

# weekly **worker**



**Ed Miliband and the complex balance between left and right in the Labour Party**

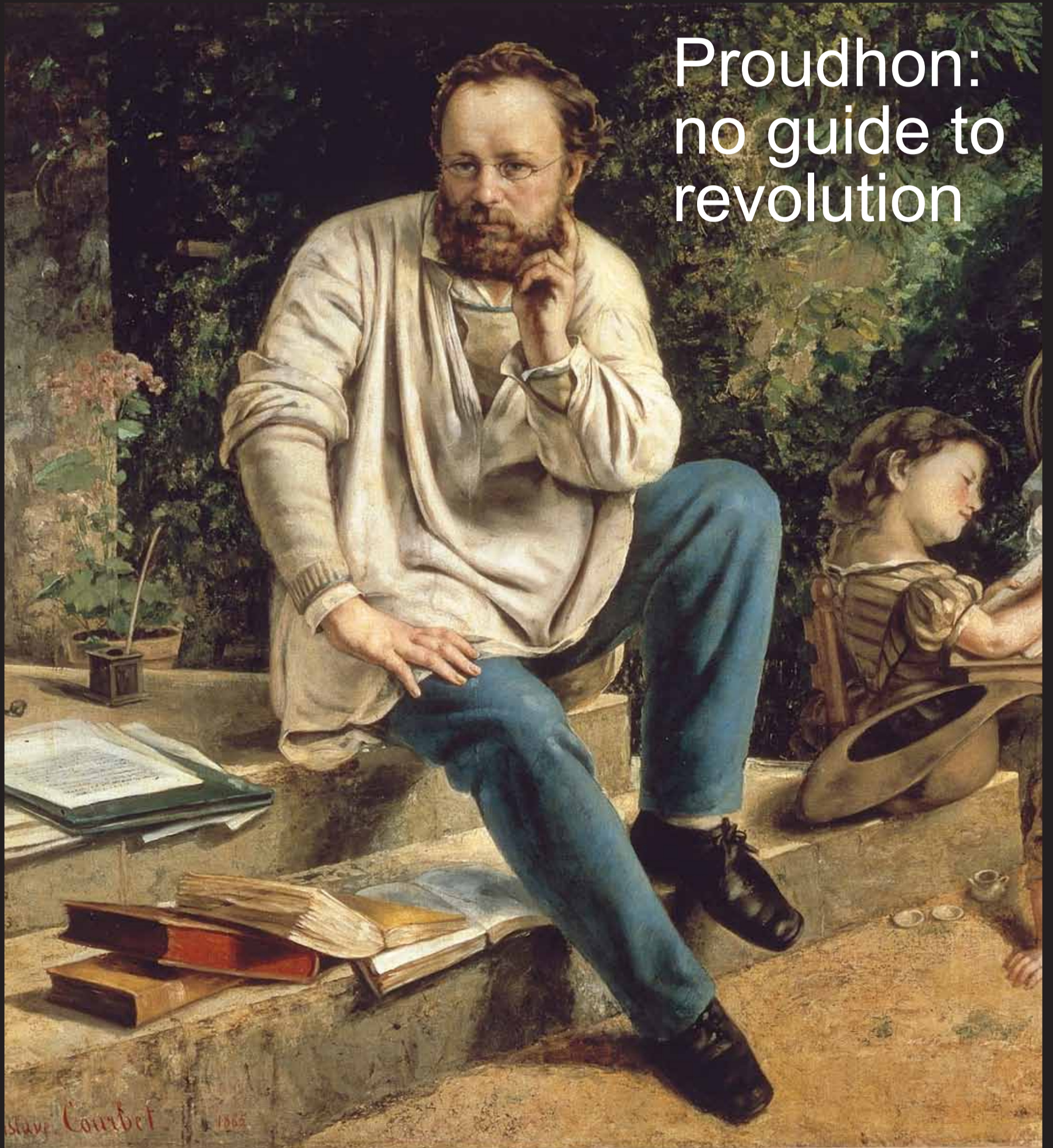
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# LETTERS



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

## Sex support

I found Simon Wells' review of Gregor Gall's book, *An agency of their own: sex worker union organising, very interesting* ('Solidarity, morality and sex', July 12).

The policy of the Scottish Socialist Party and Tommy Sheridan towards prostitution was a train crash waiting to happen. That train crash has set back the cause of socialism in Scotland by decades. Why did the SSP approve such a reactionary policy of outright hostility to prostitution? I can only conclude that it was a direct result of the bourgeois morality inculcated by the leaders of Militant. The Militant and its successors, embodied in the Socialist Party in England and Wales and its offshoot, Socialist Appeal, are centrists at best and left social democrats at worst. As such, they reflect bourgeois moral attitudes towards sex.

Most people have no idea of the reality of prostitution. As Simon Wells explains, the idea that clients exploit prostitutes is just so much hogwash. A client no more exploits a prostitute than a man exploits a mechanic when he needs his car fixed.

Prostitution in the UK should be decriminalised. However, as Simon Wells points out, state registration of prostitutes and legalisation should be opposed. Legalisation would lead to companies owning chains of brothels and the listing of such companies on the stock market, as happens in Australia.

Finally, sex workers should be supported by all communists. In a capitalist society, it gives sex workers an element of financial independence both from men and the bourgeois family.

**John Smithee**  
Cambridgeshire

## ISO conference

The US International Socialist Organization conference took place in Chicago from June 28 to July 1. There were about 1,300 participants (although the membership stands at around 800, I believe), with a fair racial mix, and on the whole very young. There was a fair geographical spread, with a sprinkling of Canadians, including Ian Angus of the Socialist History Project, John Riddell and Paul Kellogg. Among others I spoke to was Alex Callinicos of the Socialist Workers Party. There was a very large and excellent bookshop run by Haymarket Press, at least as big as Bookmarks at Marxism, I would have thought.

Sessions included Neil Davidson on 'How revolutionary were the bourgeois revolutions?'; John Riddell on 'Towards the united front'; Paul Kellogg on 'Explaining the tragedy of Germany's 1921 March action'; and Mostafa Ali on 'The Egyptian revolution: which way forward?' In all cases there was plenty of time for discussion.

While Ahmed Shawki's talk on the history of the ISO was excellent, he said little on events after about 2001 and rather evaded the sharpness of the 'split'. He was challenged from the floor by Sharon Smith, who quite truthfully said it was not a split at all - the ISO had been brutally expelled from the SWP's International Socialist Tendency. (In retrospect this was clearly the best thing that could have happened to them, although they now maintain comradely relations with the SWP.)

On this early period he quoted a note by Chris Harman in the early 80s, which was extremely pessimistic

about their chances. They were still very small at the beginning of the 1990s, but after a period of growth they began publishing their own *International Socialist Review* in the summer of 1997 - against the advice of the SWP, clearly a sign of growing independence.

Shawki emphasised internal democracy and the necessity of discussions and disagreements in public - before the membership and everyone else. Talking with a few old-timers, I was told that this openness was quite new: they would not have dreamt of joining the ISO before 2004, when its internal regime started to become much more attractive. Others I spoke to said that the ISO is less and less defined by the theology of state capitalism - they had to contain both state-capitalist and bureaucratic-collectivist theologians, while also trying to attract those from the American SWP tradition who subscribe to the theory of the degenerated workers' state.

It turns out that the ISO took opposite sides when the Greek section of the IST split in early 2001 just before the ISO break with the SWP. I think in fact these disagreements within the Greek group were growing for some time before that. When talking to Callinicos I objected that at no point in the documents which were whirling about on the web at the time was this mentioned. Alex did not demur. It was the first I had heard that disagreements in the Greek section had helped provoked the split in the IST - the main argument concerned the failure of the ISO to buy into the nonsense of the '1930s in slow motion' and throw everything into the Seattle protests.

I was impressed by the ISO, particularly their openness and development of a democratic culture. I think they compare rather favourably with the British SWP.

**Ted Crawford**  
West London

## Sectarianism

Mike Macnair argues that the orthodox definition of sectarianism - 'putting the interests of one's own organisation before those of the working class as a whole' - is inaccurate and amounts to no more than an "empty insult". Instead he offers an alternative: 'the rejection of united organisation and common action where it is possible on the basis of partial common ground' (Letters, July 12).

Mike writes of the orthodox definition: "The problem is that we disagree among ourselves as to what the objective interests of the proletariat are." He gives the example of the Spartacist League, which claims that those objective interests demand a Spartacist-type "Bolshevik-Leninist" international party. Everyone might disagree with them, but who is to say that we are right and they are wrong?

On that basis you could call into question just about any definition. For example, if we define opportunism as, say, 'engaging in unprincipled action for short-term gain', then that too runs into the same "problem": the opportunists simply deny that their actions are unprincipled or designed to achieve short-term gain. So to charge someone with opportunism, to use Mike's words, "means no more than to say you disagree with them" about what constitutes a principle or whether a course of action is likely to result in a short-term gain.

