair enough. But then he went on to say that it also made sense in “the early days of the anti-capitalist movement, when people didn’t know each other”. First you have to have “trust”, you see. For example, in the SWP “We argue, but we trust each other” - which is why decisions can be taken democratically.)

I was the first to speak from the floor. I said that I agreed with just about everything Callinicos had said when outlining the theory, but what about the SWP’s own practice? The working class needs a single Marxist party, encompassing the various strands of the revolutionary left. Comrade Callinicos and I “ought to be in the same party”, even though at the moment “you wouldn’t have me”.

In order for such a united democratic-centralist party to exist, however, it would require two things that are absent from the SWP’s own practice. Firstly the right to speak and publish openly and *publicly* (except when to do so would adversely affect a specific action); and the right of rank-and-file members to come together to challenge the leadership line. But the SWP bans “permanent factions” and the only time comrades can organise together outside the official structures is during the three-month pre-conference period. The absence of these two rights ensures that the SWP remains an organisation with precisely a “top-down command structure”.

I pointed out that the ban on factions means that two comrades in different parts of the country who communicate with each other on a common approach to an SWP dispute will find themselves on very shaky grounds outside the pre-conference period. At other times such disputes are in reality conducted only within the central committee - in reality the CC is the only permitted permanent faction.

Although I had introduced myself as “Peter Manson of the CPGB and *Weekly Worker*”, the SWP cadre who responded to my comments on the desirability of a single party remarked: “Surely the comrade from the Communist Party is aware of the differences” between our two organisations? The SWP is for socialism from below, not Stalinism; revolution, not reform; soviets, not parliament. So how can we be in the same party?

The reader may be struck by the ignorance that this response reveals. It is all very well for the SWP leadership to instruct its membership to ignore “sectarian” groups like the CPGB, but if this leaves sections of its experienced membership unable to differentiate between the *Weekly Worker* (perhaps the comrade had not heard of our paper) and the *Morning Star*, then you might think that even the likes of comrade Callinicos might be concerned.

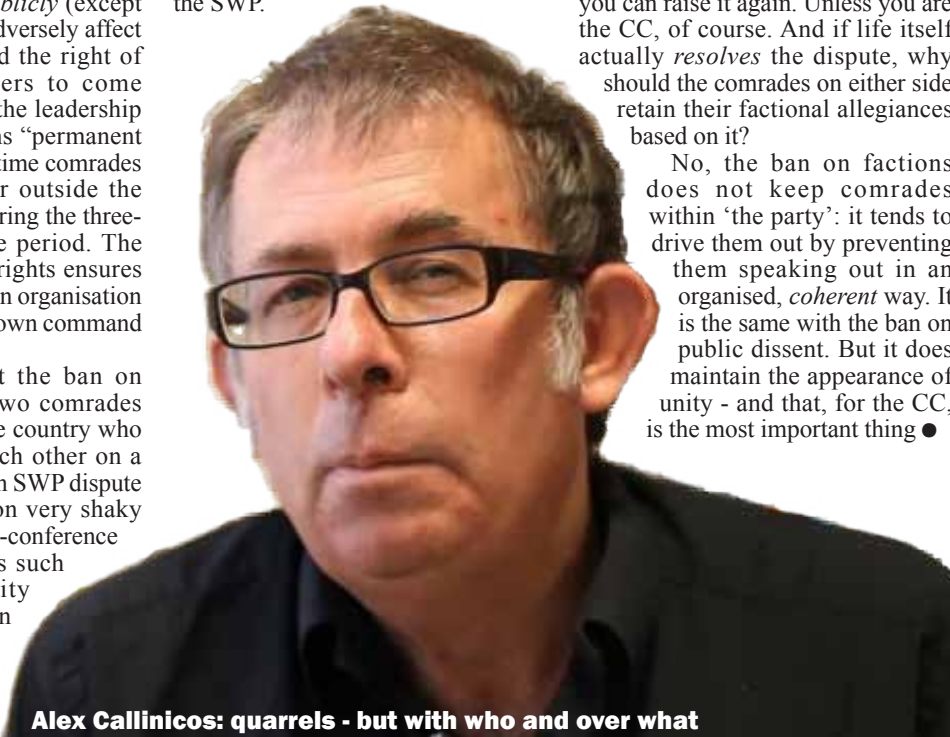
The same comrade was outraged by the suggestion that “you can’t argue and say what you like inside the party - I’m sorry?” She herself had been *encouraged* to go to conference to argue for her beliefs on the women’s question. Other comrades made similar points about the constant debate that takes place within the SWP.

No doubt they are correct - provided that debate is restricted within the narrow limits prescribed by the CC, and provided it is not carried out publicly. Nobody answered the point about *public* dissent. Comrade Callinicos himself ignored it when he asserted that there is a “very lively democracy in the SWP - we quarrel and argue all the time”. This also ignores the internal criticisms made by the likes of John Molyneux, who has identified an SWP culture which involves the use of the proverbial sledgehammer at internal meetings to warn off those with a different view.

However, comrade Callinicos did take up the question of permanent factions. He was against them because they tend to “freeze differences that are temporary”. For example, when Lenin and Trotsky fell out over the militarisation of labour, it would have been disastrous if they had formed separate factions over the question. Apparently this would have prevented them cooperating later on.

This is all quite clearly nonsense. Once ‘the party’ decides on a question - including on the militarisation of labour - then that puts an end to the question, does it? What if life itself brings it to the fore once more? Presumably you have to wait until the next pre-conference period before you can raise it again. Unless you are the CC, of course. And if life itself actually *resolves* the dispute, why should the comrades on either side retain their factional allegiances based on it?

No, the ban on factions does not keep comrades within ‘the party’: it tends to drive them out by preventing them speaking out in an organised, *coherent* way. It is the same with the ban on public dissent. But it does maintain the appearance of unity - and that, for the CC, is the most important thing ●



Alex Callinicos: quarrels - but with who and over what

# Fringe 2012

The CPGB hosted two fringe meetings at Marxism. The first, held on the Saturday evening, was entitled: ‘The left in Europe: workers’ government or extreme opposition?’ The Sunday evening fringe saw the “pre-launch” of Israeli socialist Moshé Machover’s new anthology, *Israelis and Palestinians: conflict and resolution*.

In introducing the Saturday session, Mike Macnair asked, if Syriza had been in a position to form a government after the Greek elections, should it have done so? And if so on what programme? The CPGB contends that in such situations, where the working class is far from being in a position to exercise *power*, it is much better to take up a position of extreme opposition.

Marxism has always been for participation in elections, but has argued that we should only form a government if we are in a position to be able to implement our minimum programme - which would be inconsistent with the continuation of capitalist rule over society. Leaving aside the nature of Syriza and the left parties with whom it would have had to form a coalition government, trying to implement the communist minimum programme in Greece alone

would be the same as “taking power in Somerset”, said comrade Macnair. It would have meant sealing off the country in order to prevent capital from fleeing, and trying to run a top-down command economy within an isolated Greece - which is not even self-sufficient in food, for example.

It would be different if there was a good chance that taking power in one country would spark a revolution in other, more powerful states. But that was just not a realistic proposition, as it was, for instance, in 1917. Across the whole continent the workers’ movement is weak and the immediate aim must be to rebuild our strength and combativity - and that applies in Greece too.

A couple of speakers from the floor were opposed to the position outlined by comrade Macnair. One said that if it was a case of the Greek working class itself taking power, then that would give a lead to the whole of Europe. Another agreed that comrade Macnair was “too pessimistic” - if a workers’ government was formed in Greece that would set off a “chain reaction”. A third comrade pointed out that a situation would never arise where workers across Europe were “at the same level”. Therefore, if there were a fresh election in Greece, Syriza

should say it would form government if possible - or “Are you saying that the Greek working class shouldn’t fight back?”

CPGB comrades pointed out that Marx had advised against the seizure of power in what was to become the Paris Commune in 1871. Lenin had warned against taking power in Petrograd during the ‘July days’ of 1917. Indeed, when the Bolsheviks did make revolution in October, it was with the “reasonable certainty” that the German working class would attempt to follow suit, in the words of John Bridge.

Comrade Macnair reiterated in his reply that a Syriza government would be likely to trigger a coup, a judicial rebellion or a fascist attempt at counterrevolution. But the working class is unarmed and politically unprepared. The rebuilding of our own strength and organisation is the key priority, he said. Without that talk of taking power is just wishful thinking.

On the Sunday evening, Moshé Machover took this well-earned opportunity to reflect upon his writings on the Israel-Palestine conflict, which in his latest book cover the period from 1966 to the present. He was, however, unable

to look back with satisfaction in the sense that the situation in the Middle East has not changed for the better. He has found that on the occasions that he and his contemporaries made optimistic projections, history has disappointed. The process of collating his articles (often co-authored with others) revealed that the forecasted Palestinian revolution has become, as he phrased it, an “unreal possibility”.

In the 1960s, as a founder of the anti-Stalinist, revolutionary Marxist Israeli organisation, Matzpen, comrade Machover’s opinions were often unique amongst his left contemporaries. Anti-sectarian, whilst also declining to follow uncritically the Palestinian solidarity movements of the time, Matzpen attempted to forge an analysis of its own. In the talk, he highlighted one article written during this period, ‘The class nature of Israeli society’, as an example of a ground-breaking position, but also as an example of how history has defeated their ambitions for a solution in the region.

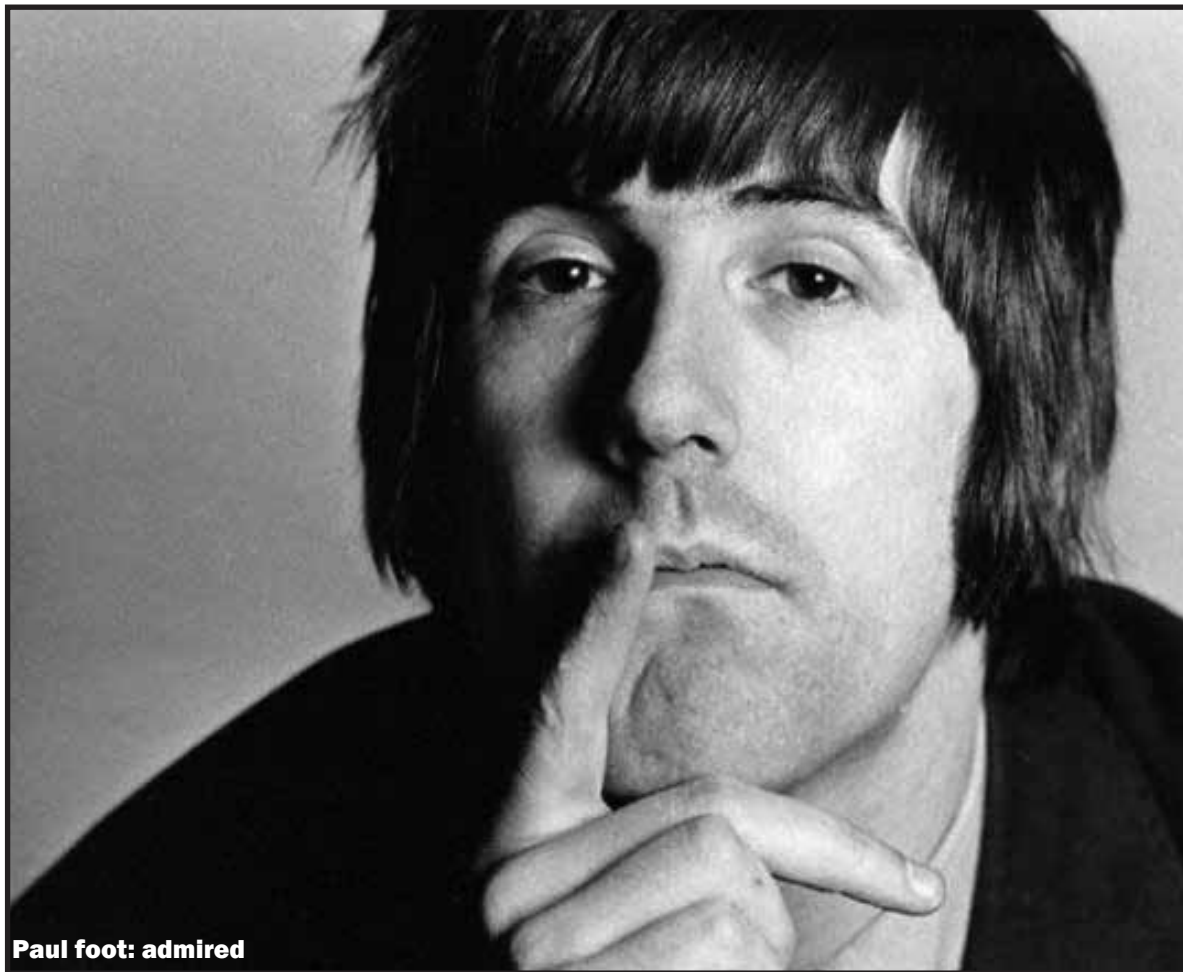
The demand for an independent trade union centre in Israel has still to be answered, allowing the destruction of the welfare state throughout the 70s. In the extreme neoliberal Israel of today, class inequality has risen above

that of the US. Comrade Machover mentioned, however, the rise of a new radical trade union, Power to the Workers, which offers a glimmer of hope to the country’s working class as an alternative to the pro-business, Zionist Histadrut.

Matzpen’s importance, Machover suggested, was in its now more widely accepted analysis of the Zionist role in the Middle East. Specifically, it had taken the dual form of waging an anti-colonial struggle against the British mandate in Palestine, while establishing a settler state. This process had brought into being two new nations - Palestine and Israel (although, of course, Zionism itself contends that it is Jews the world over, not just Israeli Jews, who constitute a nation).

Comrade Machover strongly asserts that neither a single state in Israel-Palestine nor two separate states can provide a solution in isolation. Instead, what is required is an Arab-led socialist revolution across the region - the only way to bring about real social change. He hopes that in reading his anthology we will be able to learn the necessary lessons from the disappointments he has written about ●



**MARXISM****Left pessimism and Tony Benn****Paul foot: admired**

**F**or me, the session on 'The vote: how it was won and how it was undermined' was a bit of a disappointment, despite being instructive in its way. The meeting was occasioned by the welcome re-issue of Paul Foot's impressive and often inspiring book of the same name, so there was always going to be a degree of nostalgia and a bevy of warm anecdotes about the man himself - he clearly inspired personal affection, as well as political admiration.

However, I thought that an opportunity was missed. I do not know what the hundreds of other comrades who packed out the Cruciform lecture theatre expected, but I had hoped that the speakers, Tony Benn and the SWP's Martin Smith, might spark a little more controversy - both between themselves and retrospectively in relation to the political legacy of Paul Foot.

To be fair to Benn, he did try. Both in his speech to this meeting and in his preface to the newly re-released book itself, he was clear that - whatever the merits of the first half of comrade Foot's book on the vote ('how it was won'), he had quite serious issues with the second ('how it was undermined'), given the imperatives of what he calls in that preface the "real live struggle today". Comrade Benn concedes that this notion of undermining has some "historical substance" - as exemplified in the very politically *unsubstantial* form of New Labour, for instance - but effectively it is "a form of left pessimism". He told the meeting that this downbeat leftism - the dirge that leaders "always let you down", as he put it - is of no use, as its only practical effect is to simply "undermine the next struggle".

Now even the occasional reader of the *Weekly Worker* should furrow a brow at this point. If there is one thing that this paper does not castigate the SWP for, it is for talking *down* struggles and the opportunities for left advance - at least, not since the organisation's perverse attachment to

the gibberish theory of the 'downturn' ended. In fact, comrade Benn sounded like an SWP hack here, when they roundly tick off other sections of the left - mostly the *Weekly Worker*, which comrade Benn has specifically singled out for its 'demobilising' efforts in the past, it must be said - for *any* critical reflection on previous actions and interventions. These are effectively wrecking operations against the *next* march, the *next* rally, the *next* disastrously ill-conceived get-rich-quick piece of crass opportunism ...

Martin Smith is not the most nimble-minded of comrades, but he did expend some considerable energy in refuting this 'pessimistic' tag. He and several of the (quite tightly choreographed, I thought) series of speakers from the floor, were at pains to emphasise their "optimism", while stressing that, unlike Tony, they did not believe in a "parliamentary road to socialism" - a killer point rendered a little less lethal when comrade Benn gently reminded them that he didn't either.

Perhaps some comrades thought that Smith further blurred the debate when he told us that he and the SWP agreed "99% with Tony Benn". Actually, I thought it illustrated the problems of the contemporary left beautifully. I do not agree with comrade Benn "99%" or anywhere near it. As a Marxist, I have a totally different method that very often arrives at quite dramatically different political positions on struggles that I and comrade Benn may be jointly engaged in. For example, readers should look at the political platform offered by *The Leninist* - the factional journal that was the forerunner of the *Weekly Worker* - for the miners in the Great Strike of 1984-85 and contrast it with comrade Benn's stance, for example. And, it must be said, with that of the SWP of the time.

But here we have the nub of the problem. As a left social democrat, Tony Benn ultimately believes that the role of the working class is to be gently cajoled into voting in the

*correct* sort of Labour government that can then deliver them 'socialism' (in truth, welfare capitalism - a dismal perspective that is confirmed by the way comrade Benn continually 'touches base' with the 1945 Labour government of Attlee, including in the Marxism meeting). By contrast, comrade Smith holds to a punk version of the history of Bolshevism: one that imagines that a rigidly policed sect will somehow be catapulted into state power by some elemental, blind, almost nihilistic surge of the masses - and then, apparently, socialism ensues.

The *commonality* between these two views, their point of contact, is an unconscious contempt for the working class, whatever the subjective intentions of the political personalities that mouth them. There were guarded allusions to Paul Foot's location on the right wing of the SWP in the meeting - for example, we had comrade Smith's rather painful attempt to feebly defend Paul's 'softness' on the aforementioned 1945 government as a means to "relate" to working class consciousness of the time. But the rather more brutal truth is that - in its day-to-day political activity, in the political physiognomy it adopted in the Stop the War Coalition, in the left liberal work it undertakes in its pop-front, anti-racist lash-ups or, horror of horrors, in the Respect debacle - the SWP acts like reformists; its revolutionism becomes purely formal.

Congratulations are due to Bookmarks for the re-release: it is a fine piece of work and to be recommended - in particular to comrades coming fresh to our movement. Also, huge thanks are due to the Hackney SWP comrade who chaired the meeting - and whose name my dulled and acuity-challenged ears failed to pick up - for her sterling work in negotiating with the original publishers to ensure this inspiring and accessible work is available to educate all of us, young and old alike ●

**Mark Fischer****Weakening our class**

**K**eir McKechnie gave a fairly accurate account of the political situation north of the border in the session on 'Scotland, nationalism and independence'. He also outlined a brief history of Scotland's role within British imperialism - concluding that Scotland is not an oppressed nation.

So far, so good. Alas, the correct analysis of the national question in Scotland ended there. Rather than taking the Leninist position on the right of nations to self-determination, while promoting the greatest voluntary unity of peoples, the comrade expounded the SWP's recently agreed line of advocating secession.

The SWP is going gung-ho into the 'yes' campaign, which it wants to 'move left' by "having the conversations on the marches and in the unions". The comrades who contributed to the discussion kept repeating the (clearly ill thought-through) statement, "You're either with the union jack or you're against it" - such a nuanced position! I will not patronise this paper's readership by pointing out the flaws.