Personally I think it is perfectly possible to identify an unprincipled action, just as it is possible to identify the objective interests of the proletariat. It is also possible to state with certainty that most of the left does indeed put the interests of their own organisation before those

of the working class as a whole. Mike and I both agree that the existence of rival anti-cuts campaigns results from the sectarianism of the sponsoring leftwing groups, but surely he must also agree that their 'rejection of united organisation and common action' results directly from their putting the interests of the part before those of the whole. Why else are they refusing to unite?

This gets us to the nub of the matter. Mike's alternative "rough formulation" describes the symptom, not the cause. It is also unsatisfactory in other ways. For example, where is the dividing line between 'partial common ground' and overall disagreement? Is it not possible in some circumstances for there to be sound reasons for rejecting 'united organisation and common action' despite 'partial common ground'? Am I a sectarian if I reject 'united organisation and common action' with the Sparts by refusing to join the International Communist League?

Finally, Mike states that his definition is in line with what Marx originally meant and so we should stick to the original. He very much regrets the "broader meaning" lent to 'sectarianism' by "modern usage".

This reminds me of a school teacher of mine who used to insist that the word 'hopefully' could be employed only in the sense of 'full of hope' (as in 'I waited hopefully for a positive response'), and never in the sense of 'It is to be hoped that ...' (as in 'Hopefully I will see you tomorrow'). The latter was incorrect English and totally unacceptable, he contended. But since then millions of individual usages have proved him wrong.

The point is that language is constantly evolving and it is futile to attempt to persuade large numbers of people that they must revert to the 'correct', former use of a word or phrase. It is, after all, constant employment in a particular context that makes it 'correct'. If we fail to accept "modern usage" then we will find communication very difficult indeed.

**Peter Manson**  
South London

## It's a gas

In his rejoinder to Arthur Bough, I think Tony Clark makes some good points - about fusion for sure, but also in exposing the sort of technological determinism that Arthur tends to engage in (Letters, July 12).

The missing point from Arthur, and in Tony's reply, is why coal replaced wood, why oil replaced coal and why gasoline replaced oil in transportation. It was not only cheap. It was not only abundant. It was also energy-dense. It is the density of energy per unit of weight that gives each subsequent form of energy generation its advantage, along with its abundance and relative cheapness. Each step in the advancement of human development was accompanied by better and more efficient uses of cheap and abundant energy forms, as well as experiments in, and deployment of, denser forms of energy.

Arthur Bough is correct to note his point about wood. But it was not just wood; it was wood in its densest form, as charcoal, that really made the difference in things like steel making.

Tony is correct to challenge Arthur, however, on this determinism - the 'faith' that technology can somehow get us out of the environmental and economic hole we're in, assuming the mode of production even allows us to do this. If the technology existed, then yes. But, no matter what we do, there are limits to the physics and ability of our species to 'invent our way out of' any particular crisis. But those limits

have to be explored. Isaac Asimov once noted that new and advanced discoveries were rarely proclaimed with a 'Eureka!', but more often result from 'That's funny!', accompanied by experimentation. We will, I suspect, be surprised by what our species can accomplish. Arthur is no doubt fatalistic in a positive way about this. I'm not. It's a 50-50 shot that this will occur. But I like Arthur's optimism, as opposed to Tony's rather gloomy outlook.

Peak oil folks tend to view reserves as a static concept. But it's amazing how much more oil becomes available at \$100/bbl versus \$60/bbl. Imagine what it is at \$150/bbl. That's capitalist economics and it's quite real. There are hundreds of billions of barrels or, shall I say, decades of oil available in the oil sands of Alberta, Canada and in the Orinoco, Venezuela. Decades and decades at current consumption rates and at current oil prices. So 'peak oil' viewed at this level becomes quite dynamic. The question then becomes: do we want to pay the social and environmental costs of extracting especially dirty oil?

By the way, peak oil's younger brother, peak gas, is something that almost doesn't exist any more, as there is no way to determine just how much gas is available now, with slant drilling, re-drilling and fracking.

On density: we can use nuclear energy, safer generation-three and generation-four reactors that will run for 80 years each, produce their own fuel and eat the fuel from previous older nuclear plants. We have centuries of potential energy growth based on nuclear alone. Because it's denser in terms of energy per unit of weight, it's ultimately more expandable and cheaper - yes, cheaper - than any other form of energy around. Marxists had better wake up to this fact of physics.

Utilising it in a way that is safer depends in part on moving away from the capitalist mode of production to a socialist one.

**David Walters**  
email

## Decline

How is a debate on decline relevant to socialist politics? Arthur Bough and I share a belief that socialists need an understanding of the nature of contemporary capitalism if they are to change it. We both make a distinction between an ideological and a scientific understanding. The fact we differ so much on the nature of that science is an indication of the importance of a common struggle for a rational alternative to capitalism.

Bough's science conforms to the inductive method. It relies on generalisations from observable facts or data. These consist of growth and trade statistics. He infers from these that there is a massive growth of productive investment underway (Letters, May 24). In reply, I have denied that growth rates measure the vitality of capitalism (Letters, June 7). The accumulation of capital does not correspond to GDP rates. As far as I know, there is no statistical evidence that can distinguish between growth rates and capital accumulation. Bough cannot use them as proof of an accumulation of productive capital without criticism.

I contend that growth rates do not distinguish between prices and value and show nothing of growth in productivity or in job creation. They are therefore useless in deciding whether there has been an accumulation of productive or unproductive capital. The growth of goods and services from the 1990s to the crash in 2008 could have been as much in the financial sector as in manufacturing. I quoted figures that support the reality of a vast expansion

of financial investment during the pre-crash period. Bough has ignored both these figures and my criticisms of his use of statistics. He seems to be unaware that rapid growth can be an expression of decline. An example Hillel Ticktin likes to use is that of the sun's vast expansion into a red giant before its extinction.

Bough thinks recent growth and trade statistics correspond to the Soviet economist Kondratiev's prediction of an ascending upward trend once every 50 years. Bough agrees with Kondratiev that it is technological change (such as the invention of computers) that triggered this wave. Technological determinism also colours his concept of decline. He argues that if capitalism were unable to develop the productive forces then he might consider the system to be in decline.

For Bough, 'decline' would only make sense if research into science and technology ceased and the tendency towards greater automation reversed. In other words, it would mean an absolute collapse of the system leading to mass impoverishment. Clearly this is not happening and will not happen in the foreseeable future. Here Bough adopts a Stalinist understanding of decline. Thus he is more optimistic about the future of capitalism than most bourgeois commentators today and thinks that financial crises can occur with no harmful effects on industry or employment.

Bough is wrong to think that Trotsky supported Kondratiev's theory of long waves. Trotsky agreed with Lenin and the other Bolsheviks that capitalism was in decline. Lenin linked the idea of decline with finance capital, the rise of monopolies and imperialism. He argued there had been a fusion of finance capital with industrial capital. He took the idea that finance capital had become the dominant partner of the two from Hilferding.

Trotsky argued that the October revolution had compounded the tendency towards decline. As a result, he linked long waves to turning points in the class struggle, such as revolutions and defeats caused by wars. Trotsky's theory incorporated the idea that downturns would last increasingly longer periods of time. He thought the ruling class would become less capable of resolving the system's contradictions. Ticktin follows Trotsky and contends that the bourgeoisie turned to finance capital in order to raise surplus value. However, money cannot create money and the shift from industry led to a decline of productive capital. It follows that the boom of the 1990s and early 2000s can be understood as a short-term cyclical upturn within a long-term downward trend. This is the opposite of Bough's use of Kondratiev.

Finally, do our different theoretical positions have any political consequences? If capitalism is in decline, then greater socialisation and politicisation of the economy will be an observable tendency. I have cited the dependency of Chinese accumulation on Stalinist bureaucratic and political controls over workers as an example of this.

Attempts to organise capitalism outwith the value form - and Bough's quotation of Engels (Letters, June 21) is compatible with this position: ie, that workers remain alienated even when their labour-power creates no value or surplus value - have led both to an increased sense of solidarity between workers from below and forms of proto- or pseudo-planning from above. Workers are therefore more powerful. Their objective potential to overthrow capitalism and establish a democratically planned society from below is more evident.



## LABOUR

# Bans could be a doubled-edged sword

Eddie Ford argues that the balance between left and right in the Labour Party is complex and symbolised by Ed Miliband courting both the traditional working class base and the overtly pro-capitalist right

Breaking a 23-year taboo, Ed Miliband on July 14 became the first Labour leader since Neil Kinnock to speak at the Durham Miners Gala - which was first held in 1871. By boycotting the gala, a celebration of working class solidarity, John Smith, Tony Blair and Gordon Brown were, of course, signalling that the Labour leadership was safely pro-capitalist and "intensely relaxed about people getting filthy rich" (in the infamous words of Lord Peter Mandelson). And filthy rich people do not want to be associated with ex-miners, local government workers, pensioners, the unemployed, etc, or banners bearing the images of Kier Hardie, Clement Attlee, Aneurin Bevan, Arthur Horner, Karl Marx and slogans taken from the *Communist manifesto*. Just not good for business.