Comrade McKechnie's rationale was that in these circumstances we have to ask two questions: would Scotland's secession weaken the British state? And would it raise class-consciousness? The latter question can apparently be answered in the affirmative, because the SWP will influence the 'yes' campaign, moving it to the left. Not very likely. The only

organisations capable of putting anti-austerity measures at the centre of the 'yes' campaign are the unions - but they are not for a 'yes'. And even if the 'yes' camp won on an anti-austerity ticket the financial implications for Scotland (ie, the Scottish working class) would be horrific (think of Ireland). There is absolutely no class interest in supporting a 'yes' vote.

As for the first question - would it weaken the UK state? - quite clearly it would. It would also weaken the historically constituted working class in Britain, and its ability to defend itself against the state at this time. The greatest possible voluntary unity of peoples provides the best chance the working class has of taking, and keeping, power ●

**Sarah McDonald****No line on architecture**

**O**wen Hatherley's outstanding contributions to the left's understanding of the architecture that was designed, built and quickly decayed throughout the Blair years deserves canonical status in our literature. The session entitled 'Journeys through urban Britain', which he presented, was billed as the launch of his fourth book, *A new kind of bleak* (Verso, 2012),<sup>1</sup> where Hatherley examines the effect of the continuation of the neoliberal aesthetic on Britain's so-called 'built environment'.

The session was well attended, considering it was timetabled to coincide with the festival's big showdown between Alex Callinicos and David Harvey. Here, many of the bright young things of the SWP were allowed to break from the party's rigid lines (one assumes there is no line on architecture) and the general level of intelligent contributions was refreshingly high. Points of interest included the Militant council's rebuilding of Liverpool's estates, which paradoxically mirrored Thatcherian suburbia, as well as the 'easily defensible' enclaves of Belfast, which were designed in part by the army. Another controversial topic was Hatherley's understanding of the green belt regulations, kept in place to serve the bourgeoisie, leaving Britain's workers trapped in the smallest houses in Europe.

Topically, the regeneration of the Elephant and Castle area of London was discussed, allowing for conjecture on the nature of

multiculturalism, gentrification and the destructive cycle of neoliberal regeneration. Despite his deep-set admiration for the brutalist "bid to level with the stars" (to use Alex Niven's phrase), which many of us share, Hatherley dreamed that after the revolution, the working class should be able to live in whichever architectural forms they desire, be it in cul-de-sac comfort or high in a tower on the hills.

Talking of David Harvey, his presence at Marxism revealed the uncomfortable space between the Occupy movement and the SWP. Despite latching onto Occupy and similar tendencies, left movementist groups have had to walk a tightrope between the horizontal nature of these new forces, and the top-down, bureaucratic structure of their own. Harvey's meeting, 'The urbanisation of class struggle', which discussed his new book *Rebel cities* (Verso, 2012), was a subdued affair, only enlivened briefly by his direct criticism of the SWP's tendency to neutralise grassroots struggle through their concentration on recruitment.

Johnny Jones, deputy editor of *International Socialism*, welcomed Harvey's attendance, but for myself, having heard him speak both in front of St Pauls and at Marxism, it is clear where his ideological home really lies ●

**Emily Orford****Notes**

1. See a review of his book *Uncommon* on the *Red Mist* website: <http://redmistreviews.com/?p=450>.



## BANKS

# Miliband clutches at banking straws

Labour's plans for 'root and branch' reform of the banks will hardly touch the corruption that is endemic to the system, writes **Eddie Ford**

Finally backing down, Bob Diamond - the disgraced former boss of Barclays Bank - announced on July 10 that he will forsake his various bonuses worth some £20 million. Naturally, he had given up the cash "voluntarily" - or so we were told by Marcus Agius, the former Barclays executive chairman, who has also resigned, but generously offered to stay on in order to find a successor to Diamond. And, of course, it could take quite some time to find a worthy replacement for a man so prodigiously talented.

However, before you start to feel too sorry for him, Diamond will still receive about £2 million made up of 12 months' salary, pension allowance and assorted other benefits - payable as a nice little lump sum in July 2013. True, it is double the six months' pay that his contract specifies, but the bank decided that it needed to ensure he is available to "tackle any issues" that might arise in the coming months - after all, you have to pay good money for quality advice. This is on top off, obviously, the £100 million he has pocketed since 2006 when his 'compensation' was publicly disclosed for the very first time. Not bad work if you can get it.

Most workers would love to get the sack if it produced such financial rewards, rather than the dole queue and a hellish life on income support/jobseekers' allowance. Or be able to philanthropically contemplate handing over all of their redundancy money and back pay to charity, as various people are urging Diamond to do with his £2 million.

But welcome to Bankers' World, a different universe - morally and economically - from that of the working class, struggling with increasing austerity, unemployment, bills, etc. The Bob Diamond/Libor-rigging episode, not to mention the innumerable other banking-related scandals of recent years, demonstrates once again that it is the entire banking/financial system that is corrupt - not just individual banks, let alone individual bankers (despicable though many of them may be). So what does Labour propose to do about the banking system, which as currently constituted manifestly serves the interests of the few, as opposed to meeting the needs of the many.

### Predatory

Well, now we know - bankers tremble in fear. Speaking on July 9 at the London headquarters of the Cooperative Bank, presumably a 'good' bank rather than a 'bad' one, Ed Miliband called for "root and branch" reform of the banking industry. He pointed to the Libor-fixing, mis-selling of complex insurance products, persistent failure to lend to business and the "fleecing" of customers with dodgy payment protection insurance as proof that the banking system had become "economically damaging and socially destructive". He also, hardly surprisingly, saw the Bob Diamond affair as a vindication of his Labour Party conference speech last September - heavily slammed by the rightwing press, needless to say - when he warned against a "predatory", as opposed to a "responsible", capitalism and promised wide-ranging action, starting with the banks, to create a "different kind of economy".

The main idea in Miliband's July 9 speech seems more like clutching at straws than a genuine attempt at radical change. Underwhelmingly, it involves forcing the top five banks



**Goodbye Bob**

(Lloyds, RBS, Barclays, HSBC and Santander) to sell up to 1,000 branches in order to "increase competition". According to the Labour leader, challenging the dominance of the main high-street banks - essentially breaking them up - was crucial if the nation is to move from the "casino banking" we have now to the "stewardship banking" we supposedly need. New entrants to the scene such as Metro Bank, Virgin Money, Egg, Goldfish, Aldermore, etc did begin to emerge in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, looking to fill the gap as the big banks focused obsessively on shrinking their balance sheets and building up capital reserves to meet the new and stricter regulations. Although inevitably a fraction of the size of the top banks, these banking parvenus will account for around 7% percent of the total market for current accounts in the UK, once the planned sale of over 600 Lloyds branches to the Co-op goes through.

This move towards increased competition will, Miliband hopes, lead in particular to the creation of two new "challenger banks" - run by the private sector naturally and therefore offering "more choice" for the ordinary consumer. All things going well - and when Neptune is fully aligned with Saturn - increased competition in the banking sector would eventually result in lower charges, more honest practices, and so on. As part of the drive for "stewardship banking", in which you will have a friendly, one-to-one relationship with your bank manager again - remember those days before call centres? - Labour will publish a report outlining the argument for a British Investment Bank to help the business sector, which Miliband believes is "having to compete with one hand tied behind its back" because of the lack of available credit.

Furthermore, Miliband wants to promote support for customer-owned financial services firms - so-called 'peer-to-peer' or 'social lending', exemplified by the online money exchange service, Zopa (Zone of

Possible Agreement). Zopa is an arrangement where "people who have spare money lend it directly to people who want to borrow", meaning there "there are no banks in the middle" and "no huge overheads" or "sneaky fees" - thus "everyone gets better rates" (<http://uk.zopa.com>). Banking utopia.

In his final remarks at the Co-op headquarters, Miliband also backed European Union proposals - fiercely resisted by George Osborne - to set a maximum 1:1 ratio of bonus to pay. *Radical*. Other measures mooted by the Labour leader included a "tough code of conduct" for the banking industry overseen by a regulatory body "modelled" on the British Medical Association. Professions like teaching, medicine, law, etc have "clear rules", declared Miliband, and "we need the same" from banking - anyone who breaks the rules should be struck off, just as an errant doctor or lawyer can be. Additionally, he demanded the setting up of a special financial crime unit to signal that Britain is "no longer a soft touch". Tough on crime even if not on the causes of crime - ie, the capitalist drive for maximising profit.

All this "root and branch" reform, insisted Miliband will "deliver real change" and "restore trust" in the banking system, so that it "works for working people". Here we have the Labour vision, as Miliband put it, of a British economy "based not on the short-term, fast-buck, take-what-you-can culture" of today, but on "long-termism, patient investment and responsibility shared by all" - equal stakeholders in British capitalism.

Expressing similar sentiments, Vince Cable - the coalition government's business secretary - informed viewers of the BBC's *Andrew Marr Show* on July 8 that the "real problem" at the moment is that the banks, because of their existing "anti-business" culture and "obsession" with short-term trading profits, are "throttling the recovery of British industry". He also blamed the banks for undermining the multi-billion quantitative-easing

programme launched by the Bank of England to inject liquidity into the economy - arguing that there has been a "breakdown in the mechanism" of cash transmission to struggling companies. From now on, Cable said, we must ensure that the new monies made available by the BoE and the government actually reach those companies.

### Load of Vickers

Of course, we have been here before in the shape of the 358-page Vickers report published last September. In his capacity as head of the Independent Commission on Banking, Sir John Vickers pondered on how taxpayers could in the future be "protected" from any banking crises - that is, not have to bail out the likes of Bob Diamond every time they dug themselves into a hole.

*Weekly Worker* readers may recall that the ICB's central recommendation was to "ring-fence" retail banking from "casino" banking/investment - the noble idea being that the retail banks should be the only institutions granted permission to provide "mandated services" like taking deposits from and making loans to individuals and small businesses. The Vickers report also contended that the different arms or sections of banks should be converted into "separate legal entities" with independent boards and hence - or at least according to ICB calculations - up to £2 trillion of assets (including all the domestic high-street banking services) could eventually find itself behind this ring-fence or "firewall". Other significant proposals were that UK retail operations should hold equity capital of at least 10% of their risk-weighted assets and that the larger banking groups should have primary "loss-absorbing" capacity of at least 17%-20%. The report also wanted to enable ordinary bank customers to easily switch current accounts by making sure that a free redirection service was up and running by September 2013.