Last year Miliband refused to attend the event. This year, however, he put aside his ideological reservations - for the time being - hoping to gain political capital from the growing 'anti-banker' sentiment, especially after the latest Bob Diamond/Libor scandal. Clearly too good an opportunity to miss.

Naturally, Miliband was pilloried by the Tory right for being an old-fashioned, class-war dinosaur, etc. For instance, rather stupidly (even by her standards), Baroness Warsi, the Conservative Party co-chair, claimed that his appearance meant that he was "handing his party back to Kinnock" - as if Baron Kinnock of Bedwellty did not pave the way for New Labour with his anti-left witch-hunts during the mid-1980s, most prominently the expulsion of high-profile members of the Militant Tendency. Compounding her stupidity, Warsi claimed that "Red Ed" was using the Durham Miners Gala to "cosy up to his militant, leftwing union paymasters" and was "still driving the Labour Party away from the centre ground of British politics". Old Labour is back, red in tooth and claw.

### Blandness

Unfortunately, Warsi's accusations against Miliband were baseless - just like her recent, delusional, suggestion that British society was groaning under the oppressive weight of "militant secularisation". Perhaps almost disappointingly for the more voracious sections of the rightwing press, hoping for a easy bit of political mileage by conjuring up the spectre of the 'red menace', Miliband's speech in Durham was the last word in blandness. Not a single radical or controversial utterance escaped his lips. But Miliband was never going to frighten the establishment horses.

Hence brandishing his pro-Christian credentials, despite the fact that he is a self-avowed "non-believer" from a family of Jewish immigrants, Miliband sermonised at Durham about how the miners were modern-day good Samaritans who would always help their neighbour - always "looking out for each other" and "never walking by on the other side". Yes, just like the Jesus of the Christian imagination. For Miliband, it almost goes without saying, these charitable values are also "the values of the people of Durham" - good Labour voters. Which, in turn, are a reflection of "the values of the people of the north east" and ultimately "the values of the British people" as a whole, rich or poor, worker or



Ed Miliband: Durham miners' gala

capitalist. Or so we are led to presume.

He went on to praise the event as a "great north east tradition" - being "proud to be here today". After all, he whimsically speculated, "when you see people marching past, as I did from the balcony of that hotel", then you start to realise that the gala, and life in general, is "not just about politics", but rather "about the strengths of these communities" - which are based on "values", just in case you have forgotten. Warming to the theme, Miliband rejected the scandalous notion that the mass of people congregated before him are a "bunch of militants" - only someone out of touch with the common decency of the ordinary Briton could say such a thing.

Miliband declared that the next Labour government would "tax the bankers' bonuses" and "get young people working again" and concluded by vowing to "rebuild our country" on - you guessed it - the "values" of the people of Britain: ie, "responsibility, community, fairness, equality and justice". That is Ed Miliband's "mission" and "task".

Now, on one level Miliband's Durham speech was nothing more than a revolting and disingenuous exercise in pure political spin - what with the cheap John F Kennedy impersonations and the *safe* repackaging of the unions as signifiers of working class charm and nostalgia, reminiscent in some ways of John Major's warm beer and cycling old maids. Remember, three days before addressing the Durham crowds, Ed Miliband attended a glittering "champagne, canapés and celebrities", £500-a-head Labour fundraising dinner at Arsenal's Emirates stadium - the alternative gala. One of the "celebrities" happened to be a certain Mr Tony Blair, unveiled as the Labour leader's new sports adviser. Miliband would more likely claim that a 'synergy' exists between the two gatherings and he feels equally at home at both - doubtlessly true.

On the other hand, it would be profoundly mistaken to think that Miliband's speechifying at Durham is just Blairite/New Labour business as usual - to be totally dismissed as reactionary politics and nothing more. And the same goes for his Hyde Park speech last March at the TUC-organised 'March for the alternative' protest - a mass display of resistance to the politics of austerity. Could you imagine Blair or Mandelson, the New Labour apostles, turning up to either event or making such speeches? Over

their dead bodies, if truth be told.

Yes, ultimately, Miliband represents the politics of capitalism within the Labour Party and the wider workers' movement - that is obvious. Unlike New Labour though, Ed Miliband's Blue Labour - in so far as you can call it that - represents a *form* of working class politics, albeit one that is thoroughly nationalistic and backward. The fact remains that Miliband's Blue Labourite recognition - and extolling - of the *existence* of the working class, with its "values" and "community", does represent a partial step to the left when compared to the naked money-worship espoused by creatures like Blair, Mandelson, etc.

### Outlaws?

Therefore, as things stand now - and whatever leftist dogmatists might say - Labour has not metamorphosed into a pure and simple bourgeois party. Rather, a complex and contradictory picture emerges.

Look at the June 20 elections to the Labour NEC - that certainly did not see a victory for New Labour's apparatchiks and clones. Essentially, there were two main slates - one from the centre-left, organised by the Grassroots Alliance, and one from the right, organised jointly by Labour First and Progress, plus some 'independents'. In the end, five out of six of the NEC members were re-elected and the only incumbent who did not was London councillor and blogger Luke Akehurst - who was replaced by another rightwinger, Peter Wheeler. Meaning that the political balance of the NEC remains the same - with the GA on three, Progress/LF on two and one 'independent'.

OK, hardly earth-shattering - but no rightwing clean sweep either. Blair certainly would not approve, that is for sure. The highest scoring candidate in the elections, hardly astonishingly, was Ken Livingstone - securing 31,682 votes, just ahead of long-standing NEC member Ann Black on 30,240. By most people's understanding, Livingstone - who also topped the poll the last time elections were held in 2010 - can broadly be classified as leftwing. As for the others, the Conservative Home blog disapprovingly notes that Black has been a trade union member since 1979 and "with policies to match the era" - hence she is "sceptical" about Trident and has a "list of unaffordable, unrealistic and out of touch policies".

Conservative Home also mentions

that the Progress-backed Ellie Reeves recently attended a "very lively Karl Marx pub crawl" and that the former leader of Tower Hamlets Labour group, Christine Shawcroft (22,236 votes) earlier this month described herself as being "on the extreme left of the Labour Party" - before going on to quote her more fully: "It would have been an occasion for much mirth if the various Trot groups that were around in the 80s had been told that I would end up on the extreme left of the Labour Party. That I have done tells you a lot more about how far the party has travelled to the right than it does about me. I certainly don't feel the need to be constantly burnishing my ideological purity. I'm much more interested in trying to connect with the party's rank and file."

Of course, having said that, the NEC elections do not give a full account of the current balance of forces within the Labour Party - perhaps regrettably. Plainly, the vast majority of the Parliamentary Labour Party - carefully selected by the New Labour machine - are out-and-out *careerists*, who did not vote for Miliband because they regarded him as too leftwing. Nor is it the case, however much we would want it to be, that the relative influx of young people into the party over the last year or so is a uniformly progressive phenomenon. Many of them are aspiring to become councillors as the first glorious step to becoming an MP.

The idea, sometimes mooted by John McDonnell, that these people - the PLP and new young entrants - are 'blank slates' that can have all sorts of progressive ideas written on them if the movement is sufficiently militant, is illusory. Careerists, by definition, are not empty vessels - they want to climb up that greasy pole as quickly as possible and therefore will uncritically accept bourgeois ideology as a given. Being identified as a 'leftwinger', let alone a militant, will well and truly scupper their career prospects. The practical conclusion being that Labour is a necessary site of struggle, but the parliamentary party is not about to *radically* move to the left.

Which brings us back to the admittedly unpleasant topic of Progress, the openly Blairite/rightwing faction - and journal - founded in 1996 by Lord Mandelson and backed by Lord Sainsbury of Turville (not to mention the pharmaceutical company, Pfizer) to the tune of £260,000 a year. Lord Adonis, a former transport secretary

and adviser to Tony Blair, was appointed chair of Progress in January 2012 and a number of MPs elected in 2010 are vice-chairs - including shadow cabinet member Liz Kendall. Shadow education secretary Stephen Twigg is the honorary president of the group. Progress, naturally, holds its own annual conference and provides comprehensive training sessions, etc, for eager careerists and the like.

Progress is obviously a reactionary nest and thus the left has every reason to want such an alien presence driven out of the Labour Party - we should make no bones about that. But this should be done first and foremost through an *open political fight* for the correct political ideas in front of the whole class. Therefore left-wingers, including communists, are quite right to express deep reservations, to put it mildly, concerning the apparent attempt by the GMB union to "outlaw" Progress, basically on the grounds that it is a rightwing version of the old Militant Tendency (now the Socialist Party in England and Wales).

To this end, or so it seems, a motion passed at the union's June 11-14 congress denounced "prominent Progress members" for briefing against Ed Miliband and claimed that the organisation was responsible for persuading Labour's front bench to "support cuts and wage restraint". It went on to state: "Congress notes that Progress advances the strategy of accepting the Tory arguments for public spending cuts. Congress believes that such factional campaigns to undermine Labour candidates, and to soften opposition to Tory policies, endanger the unity of the party and the movement in our fight against the coalition government."

This motion, which commits the GMB to "monitor the factional activity of Progress", is a mixture of the supportable and the downright dangerous. Accusations of "factional campaigns" that "endanger the unity of the party" are reminiscent of the anti-Militant witch-hunt. Communists certainly think that Labour should be a federal party: that is, it should permit and welcome the existence of different groups, tendencies and factions within it - with, if they wish, their own conferences, journals, discipline, etc. If that makes them 'parties within a party', so be it. We want the open clash of competing and contending ideas - that should be no crime. Quite the opposite: it should be positively encouraged. How else is the working class to learn politics and self-confidence?

However, we are obviously talking about *working class* ideas, not those that openly propagate those of the bourgeoisie. So, yes, we look forward to the day when pro-capitalist ideas are considered beyond the pale within the Labour Party. But for that to happen will require a long, hard struggle, and years of patient work to build up the strength of the left, which at present still constitutes a minority.

GMB general secretary Paul Kenny announced that the union will be putting a rule amendment to this year's Labour conference "which, effectively, will outlaw Progress as part of the Labour Party - and long overdue it is". If this is to be done on the grounds that Progress is engaged in "factional activity" and operates as "a party within a party", then it is an obvious doubled-edged sword ●

eddie.ford@weeklyworker.org.uk

## 'OFFICIAL' COMMUNISM

# Diplomacy and dissonance

The *Morning Star's* CPB is 'concerned and worried' about the Communist Party of China's embrace of capitalist relations. Lawrence Parker reports



**Chinese workers: the idea that they are in charge is an absurd lie**

In August 2011, a delegation of representatives from eight western European 'official' communist splinters visited China. These representatives included some from the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain and the Communist Party of Greece (KKE).

The inclusion of the Greek comrades was an interesting choice for the Chinese hosts, given that in 2010, Elisseos Vagenas, a member of the KKE's central committee, produced an article that was sharply critical of developments in China. It concluded: "... the dominance of capitalist relations in China, which is a fact today, slowly or quickly will lead to a bigger compliance of the political system, the dominant ideology and all the elements of the superstructure, whose capitalist character will be reflected in its symbols. The intensification of class contradictions will ripen and so will the need for the revolutionary labour movement to be represented by its own party against capitalist power." In other words, the game is up for clinging onto the Communist Party of China (CPC) as some kind of bastion of progress.

Following its jaunt to China last year, and in the very best traditions of 'official' communist 'internationalism', the CPB has a softer, more diplomatic, take on all this. John Foster, the CPB's international secretary, said in regard to his delegation's trip: "There's a danger of being unduly negative; there's a danger of being unduly positive as well. There's a question: will China go the same way as the Soviet Union? Could the pro-capitalist elements take over? I don't know. I think they probably won't. But they certainly could. So, one is concerned and worried."<sup>2</sup>

Foster and Robert Griffiths, the CPB's general secretary, were both on the trip to China and it is they who have produced the British organisation's report on the August 2011 delegation - *Which road for China?* Their conclusion echoes

similar themes to those of the KKE, albeit fudging the issue in a similar manner to Foster's above remarks: "While the trade unions and the party emphasise harmonious workplace relations in the national interest (which incorporates the interests of the working class), more and more workers may come to see themselves as a subordinate section of society whose economic and political interests are not adequately represented."

Foster and Griffiths conclude: "How the CPC draws these workers into the trade union movement and the party as active participants, who see themselves as - and actually are - the masters of society's economic and political system and not its victims, will determine China's line of march. It is not clear whether or to what degree the CPC sees the dangers to socialism in these terms or, if so, what strategy the party has to counter it. Forward to developed socialism, or into the ditch of monopoly capitalism? The interests of workers and humanity across the world demand that it be the former."

This hesitancy in regards to China's capitalist development is very obviously a reflection of reality. Foster and Griffiths note: "Potential threats to the revolution do not come from any existing political forces. In the estimation of the Communist Party of Britain representatives on the delegation, they arise from the very forces of economic development unleashed by the CPC itself."

However, such hesitancy also reflects a partial disintegration of the underlying theoretical justification that the likes of Griffiths have given to China's turn to capitalism. For example, in the report of the CPB's 2006 delegation to China, it was argued: "In defence of the NEP, Lenin made many of the same points as Deng Xiaoping and CPC representatives make today in defence of China's current course: that market mechanisms and incentives had to be utilised to stimulate production, particularly of vital food and fuel for

urban areas; that no immediate, large-scale alternative source of capital and technology existed to that offered by foreign capital; that socialism could not be built on mass poverty; and that such rapid industrial development would, despite the dangers, also ensure the rapid growth of an industrial proletariat as potentially the most resolute and disciplined force for building socialism."<sup>5</sup>

Now the CPB admits that "Chinese communists are not comfortable with the analogy" with the Bolsheviks' New Economic Policy, and the emphasis has switched to "similarities and differences with the NEP". Foster and Griffiths note that China's 'primary stage' of 'building socialism' (what one might dub 'socialism with capitalist characteristics') is expected to last until at least 2050. So now, presumably under the comradely direction of their Chinese comrades, they note: "... the NEP lasted for no more than eight years. It was ditched some five years after Lenin's death, partly in reaction to the growth of profiteering and speculation, and partly in favour of rapid industrialisation and agricultural collectivisation on the basis of public ownership and centralised planning and control. How long it was originally intended to last - or might have lasted had Lenin had lived longer - is not clear."

Clearly there have been differences between the CPB and the CPC over the international perspectives of the Chinese and its incorporation into the world capitalist economy. This has always been something of a stumbling block with traditional pro-Soviet organisations since the CPC allied itself with the USA in the 1970s. China would have never been a 'natural' choice for the CPB. Rather, the collapse of the 'official' communist regimes in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union forced this choice upon it. However, the CPB, when addressing the CPC, chose to dress up its current concerns in typical diplomatic tomfoolery:

"We appreciate China's policy of

peaceful co-existence. We understand that you cannot allow your country to be provoked into dangerous confrontations. Yet many millions of people across the world now look to China to use every peaceful avenue to curb the aggressive, interventionist agenda of the USA, Britain and other imperialist powers. You have the solidarity of our parties in taking on the very serious responsibility that humanity places upon you."

I am quite sure that when the Chinese comrades carefully weigh up their place in the capitalist world order against the solidarity that the likes of the CPB can offer, they will quickly come to their senses.

The main method used in constructing this CPB report is essentially an empiricist one. In a similar manner to the various 'analyses' that the 'official' CPGB used to make of the Soviet Union (where pig-iron production was meant to compensate for Stalin's crimes), we are given a host of facts and small-scale reportage, while difficult questions, such as 'Is China socialist?' are hedged around with further questions or appeals to higher authority.

That method, however, always leaves the thorny question of what such 'facts' actually mean. Thus we can read that: "The handling of passengers at airports is ... as efficient as the best in Europe. Public bus transport in the cities and towns appeared to be high-quality, plentiful and frequent." All this must be incredibly useful if you are planning a holiday to China in the near future (and I'd certainly be inclined to give John and Rob a ring about restaurants and hotels) but when there are clearly major issues of a country's historical trajectory at stake, it all becomes slightly surreal.

The method becomes even more bizarre when Foster and Griffiths stumble over more controversial items. They state: "In Zhejiang province, the most developed of all Chinese provinces with a very high level of

private enterprise, the head of party organisation described CPC branches in private firms as 'too often' being 'battling fortresses', having to struggle to assert workers' rights ... Elsewhere, on the other hand, representatives of the party branch were described as chairing the investment committees of private companies." I'm sure you'll agree that it's a hell of a relief to know that Chinese communists are listened to somewhere.

Therefore, two big questions are largely avoided. The first one is a point that many CPB members and supporters have raised in various forums over the years. This is the advantages or otherwise of subscribing to what has been termed as an 'elevator theory' of building socialism. That is, you use capitalism for the first part of the journey. You get off at the first stage and then board another elevator for the journey to communism. Therefore, capitalism can be wielded by so-called progressive forces such as the CPC and the ANC in South Africa as an essentially immobile, benign and neutral force without serious consequences for future stages of development.

This is, of course, a thoroughly idealist fallacy. The spreading of capitalist tendrils throughout society, as the KKE has comprehended and the CPB has begun to admit, poses a future of capitalism, not communism, as its influence spreads through the "superstructure" and ideology of a society.