Frankly, the ICB's reform proposals

were pie in the sky - especially when you bear in mind that Vickers, being a reasonable man of the establishment, of course, wrote the report in such a manner as to make sure it was "deliberately composed of moderate elements" and even then gave the bankers until 2019 to implement all the reforms. Very gentlemanly. As if the world, slipping further into crisis with almost each day that passes, will patiently stand around for seven years or more waiting for the UK's financial/banking system to get its house in order. Fear and panic is spreading throughout Europe now, with Spain quite possibly only days away from requesting another bailout and the International Labour Organisation predicting that the official number of unemployed people in the euro zone could reach almost 22 million by 2016 - up from the present 17.4 million - unless government policies "change course in a concerted manner".

Similarly, Miliband's plea for an 'ethical' banking system which responsibly plans and invests for the long-term future is also a load of old Vickers - desperate utopian scheming based on a wilful refusal to confront the *real* nature of capitalism. In reality, his "root and branch" reforms - even assuming that they ever came to fruition - would hardly touch the corruption of the system.

Albeit in his own buffoonish and boorish way, Boris Johnson - the rightwing Tory mayor of London - revealed himself to have a better grasp of capitalism than either Miliband or Cable. Using his *Daily Telegraph* column to attack politicians who are "slagging off" a sector that is "crucial to the British economy", he mocked the ideal of elevating "good old high-street stuff" to a position of moral superiority over "casino" investment banking (July 9). "You need the high rollers as well as the nice chaps who used to give you sherry," he wrote. At the end of the day business is business.

The plain fact of the matter, and something both communists and Boris Johnson can agree on, is that the sole and overriding function of the City is to make money - there is no other reason for its existence. Therefore money will be made by any means necessary or possible: ethics need not apply. But for that to happen capitalism needs constant access to *credit*, whether it be "predatory" and parasitical finance capital or productive capital sectors like transport and manufacturing. Ultimately, Barclays Bank is no more or less immoral than your local haulage company trying to maximise its profits and Bob Diamond is no more or less a 'wealth creator' than any other capitalist - *all* of them are nothing of the sort.

Obviously, for communists, the capitalist system is by definition a global international order and hence can only be challenged and overcome on a world scale - to peddle any form of national socialism is an objective crime against the working class. Logically meaning that we do not bovinely call for the nationalisation of every fish and chip shop or cafe selling Devon cream teas. However, we also believe that under certain concrete circumstances, calls for nationalisation are apt and progressive. The point is that in the here and now banking, just like healthcare or the natural utilities (water, electricity, gas, etc), needs to be taken immediately out of the realm of profit-making in order to ensure its role is that of a service ●

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## DEBATE



Diego Rivera's mural: Lenin central

# The relevance of Lenin today

Why is the Bolshevik leader ritualistically invoked, only to be demonised? Chris Cutrone of the US Platypus group<sup>1</sup> examines the paradox

**If the Bolshevik revolution is - as some people have called it - the most significant political event of the 20th century, then Lenin must for good or ill be considered the century's most significant political leader. Not only in the scholarly circles of the former Soviet Union, but even among many non-communist scholars, he has been regarded as both the greatest revolutionary leader and revolutionary statesman in history, as well as the greatest revolutionary thinker since Marx - Encyclopaedia Britannica**

**T**ime magazine nominated 'The protester' from the Arab spring to the Occupy movement, as 'Person of the Year' for 2011.<sup>2</sup> In addressing the culture of the Occupy movement, Time listed some key books to be read, in a sidebar article, 'How to stock a protest library'.<sup>3</sup> Included were *A people's history of the United States* by Howard Zinn, *The prison notebooks* by Antonio Gramsci, *Multitude* by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, and *Welcome to the desert of the real* by Slavoj Žižek.

Time's lead article by Kurt Anderson compared the Arab spring and Occupy movement to the beginnings of the Great French Revolution in 1789, invoking the poem, 'The French Revolution as it appeared to enthusiasts at its commencement', by William Wordsworth. Under the title 'The beginning of history', Anderson wrote that:

Aftermaths are never as splendid as uprisings. Solidarity has a short half-life. Democracy is messy and hard, and votes may not go your way. Freedom doesn't appear all at once ... No-one knows how the revolutions will play out: A bumpy road to stable democracy, as in America two centuries ago? Radicals taking over, as in France just after the bliss and very heaven? Or quick counterrevolution, as in France 60 years later [in 1848]?<sup>4</sup>

The imagination of revolution in 2011 was, it appears, 1789 without consequences: According to Wordsworth, it was "bliss ... in that dawn to be alive" and "to be young was very heaven". In this respect, there was an attempt to exorcise the memory of revolution in the 20th century - specifically, the haunting memory of Lenin.

## 1789 and 1917

There were once *two* revolutions considered definitive of the modern period: the French Revolution of 1789 and the Russian Revolution of 1917. Why did Diego Rivera paint Lenin in his mural, 'Man at the Crossroads' (1933), in Rockefeller Center - as depicted in the film *Cradle will rock* (1999), about the popular front against war and fascism of the 1930s? "Why not Thomas Jefferson?" asked John Cusack, playing Nelson Rockefeller, ingenuously. "Ridiculous!" Ruben Blades, playing Rivera, responded with defiance. "Lenin stays!" Still, Jefferson, in his letter of January 3

1793 to the US ambassador to France, William Short, wrote:

The tone of your letters had for some time given me pain, on account of the extreme warmth with which they censured the proceedings of the Jacobins of France ... In the struggle which was necessary, many guilty persons fell without the forms of trial, and with them some innocent. These I deplore as much as anybody, and shall deplore some of them to the day of my death. But I deplore them as I should have done had they fallen in battle. It was necessary to use the arm of the people, a machine not quite so blind as balls and bombs, but blind to a certain degree.

A few of their cordial friends met, at their hands, the fate of enemies. But time and truth will rescue and embalm their memories, while their posterity will be enjoying that very liberty for which they would never have hesitated to offer up their lives. The liberty of the whole earth was depending on the issue of the contest, and was ever such a prize won with so little innocent blood? My own affections have been deeply wounded by some of the martyrs to this cause, but, rather than it should have failed, I would have seen half the earth desolated. Were there but an Adam and an Eve left in every country, and left free, it would be better than as it now is.<sup>5</sup>

The image of 18th century Jacobins

and 20th century Bolsheviks haunts any revolutionary politics, up to today. Lenin characterised himself as a "revolutionary social democrat", a "Jacobin who wholly identifies himself with the organisation of the proletariat ... conscious of its class interests".<sup>6</sup> What did it mean to identify as a "Jacobin" in Lenin's turn-of-the-20th century socialist workers' movement? Was it to be merely the most intransigent, ruthless revolutionary, for whom "the ends justify the means", like Robespierre?

But the question of 'Jacobinism' in subsequent history, after the 18th century, involves the transformation of the tasks of the bourgeois revolution in the 19th century. To stand in the tradition of Jacobinism in the 19th century meant, for Lenin, to identify with the workers' movement for socialism. Furthermore, for Lenin, it meant to be a *Marxist*.

## 1848?

There is another date besides 1789 and 1917 that needs to be considered: 1848. This was the time of the 'spring of the nations' in Europe. But these revolutions failed. This was the moment of Marx and Engels's *Communist manifesto*, published in anticipation of the revolution, just days before its outbreak. So the question is not so much 'How was Lenin a "Jacobin"?' but, rather, 'How was Lenin a "Marxist"?' This is because 1848, the defining moment of Marxism, tends to drop out of the historical imagination of revolution today,<sup>7</sup> whereas for Marxism in Lenin's time 1848 was the lodestar.

Rosa Luxemburg, in her speech to the founding congress of the German Communist Party (Spartacus League), "On the Spartacus programme" (1918), offered a remarkable argument about the complex, recursive historical dialectic of progression and regression issuing from 1848. Here, Luxemburg stated:

Great historical movements have been the determining causes of today's deliberations. The time has arrived when the entire socialist programme of the proletariat has to be established upon a new foundation. We are faced with a position similar to that which was faced by Marx and Engels when they wrote the *Communist manifesto* 70 years ago ... With a few trifling variations, [the formulations of the *Manifesto*] ... are the tasks that confront us today. It is by such measures that we shall have to realise socialism.

Between the day when the above programme was formulated and the present hour, there have intervened 70 years of capitalist development, and the historical evolutionary process has brought us back to the standpoint [of Marx and Engels in the *Manifesto*] ... The further evolution of capital has ... resulted in this: that ... it is our immediate objective to fulfil what Marx and Engels thought they would have to fulfil in the year 1848. But between that point of development, that beginning in the year 1848, and our own views and our immediate task, there lies



the whole evolution, not only of capitalism, but in addition that of the socialist labour movement.<sup>8</sup>

This is because, as Luxemburg had put it in her 1900 pamphlet *Reform or revolution*, the original contradiction of capital, the chaos of production versus its progressive socialisation, had become compounded by a new “contradiction” - the growth in organisation and consciousness of the workers’ movement itself, which in Luxemburg’s view did not ameliorate, but exacerbated, the social and political crisis and need for revolution in capital.

By contrast, however, see the criticism of Lenin and Luxemburg by the latter’s former mentor, Karl Kautsky, for their predilection for what Kautsky called “primitive Marxism”. Kautsky wrote: “All theoreticians of communism delight in drawing on primitive Marxism, on the early works, which Marx and Engels wrote before they turned 30, up until the revolution of 1848 and its aftermath of 1849 and 1850.”<sup>9</sup>

## Marxism and ‘Leninism’

In 2011, it seems, *Time* magazine, among others, could only regard revolution in terms of 1789. This is quite unlike the period of most of the 20th century prior to 1989 - the centenary of the French Revolution also marked the beginning of the collapse of the Soviet Union - in which 1789 could be recalled only in terms of 1917. A historical link was drawn between Bolshevism and the Jacobins. In the collapse of 20th century communism, not only the demon of 1917, but also 1789, seemed exorcised.