The second question pertains to the issue of 'socialism in one country', which is presented empirically as a 'natural' response to the log-jam of bureaucratic autarchy in the 1970s: "Reform and opening up" was the [Chinese] party's response to the crisis of the late 1970s: a crisis of extreme poverty and of stalled economic development based on Soviet-type central planning."<sup>11</sup> Of course, for the CPC bureaucracy there was simply no alternative to opening up to global capital if it wanted to retain power in its own national silo. And there's the rub. The CPB is utterly addicted to its own brand of 'national socialism' and is thus currently incapable of foreseeing any alternative to the path of the CPC.

This could lead it into another ideological cul-de-sac. It seems fairly certain that, sooner or later, following the lead of the KKE, the CPB will eventually denounce the CPC for the restoration of capitalist relations in China. This would presumably have consequences for the theory of 'national' roads to socialism and the need for a reliance on the world market. Yet if "Soviet-type central planning" only leads to dysfunctional economies and poverty, what precisely is the alternative? ●

### Notes

1. <http://inter.kke.gr/News/news2011/2011-03-04-china>.
2. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=rIFH\\_S3jHOU&list=UUYmWwaDrdaZtpx4ugzAi68w&index=5&feature=plcp](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rIFH_S3jHOU&list=UUYmWwaDrdaZtpx4ugzAi68w&index=5&feature=plcp).
3. *Which road for China? - report of 2011 delegation of western European CPs* p35.
4. *Ibid* p31.
5. *China's line of march - report of the Communist Party of Britain delegation to China 2006*, p31.
6. *Which road for China?* p14.
7. *Ibid*.
8. *Ibid* p20.
9. *Ibid* p5.
10. *Ibid* p27.
11. *Ibid* pp6-8.

## REVIEW

# No guide to revolution

Iain McKay (ed) *Property is theft! A Pierre-Joseph Proudhon anthology* AK Press, 2011, pp822, £25

The end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st has seen something of a revival of anarchism and anarchist-influenced forms of leftism. There has, of course, also been a revival of anarchism of the right - 'anarcho-capitalism' and its weaker variant, small-state libertarianism. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon is one of the 'founding fathers' of left anarchism, though his political ideas were somewhat closer to the 'small is beautiful' (Schumacher) approach of modern left greens than to the direct-actionism of Mikhail Bakunin, which has been more influential on modern anarchism.

Proudhon is chiefly remembered for the slogan, 'Property is theft', which appears in his early work *What is property?* (1840). His voluminous writings are mainly not available in English, and some that are can be found only in old translations not easily accessible in print. In this volume Iain McKay and his translator collaborators do not exactly attempt to fill this gap, which would be an enormous project. Rather, they provide us with a very substantial sample of Proudhon's writings, with an expansive introduction by McKay (pp1-82).

## 'Autodidact'

Proudhon (1809-1865) was an older contemporary of Marx and Engels. He is commonly characterised as a working class autodidact, and McKay refers to him as "a self-educated son of a peasant family" (p1). This is somewhat misleading. Proudhon's parents, after working in a brewery, attempted to set up their own pub and micro-brewery, which went bust, and the family then lived on his maternal grandparents' farm. If Pierre-Joseph was on the 'unfortunate side' of the family, his much older cousin was on the 'fortunate side'. Jean-Baptiste-Victor Proudhon (1758-1838) was professor of law at Dijon and author of several standard textbooks on property law. The family relationship was significant enough that Jean-Baptiste-Victor's son (also Jean-Baptiste) was embroiled in Pierre-Joseph's financial affairs in the late 1830s.<sup>1</sup>

With the assistance of a scholarship, the family had enough money to send Pierre-Joseph to secondary school for seven years (education was neither free nor compulsory in France until the 1880s), though a worsening of the family's financial position forced him to leave in 1827 without taking the *baccalauréat*. He then went to work as an apprentice printer, initially as a proof-reader, and progressed through journeyman status in the early 1830s (and working as foreman) to master printer in a partnership firm, Lambert & Cie (1836), though he clearly had aspirations from 1831 at the latest to become a 'man of letters'. However, the firm went bust in 1838 and Lambert committed suicide, leaving Proudhon a debt of around 8,000 francs (around €18,000 in today's money).

Proudhon now took and passed the *baccalauréat* and applied for, and won, a scholarship from the Besançon Academy to study in Paris for three years under the supervision of the philosopher, Joseph Droz. In Paris he certainly attended lectures and read very extensively, with a significant emphasis on legal studies, together with philosophy; as late as 1843 he was contemplating submitting a doctoral dissertation in law.<sup>2</sup>

However, the result of his studies



Proudhon: patriarch

was not a degree and professional or academic employment. In 1840 he published *What is property?* - as a submission to a prize essay competition organised by his sponsors, the Besançon Academy. Far from winning the prize, the result was threats of the loss of his scholarship, and of prosecution for sedition.

A prosecution was initially averted because Proudhon received support from the political economist, Jérôme-Adolphe Blanqui. This support is understandable, since in spite of the rhetorical force of 'Property is theft' and Proudhon's self-identification as an "anarchist" (p133), the positive element of Proudhon's argument in *What is property?* is close to Ricardo's objections to private ground rent - the bulk of the book being a negative critique of legal writers' claims that rent-yielding property is a natural right (in modern language a 'human right').

In 1840-41 he worked for six months as a research assistant for the judge, Félix Turbat, on a law book which never appeared. In 1841 he published the 'second memoir' of *What is property?* in the form of an open letter to Blanqui defending the original book against criticisms, and in January 1842 the 'third memoir', a response to Fourierist criticisms. Proudhon's continued defence of his arguments now finally called forth a prosecution in Besançon for 'crimes against public security': he was acquitted by the jury on the (perhaps spurious) ground that the books were too technical in character to amount to sedition.<sup>3</sup>

After the prosecution, and the termination of his scholarship by lapse of time, Proudhon sought a job in local government - unsurprisingly, without success. He then took a job as a paralegal or 'law manager' working for the transport firm, Gauthier & Cie, which he held until 1847, while continuing to write and publish, and still looking for openings

as a journalist. From late 1847 he was seeking to launch a newspaper - a project which succeeded after the outbreak of the revolution of February 1848.<sup>4</sup> From then on he was a notorious revolutionary journalist, a member of the constituent assembly from June 1848, jailed for three years in 1849-52 for defaming the president (Louis Bonaparte), and from his release living somehow, more or less, by his pen.

This is not the profile of a worker, artisan or peasant autodidact in any usual sense. It is the profile of a formally educated man from the poorer part of a middle class family, whose education was interrupted first by financial problems (1827) and then by the combination of new financial problems with politics and prosecution (1841-42).

Proudhon certainly self-identified as a proletarian, and he had stronger grounds for doing so than many ex-student lefts. He was certainly a leader of a section of the workers' movement in 1848 and partially influenced leaders of the revival of this movement in the 1860s, and (posthumously) influenced some of the leaders and policies of the Paris Commune in 1870. But to identify him as "a self-educated son of a peasant family" (McKay) or "one of those rarities, a proletarian ideologue" (Hoffmann) is to give him spurious proletarian credentials: he was, in substance, an intellectual, albeit one who had to work for a living, other than by writing, for most of the 1830s and part of the 1840s. My point here is not in any sense to damn Proudhon; merely to get rid of 'workerist' arguments to sanctify him.

## The selection

It is perhaps slightly tedious to list the contents of McKay's selection from Proudhon's works, but also hopefully helpful for reference in what follows. From the 1840s, down to Proudhon's 1849 imprisonment,

come: most of *What is property?* (the 'first memoir'); some extracts from the 'second memoir' or letter to Blanqui; extracts from most of the chapters of volume 1 and of less of volume 2 of the *System of economic contradictions, or philosophy of poverty* (1846), against which Marx wrote the *Poverty of philosophy* (1847)<sup>5</sup>; a selection of Proudhon's pamphlets and journalism from 1848, and documents from the 'People's Bank' he attempted to found in early 1849.

From 1849 on, starting with work Proudhon published from prison, come: extracts from *Confessions of a revolutionary* (1849) on the 1848 revolution; a set of short polemics with the 'Jacobin socialist', Louis Blanc, from 1849; extracts from *Interest and principal*, a polemic with the political economist, Claude Frédéric Bastiat, in the form of open letters (1850); extracts from *The general idea of the revolution in the 19th century* (1851); small extracts from *The stock exchange speculator's manual*, a satirical work which ran to several editions (1853, from the edition of 1857); extracts from *Justice in the revolution and the church* (1858).

From the 1860s come chapters 6, 8, 10 and 11 of *The federative principle* (1863); and the introduction, from the second part chapters 4, 8, 13, 15, and from the third part chapter 4 (conclusion) of *The political capacity of the working classes* (1865).