Did 1917 and 1789 share only disappointing results, the terror and totalitarianism, and an ultimately conservative, oppressive outcome - in Napoleon Bonaparte’s empire and Stalin’s Soviet Union? 1917 seems to have complicated and deepened the problems of 1789, underscoring Hegel’s caveats about the terror of revolution. It would appear that Napoleon stands in the same relation to Robespierre as Stalin stands to Lenin. But the problems of 1917 need to be further specified, by reference to 1848 and, hence, to Marxism, as a post-1848 historical phenomenon.<sup>10</sup> The question concerning Lenin is the question of Marxism.<sup>11</sup>

This is because there would be no discussing Marxism today without the role of the Bolsheviks in the October revolution. The relevance of Marxism is inevitably tied to Lenin. Marxism continues to be relevant either because of or despite Lenin.<sup>12</sup> But what is the significance of Lenin as a historical figure from the point of view of Marxism?

For Marx, history presented new tasks in 1848, different from those confronting earlier forms of revolutionary politics, such as Jacobinism. Marx thus distinguished “the revolution of the 19th century” from that of the 18th.<sup>13</sup> But, where the 18th century seemed to have succeeded, the 19th century appeared to have failed: history repeated itself, according to Marx, “the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce.”<sup>14</sup> Trying to escape this debacle, Marxism expressed and sought to specify the tasks of revolution in the 19th century. The question of Lenin’s relevance is how well (or poorly) Lenin, as a 20th century revolutionary, expressed the tasks inherited from 19th century Marxism. How was Lenin, as a Marxist, adequately (or inadequately) conscious of the tasks of history?

The recent (December 2011) passing of Christopher Hitchens (1949-2011) provides an occasion for considering the fate of Marxism

in the late 20th century.<sup>15</sup> Hitchens’s formative experience as a Marxist was in a tendency of Trotskyism, the International Socialists, who, in the 1960s and early 1970s period of the ‘new left’, characterised themselves, as Hitchens once put it, as “Luxemburgist”. This was intended to contrast with ‘Leninism’, which had been, during the cold war, at least associated, if not simply equated, with Stalinism. The ‘new left’, as anti-Stalinist, in large measure considered itself to be either anti-Leninist, or, more generously, post-Leninist - going beyond Lenin. The ‘new left’ sought to leave Lenin behind - at least at first. Within a few short years of the crisis of 1968, however, the International Socialists, along with many others on the left, embraced ‘Leninism’.<sup>16</sup> What did this mean?

## The ‘new left’ and the 20th century

Prior to the crisis of the ‘new left’ in 1968, ‘Leninism’ meant something very specific. Leninism was ‘anti-imperialist’, and hence anti-colonialist, or even supportive of third-world nationalism, in its outlook for revolutionary politics. The relevance of Leninism, especially for the metropolitan countries - as opposed to the peripheral, post-colonial regions of the world - seemed severely limited, at best.

In the mid-20th century, it appeared that Marxism was only relevant as ‘Leninism’, a revolutionary ideology of the ‘underdeveloped’ world. In this respect, the metropolitan ‘new left’ of the core capitalist countries considered itself to be not merely post-Leninist, but post-Marxist - or, more accurately, post-Marxist because it was post-Leninist.

After the crisis of 1968, however, the ‘new left’ transitioned from being largely anti-Leninist to becoming ‘Leninist’. This was when the significance of Maoism, through the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China, transformed from seeming to be relevant only to peasant, guerrilla-based revolutionism and ‘new democracy’ in the post-colonial periphery, to becoming a modern form of Marxism with potential radical purchase in the core capitalist countries. The turn from the 1960s to the 1970s involved a neo-Marxism and neo-Leninism. The ostensible Marxist organisations that exist today are mostly characterised by their formation and development during this renaissance of ‘Leninism’ in the 1970s. Even the anti-Leninists of the period bear the marks of this phenomenon: for instance, anarchism.

The ‘new left’ leading up to 1968 was an important moment of not merely confrontation, but also cross-fertilisation between anarchism and Marxism. This was the content of supposed ‘post-Marxism’: see, for example, the ex-Marxist, anarchist Murray Bookchin, who protested against the potential return of Leninism in his famous 1969 pamphlet, *Listen, Marxist!* In this, there was recalled an earlier moment of anarchist and Marxist rapprochement - in the Russian Revolution, beginning as early as 1905, but developing more deeply in 1917 and the founding of the Communist International in its wake. There were splits and regroupments in this period not only among social democrats and communists, but also among Marxists and anarchists. It also meant the new adherence to Marxism by many who, prior to World War I and the Russian Revolution, considered themselves ‘post-Marxist’, such as Georg Lukács.

The reconsideration of and return to ‘Marxism/Leninism’ in the latter phase of the ‘new left’ in the 1970s, circa and after the crisis of 1968, thus recapitulated an earlier moment

of reconfiguration of the left. The newfound ‘Leninism’ meant the ‘new left’ was ‘getting serious’ about politics. The figure of Lenin is thus involved in not only the division between ‘reformist’ social democrats and ‘revolutionary’ communists in the crisis of World War I and the Russian and other revolutions (such as in Germany, Hungary and Italy) that followed, or the division between liberalism and socialism in the mid-20th century context of the cold war; but also between anarchists and Marxists, both in the era of the Russian Revolution and, later, in the ‘new left’. It is in this sense that Lenin is a world-historical figure in the history of the left.<sup>17</sup> ‘Leninism’ meant a turn to ‘revolutionary’ politics and the contest for power - or so, at least, it seemed.

But did Lenin and ‘Leninism’ represent a progressive development for Marxism, either in 1917 or after 1968? For anarchists, social democrats and liberals, the answer is ‘no’. For them, Lenin represented a degeneration of Marxism into Jacobinism, terror and totalitarian dictatorship, or, short of that, into an authoritarian political impulse, a lowering of horizons - Napoleon, after all, was a Jacobin! If anything, Lenin revealed the truth of Marxism as, at least potentially, an authoritarian and totalitarian ideology, as the anarchists and others had warned already in the 19th century.

For avowed ‘Leninists’, however, the answer to the question of Lenin as progress is ‘yes’: Lenin went beyond Marx. In terms of anti-imperialist and/or anti-colonialist politics of the left, or simply by virtue of successfully implementing Marxism as revolutionary politics ‘in practice’, Lenin is regarded as having successfully brought Marxism into the 20th century.

But perhaps what ought to be considered is what Lenin himself thought of his contribution, in terms of either the progression or regression of Marxism, and how to understand this in light of the prior history leading into the 20th century.

## Lenin as a Marxist

Lenin’s 1917 pamphlet, *The state and revolution*, did not aspire to originality, but was, rather, an attempted synthesis of Engels’s and Marx’s various writings that they themselves never made: specifically, of the *Communist manifesto*, *The civil war in France* (on the Paris Commune) and *Critique of the Gotha programme*. Moreover, Lenin was writing against subsequent Marxists’ treatments of the issue of the state, especially Kautsky’s.

Why did Lenin take the time during the crisis, not only of the collapse of the tsarist Russian empire but of World War I, to write on this topic? The fact of the Russian Revolution is not the only explanation. World War I was a far more dramatic crisis than the revolutions of 1848 had been, and a far greater crisis than the Franco-Prussian war that had ushered in the Paris Commune. Socialism clearly seemed more necessary in Lenin’s time. But was it more possible? Prior to World War I, Kautsky would have regarded socialism as more possible, but after World War I, Kautsky regarded it as less so, and with less necessity of priority. Rather, ‘democracy’ seemed to Kautsky more necessary than, and a precondition for the possibility of, socialism.

For Lenin, the crisis of bourgeois society had matured. It had grown, but had it advanced? For Lenin, the preconditions of socialism had also been eroded and not merely further developed since Marx’s time. Indeed Kautsky, Lenin’s great Marxist adversary in 1917, regarded World War I as a setback and not as an opportunity to struggle for socialism. Lenin’s opponents considered him

fanatical. The attempt to turn the world war into a civil war - socialist revolution - seemed dogmatic zealotry. For Kautsky, Lenin’s revolutionism seemed part of the barbarism of the war rather than an answer to it.

Marx made a wry remark, in his writing on the Paris Commune, that the only possibility of preserving the gains of bourgeois society was through the “dictatorship of the proletariat”. Marx savaged the liberal politician who put down the Commune, Adolphe Thiers. However, in his *Critique of the Gotha programme*, Marx regarded his followers as having regressed behind and fallen below the threshold of the bourgeois liberals of the time. He castigated his ostensible followers for being less ‘practically internationalist’ than the cosmopolitan, free-trade liberals were, and for being more positive about the state than the liberals.

Lenin marshalled Marx’s rancour, bringing it home in the present, against Kautsky. World War I may have made socialism apparently less possible, but it also made it more necessary. This is the dialectical conception of ‘socialism or barbarism’ that Lenin shared with Rosa Luxemburg, and what made them common opponents of Kautsky. Luxemburg and Lenin regarded themselves as ‘orthodox’, faithful to the revolutionary spirit of Marx and Engels, whereas Kautsky was a traitor - a “renegade”. Kautsky opposed democracy to socialism but betrayed them both.

## Political and social revolution

All of this seems very far removed from the concerns of the present. Today, we struggle not with the problem of achieving socialism, but rather have returned to the apparently more basic issue of democracy. This is seen in recent events, from the financial crisis to the question of ‘sovereign debt’; from the Arab spring to Occupy Wall Street; from the struggle for a unified European-wide policy, to the elections in Greece and Egypt that seem to have threatened so much and promised so little. The need to go beyond mere ‘protest’ has asserted itself. Political revolution seems necessary - again.

Lenin was a figure of the struggle for socialism - a man of a very different era.<sup>18</sup> But his self-conception as a “Jacobin” raises the issue of regarding Lenin as a radical democrat.<sup>19</sup> Lenin’s identification for this was ‘revolutionary social democrat’ - someone who would uphold the need for revolution to achieve democracy with adequate social content. In this respect, what Lenin aspired to might remain our goal as well. The question that remains for us is the relation between democracy and capitalism. Capitalism is a source of severe discontents - an undoubted problem of our world - but seems intractable. It is no longer the case, as it was in the cold war period, that capitalism is accepted as a necessary evil, to preserve the autonomy of civil society against the potentially ‘totalitarian’ state. Rather, in our time, we accept capitalism in the much more degraded sense of Margaret Thatcher’s infamous expression, “There is no alternative!” But the recent crisis of neoliberalism means that even this ideology, predominant for a generation, has seemingly worn thin. Social revolution seems necessary - again.

But there is an unmistakable shying away from such tasks on the left today. Political party, never mind revolution, seems undesirable in the present. For political parties are defined by their ability and willingness to take power.<sup>20</sup> Today, the people - the *demos* - seem resigned to their political powerlessness. Indeed,

forming a political party aiming at radical democracy, let alone socialism - a ‘Jacobin’ party - would itself be a revolutionary act. Perhaps this is precisely the reason why it is avoided. The image of Lenin haunting us reminds that we could do otherwise.

It is Lenin who offers the memory, however distant, of the relation between political and social revolution, the relation between the need for democracy - the ‘rule of the people’ - and the task of socialism. This is the reason that Lenin is either forgotten entirely - in an unconscious psychological blind spot<sup>21</sup> - or is ritualistically invoked, only to be demonised. Nevertheless, the questions raised by Lenin remain.

The irrelevance of Lenin is his relevance ●

## Notes

1. On December 17 2011, I gave a presentation on ‘The relevance of Lenin today’ at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, broadcasting it live on the internet. This essay - originally published in *The Platypus Review* July-August 2012 - is an abbreviated, edited and somewhat further elaborated version, especially in light of subsequent events. Video and audio recordings of my original presentation can be found online at <http://christophertrope.com/platypus1917.org/?p=1507>.
2. Kurt Anderson, ‘The protester’ *Time* Vol 175, No28 (December 26 2011-January 2 2012): [www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2101745\\_2102132,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2101745_2102132,00.html).
3. *Time* Vol 175, No28, p74.
4. *Time* Vol 175, No28, p75.
5. T Jefferson ‘*The declaration of independence and other writings*’ (ed: Michael Hardt) London 2007, pp46-47. Also available online at <http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/d/592>.
6. VI Lenin *One step forward, two steps back* (1904): [www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1904/onestep/q.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1904/onestep/q.htm).
7. See my ‘Egypt, or history’s invidious comparisons: 1979, 1789, and 1848’ *Platypus Review* No33, March 2011: <http://platypus1917.org/2011/03/01/egypt-or-history%E2%80%99s-invidious-comparisons-1979-1789-and-1848>; and ‘The Marxist hypothesis: a response to Alain Badiou’s “communist hypothesis”’ *Platypus Review* No29, November 2010: <http://platypus1917.org/2010/11/06/the-marxist-hypothesis-a-response-to-alain-badiou-communist-hypothesis>.
8. [www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1918/12/30.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1918/12/30.htm).
9. This is in the critique by Karl Kautsky of Karl Korsch’s rumination on Luxemburg and Lenin in ‘Marxism and philosophy’ (1923). For Ben Lewis’s translation of Kautsky’s critique, ‘A destroyer of vulgar Marxism’ (1924), see *Platypus Review* No43, February 2012: <http://platypus1917.org/2012/01/30/destroyer-of-vulgar-marxism>.
10. See my ‘1873-1973, the century of Marxism: the death of Marxism and the emergence of neo-liberalism and neo-anarchism’ *Platypus Review* No47, June 2012: <http://platypus1917.org/2012/06/07/1873-1973-the-century-of-marxism>.
11. See T Krausz, ‘Lenin’s legacy today’ *Platypus Review* No39, September 2011: <http://platypus1917.org/2011/08/31/lenin%E2%80%99s-legacy-today>.
12. See my ‘Lenin’s liberalism’ *Platypus Review* No36, June 2011: <http://platypus1917.org/2011/06/01/lenin%E2%80%99s-liberalism>; and ‘Lenin’s politics: a rejoinder to David Adam on Lenin’s liberalism’ *Platypus Review* No40, October 2011: <http://platypus1917.org/2011/09/25/lenin-politics>.
13. See K Marx *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852): [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire).
14. *Ibid.*
15. See S Leonard, ‘Going it alone: Christopher Hitchens and the death of the left’ *Platypus Review* No11, March 2009: <http://platypus1917.org/2009/03/15/going-it-alone-christopher-hitchens-and-the-death-of-the-left>.
16. See T Cliff *Lenin* (four volumes: 1975, 1976, 1978 and 1979; volumes 1-2 available online at [www.marxists.org/archive/cliff/index.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/cliff/index.htm)); however, see also the critique of Cliff by the Spartacist League, *Lenin and the vanguard party* (1978): [www.bolshevik.org/Pamphlets/LeninVanguard/LVP%200.htm](http://www.bolshevik.org/Pamphlets/LeninVanguard/LVP%200.htm).
17. See my ‘The decline of the left in the 20th century: toward a theory of historical regression - 1917’ *Platypus Review* No17, November 2009: <http://platypus1917.org/2009/11/18/the-decline-of-the-left-in-the-20th-century-1917>.
18. See my ‘1873-1973: the century of Marxism’ *Platypus Review* No47, June 2012: <http://platypus1917.org/2012/06/07/1873-1973-the-century-of-marxism>.
19. See B Lewis and T Riley, ‘Lenin and the Marxist left after Occupy’ *Platypus Review* No47, June 2012: <http://platypus1917.org/2012/06/07/lenin-and-the-marxist-left-after-occupy>.
20. See JP Nettl, ‘The German Social Democratic Party 1890-1914 as a political model’ *Past and Present* No30, April 1965, pp65-95.
21. But Lenin is more than the symptom that, for instance, Slavoj Žižek takes him to be. See ‘The Occupy movement, a renaissance left and Marxism today’ *Platypus Review* No42, December 2011-January 2012: <http://platypus1917.org/2011/12/01/occupy-movement-interview-with-slavoj-zizek>.



## LABOUR

# Tyranny, structure and red baiting pluralists

Though merger with the Labour Representation Committee was agreed at the *Labour Briefing* AGM, ugly accusations have followed. Stan Keable of Labour Party Marxists reports

Peter Firmin's motion to the July 7 *Labour Briefing* annual general meeting - that *Briefing* should "become the magazine of the LRC" - was carried, and the alternative motion moved by Jenny Fisher that the magazine should continue to be "run by our readers" was defeated, by 44 votes to 37 with three abstentions, after what comrade Firmin described as "by and large a healthy debate". By this slim majority, the AGM agreed to "transfer *Briefing* to the LRC with immediate effect, with the aim of a relaunch at this autumn's Labour Party conference".

On the day, the AGM debate was thankfully free of the silly online accusation that the whole purpose of the merger proposal was personal: to exclude Jenny Fisher, Christine Shawcroft and others from *Briefing's* editorial board (EB). In fact the June LRC national committee meeting had already agreed (subject to *Briefing* voting for the merger) to invite all existing EB members to sit on the interim editorial board "with full rights, including voting", alongside those appointed by the NC. Subsequently, they will have the same right as anyone else to a seat on the EB - six to be elected by the LRC AGM (probably in December), and six by the national committee, to give "a balance of independence from, and accountability to, the NC". Cooptees will not have a vote, in order "to maintain the supremacy of those elected". It goes without saying, of course, that this NC plan may be varied by the LRC AGM itself.

This democratic structure will, hopefully, bring transparency and accountability to the editorial board, in place of the present 'tyranny of structurelessness' which leaves control in the hands of those in the know, or the most tenacious volunteers. "At present," said the successful resolution, "*Briefing* is run by a small group of people ... its structures and procedures are not very transparent and accountable." And in the discussion on the two motions, Andrew Berry pointed to the "accountability deficit in *Briefing*". Norette Moore - who, as a recent secretary of Greater London LRC, might reasonably be expected to know - said she had not previously attended a *Briefing* AGM because this was "the first time I heard that it is open". I myself was similarly surprised, a few months ago, to discover that AGMs were open to readers, and that anyone at all could attend and vote. A fact not advertised, and presumably unknown to most of the roughly 950 *Briefing* readers.

Under these circumstances, it is perhaps inevitable that personal frictions arise and working together may become intolerable to the individuals concerned - in this case between comrades Jenny Fisher and Graham Bash. It was comrade Bash's withdrawal from the EB in February, also withdrawing the use of his home as the EB's office and meeting place, which triggered the revival of the 2008 proposal that *Briefing* should merge with LRC. But behind personal conflict there are usually political differences, and

it was wrong for comrade Shawcroft to ask readers to oppose the merger on the basis of personal loyalty, as she did online, dividing the two EB camps into "carvers and carvees".

Despite the much proclaimed commitment on both sides of the merger debate to continuing *Briefing's* pluralist tradition of carrying articles from different political trends, it is evident that airing differences in public - actually a most healthy thing to do - is regarded by most as an embarrassment. In the online debates prior to the AGM, quite a few comrades bemoaned "wasting time on internal disputes", while there are real issues "out there". At the AGM, Simon Clark (for example), while arguing for the merger, said that the LRC "needs a paper, not debate", and an ex-Islington councillor thought it "sad to dispute amongst ourselves". But unless ideas are openly expressed and thrashed out in the light of day, they fester in an undeveloped form in the dark, and only burst into public view in the rotten form of a crisis - as on this occasion.