Besides these substantial elements are a number of short letters taken as illustrative of Proudhon's views, and a letter to Marx included (I think) as evidence of Marx's sectarianism and Proudhon's rejection of violent revolution. In appendices are the 'conclusions' of the posthumously published draft *The theory of property* (in an appendix because McKay, no doubt correctly, judges that Proudhon abandoned work on the draft well before his death), and a selection of documents from the Paris Commune.

What is missing from this list (beyond, obviously, a good deal of ephemera)? What is the motivation for their omission? McKay does not explain these choices, so we are left to infer them. The *Elements of general grammar* (1837) Proudhon later repudiated. The essay *On the celebration of Sunday* (1839) could legitimately be omitted as prior to Proudhon's self-identification as an anarchist in *What is property?*, though Proudhon's biographers see it as an important step towards his later ideas. *The creation of order among humanity* (1843) "has been judged almost universally as one of Proudhon's worst [books]" (Vincent).

*The social revolution demonstrated by the coup d'état of December 2* (1852) had the peculiar character of urging Louis Bonaparte (Napoleon III), after his coup against the republic, to place himself at the head of the social revolution.<sup>6</sup> Peculiar, but nonetheless significant: Proudhon was an opponent of political democracy as such, on the basis that it led logically to the president elected by universal suffrage as a dictator - witness the election of Louis Bonaparte. *The philosophy of progress* (1853), on the philosophy of history, is characterised by Hoffmann as "not one of Proudhon's better books" and its arguments are said to be better restated in *Justice in the revolution and the church*.

*War and peace* (1861) would be hard to abridge, since it is a pacifist book which begins with extensive

praise of the historical progressive role of war before reaching the conclusion that it is obsolete.<sup>7</sup> But this is again possibly significant for understanding the place of complex forms of rhetoric, and of argument from history, in Proudhon's writing. *Federation and unity in Italy* (1862) and *New observations on Italian unity* (1865), arguments against Italian unification, are 'represented' by the more abstract (and less offensive) *Federative principle*.

The choices of how to abridge the texts are also political. McKay in his introduction tells us: "This is not to say that Proudhon was without flaws, for he had many. He was not consistently libertarian in his ideas, tactics and language. His personal bigotries are disgusting, and few modern anarchists would tolerate them" (pp35-36). A footnote (p36) expands upon this: "Namely, racism and sexism. While he did place his defence of the patriarchal family at the core of his ideas, they are in direct contradiction to his own libertarian and egalitarian ideas." It goes on to argue that the violent anti-Semitism expressed in Proudhon's private notebooks only appears in public works in "rare ... asides". It is presumably on this basis that arguments of this sort as a result do not appear in the extracts.

As far as anti-Semitism is concerned, this is probably a correct judgment. Proudhon fairly clearly did, like the contemporary and later Catholic anti-Semites, view interest and financial operations as *more* parasitic than (some) other forms of profit. He did not, however, project or agitate for an anti-Semitic Catholic or nationalist *political movement*.

In relation to patriarchalism, McKay's judgment is more problematic. I will return to this point later, but for now it is enough to say that Proudhon's patriarchalism is not merely 'of his time'. Contrast Marx's and Engels's vigorous assertion in the *Communist manifesto* in 1848 of communism's connection to the emancipation of women: "The bourgeois sees his wife as a mere instrument of production. He hears that the instruments of production are to be exploited in common, and, naturally, can come to no other conclusion that the lot of being common to all will likewise fall to the women. He has not even a suspicion that the real point aimed at is to do away with the status of women as mere instruments of production."

One 'technical' point can be made on the selection of texts. *What is property?* (the 'first memoir') was translated by Benjamin Tucker in 1876, and this translation has been frequently reprinted and is widely available second-hand; McKay and his collaborators make only marginal changes to it. The book is also available in a new translation in a cheap Cambridge University Press edition (1994). It is arguable that it would have made sense for this collection to save 50 pages by omitting it and use the space to add in some way to the material included.

What might have gone in instead is some reduced level of abridgment. Proudhon's rhetorical constructions and inversions make it hard enough to follow the logic of his arguments in complete texts; it is hard to be confident that McKay's ellipses in the texts have not left out something essential to the argument.

Nonetheless, overall McKay and his translator collaborators have done

a significant service to the Anglophone left. Much more of Proudhon's writing is made readily accessible, and enough for the reader to form a general assessment of his ideas which is not completely dependent on the biographers, historians of anarchism, and so on.

## Property

Proudhon's ideas developed substantially, but the core which remained with him to the end of his life is already present in *What is property?* He rejected as unjust all claims to live on the basis of the labour of others. Justice required equality in exchange. Hence rent, interest and profit were unjust. He rejected communism on the same ground: that it involved the idler living at the expense of the hard worker, and as inconsistent with individual liberty; though he insisted that "every capacity for labour being, like every instrument of labour, an accumulated capital, and a collective property, inequality of wages and fortunes (on the ground of inequality of capacities) is, therefore, injustice and theft" (p137).

In *What is property?* he stigmatises property (ownership) as unjust, but insists, in contrast, that "possession is a right; property is against right" (p137). This was an unfortunate contrast. It was already Roman law that a member of the citizen class could possess things through his slaves or his tenants; medieval law that a lord could possess through his villeins; and, in Proudhon's own time and our own, that an employer possesses through his employees. In any of these periods, the small proprietor possesses through his wife and children. The legal concept of possession is no less contaminated by the general order of social inequality than that of ownership.

*What is property?* is primarily a legal-moral argument, though Proudhon makes casual reference to the political economists and to dialectics (the thesis-antithesis-synthesis formula). After the book came out, he grappled more fully both with the political economists and with Hegel (via translations and summaries provided by German left-Hegelian émigrés in Paris, including the young Marx). The result was the *System of economic contradictions, or philosophy of poverty*.

Though McKay accuses Marx of having in *The poverty of philosophy* misread Proudhon, McKay's objections to Marx's critique are largely extremely secondary. The *System of economic contradictions* is a deeply incoherent book, precisely because of its methodology. Firstly, it remains within the frame of the internal critique of defences of rent-bearing property in *What is property?*, merely adding a spurious historical development which leads to a future without rent-bearing property.

Secondly, as Marx argued, the dialectical development it offers from concept to concept is neither properly dialectical (even in the Hegelian sense) nor concretely historical. It begins not with the hunter-gatherer band (or the peasant form of 'primitive communism', which was the image of early society in contemporaries, including Marx and Engels), but with political-economist 'Robinsonades' of the isolated producer or producer family; the division of social labour, of which private property (including Proudhon's 'possession') is a part, is simultaneously presupposed and not presupposed, and not grasped as a historical development.

## Mutualism

The book does, however, introduce Proudhon's fundamental idea for the future, 'mutualism', from the Roman contract of *mutuum*, or loan of consumables or money without interest (p255). The plausibility of

this idea is partly dependent on an aspect of the book in which Proudhon follows the political economists and in particular Jean-Baptiste Say: goods, he says, exchange for other goods; money is a secondary phenomenon. In Proudhon, this secondary phenomenon - in particular commodity money, gold and silver - is intimately connected with monopoly and the negative features of market society. Credit grows out of money; but a better organisation of credit could overcome the problems of money.

Proudhon's solution in its two-sided character is elaborated in 1848 in the two-part *Solution of the social problem and Organisation of credit and circulation*. The first part is a polemic against political democracy as involved in the solution to the social problem. The second is a proposal for the creation of a mutualist bank which would borrow and lend without interest, on the security of actual and expected products, purely by discounting bills of exchange. (Proudhon does not seem to see that discounting bills of exchange is, in fact, a way of receiving a form of interest on money lent, since the bills remain enforceable at face value after discounting.)

The broad support for Proudhon's newspaper enabled the actual formation of the *Banque du Peuple* as a mutualist bank in January 1849. It did not get off the ground, either because the project was unsound or because of Proudhon's prosecution and jailing in the following month. Napoleon III adopted a very diluted form of the idea that small businesses and artisans could benefit from easier access to credit in the *Crédit Mobilier* in 1852, which rapidly evolved towards an ordinary bank (and one much affected by scandals). A similar attempt to provide credit for the poor by lending on movables had been made in the Charitable Corporation in early 18th century England (it did little business till the 1720s, then was made the vehicle for a large-scale financial scam, and collapsed in the early 1730s).

This aspect of Proudhon's argument was criticised (in the first place in relation to one of his followers) by Marx in the 'Chapter on money' in the notebooks published as the *Grundrisse*, and in a substantially reworked form in the first part of *Capital*, volume 1. McKay reads Marx's critique of Proudhon as *ending with The poverty of philosophy*, and therefore does not address these arguments. He claims that Proudhon's arguments for free credit can be understood as a precursor to Keynes, or perhaps to the 'post-Keynesian' theory of endogenous money (pp13-18). And he suggests that the approach is confirmed by the relative success of the Mondragon group of cooperatives, which includes risk-pooling and a credit union (pp31-32).

There are two problems posed by this sort of large-scale cooperative project. The first is the continued control of the spinal core of the global division of labour - international trade and finance - by capital. For example, to survive, Mondragon has been driven towards becoming a multinational, with questions posed as to the nature of its Chinese subsidiaries and their relation to the core cooperative project.<sup>8</sup> The second is the problem of practical democratic control of management (most obvious in the British Co-op).

For Proudhon, however, relations of justice between individuals (or rather *patresfamilias*), and hence their underlying autonomy, reflected in the right of withdrawal from the cooperative association, are counterposed to the subordination of managers, etc, by political democracy. This is systematically reflected in his arguments in the journalistic polemics

of 1848-49 and in the *General idea of the revolution*. It is the requirement of equality in exchange and the right of withdrawal (and hence the necessity to create conditions in which peasant and artisan production can flourish) which provide the only real controls he offers against managerial power.

## Federalism

In the late work, Proudhon does develop a political model on the basis of mutualism. It is that of contractual federalism, discussed in *The federative principle*.<sup>9</sup> Switzerland, and the 'states' rights' interpretation of the US constitution, are offered as partial models. Hence (together with opposition to Napoleon III's aggressive wars) Proudhon's opposition to the movement for Italian unification.

The starting point is autonomous individuals. They *contractually* confer *limited* powers on productive associations (cooperatives) engaged in those economic activities which cannot be operated on the family scale. They also contractually confer limited powers on *local* associations, like the commune (in its French sense as the most local government institution). The contract, as is usual in Proudhon, contains a requirement of equality in exchange for validity, and the right of withdrawal in the event of excess of power by the association. The productive associations and communes, in turn, may contractually confer limited powers on larger-scale bodies, like the Swiss federation. The same requirement of equality and the same right of withdrawal are present. Thus Proudhon asserts that the Catholic *Sonderbund*, defeated in 1847, had the right of withdrawal from the Swiss federation, and that in the US civil war the north's military operations against the Confederacy could only be justified if the north intended to abolish slavery (which, at the date of publication, it did not) (pp698-99n).

The underlying contractual basis of Proudhon's federalism carries with it an invisible underlying *legal* basis: that is, that the relations between the local communes and their central delegates necessarily fall to be decided by some judicial procedure. The alternative is (as Proudhon says of the *Sonderbund*): "In such a case the question is resolved by the right of war, which means that the most significant part, whose ruin would lead to the greatest damage, must defeat the weakest one" (p699n).

To allow a *political* process would negate the contractual character of the federal arrangement. To rely on a *judicial* process, however, makes the judiciary sovereign and arbitrary rulers of the sort Proudhon elsewhere objects to (as we can see in the modern USA).

If we are both to eliminate the sovereignty of judges *and* deny the legitimacy of political processes to bind individuals, the 'right of war' has implications much more extensive than the Swiss and US civil wars of 1847 and 1861-65: it implies a legal order based on the sanction of blood-feud, of the character of the early medieval Icelandic legal order discussed in WI Miller's *Bloodtaking and peacemaking* (London 1990). 'Practical anarchism' may indeed have this character, as can be inferred from James Scott's *The art of not being governed: an anarchist history of upland southeast Asia* (Yale 2009). The question is whether this is a price we should be willing to pay for getting rid of politics.

## Justice

Justice - with the specific meaning of the principle of equality in exchange, and the rejection of anyone getting something for nothing - is the real core of Proudhon's ideas. It is reflected in his rejection of rent, interest and profit

as early as *What is property?*; in his project of mutualism - credit without interest; in his rejection of political democracy as illusory; in his approach to the nature of associations; and in his contractual concept of federalism. *Justice in the revolution and the church* places justice at the centre of all human thought and makes a social order based on justice the *telos* of history.

I said earlier that it was a mistake for McKay to sidestep Proudhon's patriarchalism as "in direct contradiction to his own libertarian and egalitarian ideas". The core of this problem is the foundational role of justice in Proudhon's thought.

The underlying problem is a simple one. The relation between parents and children is not and cannot be a relation of justice in Proudhon's sense. The child is for some years necessarily dependent on its parents - or, if orphaned, on other relatives or on the state. In this situation parents *necessarily* give the child something for nothing. While there may be an expectation that the child will look after its parents in old age, this cannot be an expectation of the sort of equality in exchange which is the foundation of Proudhon's concept of justice. Leave aside the fact that the child may predecease the parents, or the parents die young enough not to become dependent on the child; this relation is one of gift and return gift, not of the sort of synallagmatic contract which Proudhon makes into the foundation of a just social order.

The problem is not unique to Proudhon's conception of justice. In Kant's conception, we must treat each other as ends, not as means; but the child biologically must treat its parents or other carers primarily as means to its own existence.

A corollary of this is that theories of justice pose intergenerational problems with which they cannot cope. One sort of solution holds that the present generation, who are in possession, have the right if they wish to destroy the world. A converse position (for example) which treats future generations as having rights, has the consequence that an intergenerational settlement is necessarily unfair to past generations, because our descendants reap the rewards of our sacrifices. These questions, which were rather abstract until recently, have acquired immediate political relevance as the number of humans in the world and the extent of our activity begin to press on the limits of the habitability of the biosphere.

The classical solution is to hold that intergenerational relations are outside the sphere of morality governed by justice. The moral subjects are then taken to be heads of families: a solution suggested by John Rawls in *A theory of justice* (Harvard 1971) to the problem of intergenerational justice. It has venerable antecedents. As far as ancient writers were concerned, the moral subjects were those capable of independent action because they owned slaves, while at least some early modern political theorists specified that only heads of households (ie, men who had wives, children and servants) were political subjects.<sup>10</sup> The evolution of the market economy, which has drawn both youth and women into the labour market and hence into the public sphere, has rendered arguments of this type manifestly untenable: hence McKay's discomfort with Proudhon's 'sexism'.

It is for these reasons that patriarchalism is essential to Proudhon's theoretical construction. Justice cannot cope with family and intergenerational relations; and the only way to construct a moral and political theory founded on justice is to hive off these relations by making them into a separate sphere handled by women, *under the authority*

of men, who in their character as *patresfamilias* are the only free, autonomous individuals.

## Politics

Marx and Engels from 1846 onwards more or less constantly urged the organisation of the working class for *political* action independent of the capitalists. In the *Communist manifesto* they claimed that "the first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class - to win the battle of democracy". This approach informed their political choices and alliances all the way down to Engels's death in 1895.

Bakunin thought that this was the fundamental flaw of their ideas: "All the German socialists believe that the political revolution must precede the social revolution. This is a fatal error."<sup>11</sup>

Proudhon took the same standpoint as Bakunin, albeit with different conclusions. In 1848 he stood for election, and was elected, to the assembly. But after 1848 he increasingly insistently argued that for workers to stand in elections was a disastrous diversion. This was the eventual conclusion of *The political capacity of the working classes*. For Bakunin, the alternative was the mass strike and the revolution triggered by the 'spark that lights the prairie fire'. For Proudhon, it was the gradual extension and development of the cooperative movement, and the spread of the moral catechism of justice (see *Justice in the revolution and the church*, pp654-683).

I am not concerned here with Bakuninism, which is more truly represented by the modern 'Leninist' far-left groups than by the anarchists. The problem with Proudhon is that neither the value of justice nor cooperation avoids the problem of political ordering.

The value of justice does not do so for the reasons just given: it resolves either into judicial tyranny or into the blood-feud regime, and it inherently involves patriarchalism in the family.

Cooperation does not do so because cooperatives below a certain level of size and complexity are prisoners of the capitalist order; those of a size and complexity sufficient to (partially) escape from or undermine the capitalist order immediately pose within themselves the same problems of political ordering as states and parties. This is, of course, the old story of the 'tyranny of structurelessness'.

It is worth reading Proudhon, then. But not in any sense as a guide, as McKay suggests, to the "general idea of the revolution in the 21st century" ●

**Mike Macnair**

## Notes

1. Proudhon's parents: RL Hoffmann *Revolutionary justice* London 1972, p20; J-B-V and J-B Proudhon: DR Kelley, BG Smith, 'Introduction' to P-J Proudhon *What is property?* Cambridge 1994, ppixiii, xxi-xxiii.
2. Proudhon's career in the 1830s: KS Vincent *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the rise of French republican socialism* Oxford 1984, pp23, 26-30, 47-54, and RL Hoffmann *op cit* pp21-22, 26-29; legal focus: visible in *What is property?* and DR Kelley and BG Smith *op cit* ppviii-xix, xxv-xxvi.
3. KS Vincent *op cit* pp70-74.
4. KS Vincent *op cit* pp87-91, 167-68.
5. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/poverty-philosophy/index.htm.
6. KS Vincent *op cit* pp200-08; RL Hoffmann *op cit* pp198-208.
7. RL Hoffmann *op cit* pp210-11.
8. A Errasti, B Baikaikoa, A Mendizabal, 'Basque Mondragon multinationals in the middle kingdom': www.ipedr.com/vol39/018-ICITE2012-B10003.pdf.
9. There is a fuller translation of the book by Richard Vernon at www.ditext.com/proudhon/federation/federation.html.
10. Rawls: pp128-29; moral subjects in antiquity slave-owners: various references in GEM De Ste Croix *The class struggle in the ancient Greek world* New York 1981, chapter 7; early modern theorists: CB Macpherson *Possessive individualism* Oxford 1964. Cf also C Pateman *The sexual contract* Stanford 1988 on the relationship of these questions to the status of women.
11. 'A critique of the German Social Democratic programme' (1870): www.marxists.org/reference/archive/bakunin/works/1870/letter-frenchman.htm.