During the four years since the merger proposal was previously raised, the idea was not developed and thrashed out in the pages of the journal itself - the logical thing to have done. If that had happened, readers could have become familiar with the arguments and the issue need not have exploded onto a surprised readership in the form of a personality clash. In the period leading to the AGM, *Briefing* did not even carry the text of Peter Firmin's merger motion, though it was submitted to the April EB meeting. Pre-AGM discussion in the journal was limited to a single page for each side in the June issue, and again in the July issue, but there were no readers' letters on the merger proposal. So the main debate raged on the Facebook pages of *Briefing* and LRC, where facts and arguments were gradually dragged into the light - but only for those with the time and tenacity to dredge their way through hundreds of messages.

## 'Historic' delay

Chairing the AGM, comrade Shawcroft, drawing attention to the day's agenda, announced somewhat casually and unconvincingly that the merger proposal (or "takeover", as she called it) made this "a historic meeting". Nevertheless, the proposed agenda allocated only an hour and twenty minutes out of four hours to this issue - to be preceded by two hours for four guest speakers and discussion. A comrade from Labour Party Marxists proposed that the "historic" merger proposal - "the reason there is such a big turnout today" - be taken seriously and moved to the top of the agenda. Only if time permitted should we hear the guest speakers. But comrade Shawcroft overruled the proposal, and invited the comrade to challenge the chair's ruling, which would require a two-thirds majority. However, John Stewart asked if more time could be given to the two motions, and the chair agreed to start the item 30 minutes earlier.

Although passions were sometimes high, significant political differences



Not what should be expected of the left

between the two sides were difficult to discern. Both sides were clearly committed to the struggle within the Labour Party, but at least some of the anti-merger wing wanted to keep a certain distance from the LRC - because they want to keep a certain distance from the non-Labour left. The anti-merger comrades did not dispute the description of *Briefing* in comrade Firmin's four-page motion: "*Briefing* has a unique role in providing a broad, non-sectarian voice for the left, which orientates politically towards the Labour Party and fights to channel the demands of the broader movement and campaigns towards the party and a Labour government." But the motion also emphasised the importance of the class struggle outside the Labour Party and, while comrade Firmin said "the Labour Party is the agency of change", he added that "class struggle is the agency of change in the Labour Party". Richard Price, in contrast, exhibited a severe case of Labour Party sectarianism, fulminating against LRC joint secretary Andrew Fisher for resigning from Labour like so many comrades (though he later rejoined), over the Labour government's 2003 invasion of Iraq. And the LRC, he complained, had split the Grass Roots Centre Left slate and allowed Luke Akehurst onto Labour's NEC. So there are those who consider the LRC ultra left, eg, comrade Stewart, who penned the anti-merger page in the June issue of *Briefing*, admitted that "the LRC is too left for me".

Ian Ilett, speaking in favour of the merger, saw the political difference as either "working in the Labour Party, waiting for the class struggle to come in" (anti-merger), or "going out to the class struggle" (pro-merger). Indeed, comrade Jenny Fisher's emphasis, in moving the anti-merger motion, saw *Briefing's* role almost purely within the Labour Party. "Some in the LRC," she said, "want to build the LRC as an alternative movement." *Briefing* "isn't an organisation: it's a magazine". And, pretending that *Briefing* does not have its own politics, she added: "Don't tell

the Labour left the answers - they have ideas themselves." *Briefing* should "give space to the newly elected left on Labour's NEC and national policy forum". Its role should be "to make the left visible, not to lead it".

With all their talk of pluralism, of giving a voice to all strands of the Labour left, the anti-merger wing of *Briefing* seems satisfied with the left being divided, so that *Briefing* can carry on its "non-aligned" role of supposedly being everyone's voice. These comrades do not want organisational unity - which, however, is vital to the task of defeating the pro-capitalist bureaucracy and transforming the party into a pro-working class, socialist party. Reflecting the sad division of much of the left, in or out of Labour, into bureaucratic-centralist sects which forbid public discussion of political differences, they support this backwardness by believing that pluralist organisation, where minorities can express their views, is impossible. Pluralism versus organisation.

Hence, the pejorative term, "house journal", that was used by a number of anti-merger comrades. Comrade Fisher clearly expressed this view in a Facebook posting: "I still don't see how the LRC can produce a pluralist and open magazine if it is the magazine of only one organisation - its mouthpiece, aiming to build that organisation (unless one assumes that organisation is the pluralist left, rather than part of it)."

Perhaps the trump card of the anti-merger wing was veteran Labour CND comrade Walter Wolfgang, who told us that *Briefing* is needed because "*Tribune* is not always consistent". But *Briefing* "must be independent of an organisation ... To make it a house journal would be to murder it." However, the pro-merger trump was John McDonnell, who, after pleading for everyone to accept whatever decision was made and leave the room as comrades, reluctantly admitted that he had been won away

from his previous agnostic position by the arguments of Mike Phipps and was now convinced that merger was "beneficial for the movement overall".

## Red-baiting

On July 8, the day after the AGM, instead of accepting the democratic decision of the *Briefing* AGM, comrades Fisher and Shawcroft issued a press release which, unfortunately, reverted to many of the acrimonious terms and arguments used online before the relatively cordial debate at the AGM. *Labour Briefing* is to "close down" and the LRC intends to launch "its own house journal, using the same name". Despite the majority vote by the *Briefing* AGM on a motion from members of the *Briefing* editorial board, the press release has it that "members of the LRC - aided by members of the Communist Party of Great Britain, which produces the *Weekly Worker* - attended the AGM of *Labour Briefing* and forced through a vote ..." The merger is "a hostile takeover which is tantamount to political asset-stripping", the press release continues. "Those readers who have been robbed of their magazine are now the human collateral damage in the LRC's turn to empire building."

This red-baiting and fingering comrades as Communist Party members, reminiscent of McCarthyism and the worst aspects of the Labour Party in the cold war period, is repeated uncritically by Jon Lansman in his July 9 Left Futures blog, where he presents what appears to be a neutral, journalistic report - failing to mention that he was one of the signatories of the anti-merger motion, or the unmissable fact that comrade McDonnell spoke in favour of the merger.

I have as yet received no reply from comrades Fisher and Shawcroft to my two questions, asked in the light of their hostile press release: Are you planning to launch a rival magazine, as some have suggested? I hope not. Will you write for the coming issues of *Briefing*? I hope so ●



**REVIEW**

# Solidarity, morality and sex

Gregor Gall *An agency of their own: sex worker union organising*  
Zero Books 2012, pp97, £9.99

**G**regor Gall's *An agency of their own: sex worker union organising* is a follow-up to his more substantial 2006 study, *Sex worker union organising: an international study*. The publisher of that book, Macmillan, described it as "the first study of the emerging phenomenon of sex workers - prostitutes, exotic dancers such as lap dancers, porn models and actresses, and sex chat line workers".<sup>1</sup>

This current, shorter work looks at the problems for both union organisation and workers in the industry. But it can only provide the reader with a brief introduction to the subject. It could be described as primer in sex worker organisation - a manual or guide for action for the workers themselves, while for the general reader it serves as an overview.

Gall's understanding of sex work does not come from first-hand accounts: he has not gone out and conducted interviews or issued questionnaires. This is more of a historical tour bringing us up to the current period. What he is doing though is bringing his area of interest as an academic (according to his university website page, "the collective mobilisation of workers, primarily in their workplaces, in order to prosecute their collective interests"<sup>2</sup>) - to bear on the sex industry. And in this book he has certainly highlighted the interests of workers in different sectors of the industry and from different parts of the world.

By providing positive examples of organisation, the author is attempting to further the interests of sex workers. However, he does not deny the negative experiences and problems they face. And this aspect is interesting in relation to the author's own position on sex work ... and the comrades with whom he has been associated (being a former member of the Socialist Workers Party and Scottish Socialist Party and currently as a contributor to the *Morning Star*.)

For example, the SSP is "unequivocal in its condemnation of prostitution as a legitimate activity". Its 'Prostitution briefing paper' comments: "We see it as sexual abuse perpetrated primarily on the vulnerable, in exchange for payment." It continues: "Various strategies have been suggested to try to make the industry less exploitative and more safe ... All of these

strategies fail ultimately because they conceive of prostitution as 'work' rather than abuse in exchange for payment."<sup>3</sup> Obviously, if prostitution is not work, then prostitutes cannot be workers. Therefore SSP-type 'socialists' and feminists cannot be expected to show solidarity and support attempts at unionisation.

In the majority of examples that Gall highlights, it is clear that the presence or absence of such support is a factor in the success or otherwise of attempts by sex workers to unionise. This is because it provides a boost to those workers' confidence. But, more than that, this attitude weakens the working class by trying to separate off one of its components, just as feminism itself divides our ranks by posing the interests of women of all classes in opposition to the needs of the working class. If Gall ever shared the SSP's feminism, thankfully he has now left it behind.

Feminists of the SSP type argue that the underlying cause of the economic subordination of women is their sexual subordination; and that this, in turn, is ultimately a matter of male violence. This type of feminism is thus class-collaborationist - and, when it comes to sex work, promotes women's dependence on the state, not on their collective organisation as part of working class struggle. In parallel there has been a gradual and insidious extension of the idea of 'abuse' - not just, say, child sex abuse, rape and domestic violence, but any sort of sexual relation which, though on the face of it consensual, involves inequality of power.

In the case of Tommy Sheridan, the SSP cultivated his image as a clean-living, conventionally married, straight politician. The *News of the World* campaign to out him as a 'swinger' not only blew apart that image, but the SSP's policy on prostitution indirectly led both Sheridan and the SSP to play into the paper's hands in their different ways. Attending a sex club could not be viewed purely as a private matter. Sheridan insisted on denying his attendance, while the leadership failed to insist that he should on no account pursue his disastrous defamation case.

It is only natural that as a professor of industrial relations Gall would view

the obvious absence of a discourse as a barrier to the unionisation of sex workers. However, it is for the sex workers themselves, he argues, to insist that what they do should be categorised as work, which would put them on a par with other workers and allow them to pursue questions of unionisation more effectively.

Gall does not fully examine the question of morality, but it is worth engaging in a brief diversion to rebut the usual arguments. What appears immoral to some in a system based on commodity exchange can be seen in quite a different light when the origins of women's oppression are examined.<sup>4</sup> Whether or not men are abusive and whether or not prostitution degrades women, unionisation should be seen as a *moral* step towards overturning all forms of oppression. That is where we should be directing our energies and solidarity work as communists.

When sex workers have the confidence to unionise, to go on strike, it is those who break the strike, break the picket line, break class lines and effectively side with the bourgeoisie and the state who should be condemned. Moral legitimacy resides with those workers, not their detractors. Once sex workers gain the legitimacy that comes with being recognised as workers just like any other, that will aid their own perception of themselves as having separate class interests from the owners and employers of sex industry establishments and a common interest with the class to which they belong.

Where Gall is weak is in his summing up. He has identified the need for sex worker collectives, political lobbying, rights campaigns and decriminalisation. But surely, if we are to believe the message of the title - *An agency of their own* - then sex workers should have no truck with the sort of regulation and registration schemes the author suggests. They should rely only on their own collective strength and the solidarity of our class ●

Simon Wells

**Notes**

1. www.palgrave.com/products/title.aspx?pid=270919.
2. http://web-apps.herts.ac.uk/uhweb/about-us/profiles/profiles\_home.cfm?profile=D9F0BACF-BB23-AB37-92A2359AF623052A.
3. www.scottishsocialistparty.org/stories/pros\_briefing.html.
4. See, for example, 'World-historic defeat of women' *Weekly Worker* April 19.

## 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.

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**Unity needed but  
Greece cannot be  
simply copied**

## The appeal of Syriza

The left continues to squabble over the merits of the Coalition of the Radical Left in Greece - but, argues Paul Demarty, both sides miss the point

The European left, on the whole, has gone Syriza-crazy. It is not especially hard to see why. When even a middling soft-left like François Hollande can set the world alight with excitement, a self-proclaimed radical left coalition-cum-party achieving genuinely mass votes in a country on the sharp end of the European austerity nightmare is nothing to sniff at.

This excitement, of course, is not unanimous; everywhere, Syrizophiles face off against Syrizophobes. Many Trotskyist groups in Britain have their own horses in the chaotic race of Greek politics; and a good clutch of them are gathered in the rival Antarsya coalition. This presents certain problems for some: the Socialist Workers Party has had to sell its sister-organisation's decision to persist with Antarsya on the grounds that Syriza is 'reformist' - as if even the most watered-down versions of its politics were significantly to the right of the SWP's positions in Ireland, Britain and, well, everywhere else.

For the Mandeliste Fourth International, the problem is even more acute. It seems a rift has opened up between the international centre and the Greek section, the Organisation of Communist Internationalists of Greece (Spartacus) (OKDE). There are whispers that a pro-Syriza article by Alan Thornett was implied, by the editors of the Mandelites' *International Viewpoint*, to be the international's official position, rudely gazumping their own comrades on the ground. Comrade Thornett - an opportunist even by the FI's elastic standards - called Antarsya's anti-Syriza stance "an object lesson in the role of ultra-left sectarianism, when real opportunities open up for the workers' movement." A Syriza-led government would be a "workers' government in Marxist parlance".<sup>1</sup>

The OKDE has hit back with a piece strongly critical of Syriza. It "desperately tried to articulate a political programme of neo-Keynesianism", which amounts to a "modernisation" of the "bourgeois system" without rejecting the "dominant mechanisms" at work - the European Union and the "hard euro". More significantly, Syriza leader Alexis Tsipras (apparently) does not base himself on the mass popular movement.<sup>2</sup>

The debate in the FI neatly summarises the pattern by which opinions on Syriza, and politics in Greece more generally, are polarised on the far left. Typically, both positions are false.

### Syrizophilia

The pro-Syriza position is false, in the first instance, because a left government - or a left government that, by the terminological laziness of an Alan Thornett, equals a workers' government - will not save Greece from disaster. The workers' government slogan was raised by the Comintern on the basis that, in the context of the early 1920s, such a government would



**Alexis Tsipras: no Bolshevik**

be an immediate prelude to revolution across Europe.

Such a gamble cannot seriously be entertained in the current situation, for the same reason that Syrizomania has such traction - elsewhere in Europe, the left is nowhere, and the revolutionary left less significant still. In Italy, which had the largest electoral base for 'official communism' down to the 1980s, the left is now reduced to a state even more parlous than it is in this country (readers will appreciate what a dire state of affairs that is). This, remember, is the country to which the anti-austerity fever is supposed to jump, post-haste, from Greece. Jean-Luc Mélenchon received a respectable vote in France, but the Front de Gauche is a long way from taking power. Die Linke looks to be dead on its feet. Who, pray, will follow Syriza?

If nobody follows Syriza - and this question may be posed very soon again, given the dilemmas the new Greek government will face in the coming months - then the latter will face an unpalatable choice. Either negotiate with Merkel and the troika - and take responsibility for whatever share of economic collective punishment is, from their point of view, non-negotiable - or pull out,

causing the scenario so cheerfully called 'drachmageddon' by various financial hacks: the replacement of the euro by a Greek currency doomed, as Oedipus was to parricide and incest, to overnight collapse. Syriza will remain an attractive model for the international left until the moment it is put to the test of government; at that point, its success will prove just as fleeting as, say, Rifondazione's in Italy.

Syriza, one would expect, would take the first course rather than the second. This is the second reason the Tsipras-philes are wrong - Syriza's political character is, if not reformist, best characterised as centrist. It is a melange of different forces, but its main component - Synaspismos - is a fragment (of which many exist) of the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) historically associated with Eurocommunism. Syriza's leaders are happy to talk big about mass action and popular protest; but in the end their politics are precisely the kind of fantasy-land neo-Keynesianism that the OKDE criticises (and that the likes of Thornett typically advocate in their dismal political interventions).

The third reason has to do with the sort of lessons we are to take from the sudden and spectacular success of Syriza in Greek politics. It is implied that what we need are, to paraphrase Che Guevara, 'two, three, many Syrizas'. But there is only one precisely because of the specific historical circumstances pertaining to Greece, which saw the KKE and other 'official communist' fragments survive, almost uniquely in Europe, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent period of political reaction more or less intact.

The KKE is routinely lambasted for its sectarian dogmatism. This is no doubt a fair enough charge. But it retains a very significant penetration into the Greek workers' movement. As for the Eurocommunists, whereas

in Britain they became Blairites in short order, and in Italy divided into the Democratic Party and Rifondazione (which in turn drove itself to destruction in the last Prodi government), in Greece they have retained some life as a serious and distinctive trend. It is this factor - the existence of serious organisations of the class and of the left - that produced Syriza's vote.

On the contrary, it is plain that the likes of comrade Thornett - and dissidents against the anti-Syriza line in the Socialist Workers Party - imagine that Syriza's success can unproblematically be replicated elsewhere. It cannot, without the serious development of radical, mass workers' organisations that - however deformed those organisations are in Greece - made that success possible.

### Syrizophobia

On the other hand, the major problem for those who oppose Syriza is that their critique centres on its unwillingness to break from the EU and somehow 'go it alone'. This is posed as a dividing line between reformists and revolutionaries - but the true distinguishing feature of reformism is that it seeks to work through the existing constitutional order, as opposed to a commitment to its overthrow and replacement.

Syriza, it is true, is at best ambiguous on this point - but so is the anti-EU dogmatism posed against it. There is nothing revolutionary about choosing the bosses' club of the Greek state over the bosses' club of the EU. If anything, it is the other way round - the existence of supranational organisations for the administration of capitalism is simply an imperfect reflection of the fact that production is thoroughly internationalised by this system. The answer is not to abolish such transnational institutions, but transform them through the mass, collective political action of workers

across the EU. That Tsipras and co, however politically compromised they are, blow hot air in favour of such action is a strength rather than a weakness.

The 'alternative' posed by such comrades - perfectly clear in the OKDE statement - is more mass action, more occupations, strikes, demonstrations and whatever else. But all the mass action in the world will not change the fact that Greece has not been self-sufficient in the production of food for two and a half thousand years, and is unlikely to be in the near future.

Mass actionism, moreover, is the reverse side of the pro-Syriza electoralist coin. The latter, as noted, is a *dodge* from taking on the serious tasks of building the revolutionary workers' organisations that can truly make a difference to the political situation - equally, the idea that 'mass action' in itself is capable of solving the political problems we face is an idea which descends to us from Bakunin, through the Second International left to the post-1968 'new left'. In all cases, it has failed quite as miserably to substitute for *conscious* political work as naive electoralism.

Above all, the back and forth over Syriza testifies to the fact that the left is utterly disoriented in this, the period when humanity most needs a revolutionary alternative. Syrizophiles look to Tsipras as a messianic saviour figure; their 'left' opponents look to the more pantheistic god that is 'the struggle'. Neither will confront the burning necessities of the day - the need for revolutionary mass parties, and common workers' action across borders, in this most global of crises ●

### Notes

1. [www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article2654](http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article2654).
2. [www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article2688](http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article2688).

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Address \_\_\_\_\_

Post code \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_ Tel \_\_\_\_\_

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

Sub £/€ \_\_\_\_\_

Donation £/€ \_\_\_\_\_

Total £/€ \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

To \_\_\_\_\_ Bank plc \_\_\_\_\_

Branch Address \_\_\_\_\_

Post code \_\_\_\_\_

Re Account Name \_\_\_\_\_

Sort code \_\_\_\_\_ Account No \_\_\_\_\_

Please pay to **Weekly Worker**, Lloyds TSB A/C No 00744310  
sort code 30-99-64, the sum of £ \_\_\_\_\_ every month\*/3 months\*  
until further notice, commencing on \_\_\_\_\_

This replaces any previous order from this account. (\*delete)

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Name (PRINT) \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_