## TURKEY

# AKP resorts to brutality

The true intentions of the Turkish government in relation to the 'Kurdish problem' have been well and truly revealed, writes **Esen Uslu**

Last Saturday, July 14, Turkish state forces launched a vicious attack on a demonstration organised by the Kurdish BDP (Peace and Democracy Party) in the eastern city of Diyarbakır. The protest had been called against the illegitimate isolation imposed since last summer on Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

Comrade Öcalan, who is serving a life sentence for 'terrorism', has been held on the prison island of İmralı in the middle of Marmara Sea since 1999. Since last year he has been kept incommunicado from his lawyers and relatives, and government officials have denied him family visits on pretexts insulting to the intelligence of European human rights watchers, such as an "engine problem" with the boat that regularly sails to the island or "insufficiently calm weather". There is, of course, no need to apologise to Turkish nationalist public opinion, and for the Kurds such excuses were intended to be a poke in the eye.

The BDP's demonstration was expected to be highly charged, especially following similar protests on March 21 marking the Kurdish new year (Newroz). So the governor of Diyarbakır, with its Kurdish-dominated population, decided to ban it.

For the uninitiated, the Turkish state is divided into 81 provinces. Each is headed by a governor appointed by the central administration. As a sop to democracy, a locally elected 'provincial general council' assists the governor in his (there is yet to be a female one!) duties. However, in reality the toothless provincial council acts as a front for the appointed governor, who commands the local security forces, as well as the finances and the provincial departments of the central government's ministries. As the topmost official of the central bureaucracy, the governor has the power (with the approval or on the instructions of the central government) to ban a public gathering on very elastic 'public safety' grounds.

A similar ban was imposed on the Newroz demonstration. However, realising that his actions could well provoke an ugly street battle, the governor backtracked at the last minute and allowed the demonstration to go ahead. Expecting a similar retreat on July 14, BDP leaders did not heed the ban and continued their preparations for the demonstration. But this time the state was determined and well prepared to stop it at any cost.

## Battle of July 14

The ensuing battle started outside the local BDP headquarters in the morning. Party leaders and members of parliament, as well as the mayor of Diyarbakır, were leaving the building with a group of supporters when they were stopped by the police, and after a brief discussion MPs were allowed to cross the police lines to negotiate with senior officers.

But they had only walked a short distance when they were attacked by the police. After a short while their way was blocked by an armoured vehicle (Toma), which is equipped with a water jet and teargas launcher. When they tried to halt the Toma, which was edging them back, by hitting its bull-catcher with their shoes and hats, they were attacked once more and brutally beaten.

Two women members of parliament were struck by the



Turkish Kurdistan: Abdullah Öcalan its symbol

powerful water jet from short range, and suffered injuries to their eyes and faces. Another female MP, whose husband was killed in an anti-guerrilla attack years ago, suffered a broken leg and burns when she was hit by a teargas canister. Other MPs were beaten and dragged along the street.

That marked the beginning of an all-out attack on the Kurdish demonstrators, which continued all day long. The security forces stopped buses on the approach roads to Diyarbakır, and forced them to turn back. In many other towns and cities in the region checkpoints were set up in an attempt to prevent demonstrators travelling to Diyarbakır.

About 87 people were detained, and many other young demonstrators were summarily assaulted: they were forced to strip from the waist up and beaten with rubber batons. Many were held down by police boots on hands, ankles and knees while they were viciously attacked.

So much tear gas was used that stocks were exhausted and additional supplies were airlifted in from neighbouring provinces. Police helicopters, Tomas and other paramilitary vehicles terrorised the inhabitants of the city. Despite all those repressive measures, Kurdish youth continued to gather and fight back against the police. If they were dispersed, they simply regrouped and appeared in another location. The clashes lasted until the early hours of the morning.

The leaders of the BDP and MPs were not even allowed to hold an impromptu press conference, and decided to stage a sit-down protest lasting the whole of the night. That evening three major jails erupted in uprisings, and many cells were set alight.

## Significance

How did the battle of July 14 actually differ from many similar clashes that have occurred over the last decade? In my estimation it was a blatant and brutal indication of a change in policy on the part of the governing Justice and Development Party (AKP). To explain how such a conclusion is reached we must look a little back into the history of the Kurdish struggle.

July 14 2012 was an important date for the Kurds, as well as for all democrats in Turkey, since it marked the 30th anniversary of the first hunger

strike in Diyarbakır prison following the 1980 coup.

On that day in 1982, four leading PKK prisoners stood before a military court and defiantly declared that they were starting a fast in response to the brutalities and torture inflicted on them by the regime. Hundreds more prisoners followed them in various prisons. The four prisoners who initiated the protest - comrades Kemal Pir, Hayri Durmuş, Ali Çiçek and Akif Yılmaz - died as a result of their hunger strike in September of the same year.

1982 was a year of open rebellion by Kurdish prisoners in Diyarbakır prison. First there was the suicide of comrade Mazlum Doğan, who hanged himself on the occasion of Newroz. Then four prisoners set themselves alight in May.

The hunger strikers selected the day with a reference to the storming of the Bastille during the French Revolution, and their defiant speech ended with the words: *An azadi an mirin!* (freedom or death). That slogan later became the battle cry that echoed in the mountains of Kurdistan.

July 14 2012 also marked the first anniversary of the democratic autonomy call of the DTK (Congress for a Democratic Society, an umbrella group of legal mass organisations in Turkish Kurdistan). It followed the new policy line of the Kurdish national liberation movement, which replaced the previous aim of a separate Kurdish state with democratic autonomy within Turkey. The democratic autonomy programme was also addressed to the general population, signifying that the Kurdish movement was the leading opposition force in Turkey, with its all-encompassing democratic platform.

It was also the culmination of new policies adopted by the PKK in the face of the new reality emerging after the Iraq war - especially the formation of an autonomous Kurdish regional government in southern Kurdistan. During those years the PKK formed several legal and semi-legal organisations and parties to reorganise the Kurdish resistance, and massively successful actions brought in a new phase of local power, with election victories in almost all the main cities, as well as a group of Kurdish deputies in parliament. The slogan of the BDP on the streets changed to *An azadi an azadi!* (Nothing but freedom).

The initial response of the government was restrained, and even some of the most rightwing leaders argued that it was better if the Kurds took part in the "political process of the valleys instead of fighting in the mountains".

A selected group of Kurdish guerrillas, who had not been previously charged with any crime in Turkey, as well as some refugees who were staying in a refugee camp in Iraq, arrived in Turkey as peace emissaries. They were declared to be recanting former fighters by the hastily assembled courts at border checkpoints, even though they vehemently opposed such a label. However, when they were greeted by thousands of people on the street as victorious members of the resistance, the government began to have second thoughts.

The new policy also led to secret negotiations conducted between representatives of the Turkish government and the PKK leadership, aiming for a peaceful settlement of the so-called 'Kurdish problem'. These were dubbed the 'Oslo process' after the first meeting held in the Norwegian capital under the auspices of Britain's ubiquitous Secret Intelligence Service (MI6).

The negotiations progressed quite rapidly to a stage where a draft memorandum of understanding was prepared by the negotiating teams - it was even claimed that the memorandum resembled the programme of democratic autonomy. However, the government recoiled at the last moment, causing an uproar in the top echelons of the military, judiciary and civilian bureaucracy.

## End of 'Oslo process'

A series of mass arrests starting in 2010 and the ensuing court cases flagged the end of the 'Oslo process'. Almost every mayor, elected municipal representative and leading member of BDP organisations was arrested. They were accused of 'aiding and abetting terrorism' or being a 'member of a terrorist organisation'. The conduct of the so-called 'KCK trials', with their never-ending remand periods and the ban on the use of the Kurdish language, were reminiscent of the military regime days.

On July 14 2011 Turkish armed

forces and Kurdish guerrillas clashed in the rural Silvan county in Diyarbakır province, and the day ended with the death of 13 soldiers, who died in a scrub fire caused by battle. In the aftermath the Turkish army intensified its operations against the guerrillas - precision air raids were launched against selected targets in the Qandil mountains, where the Kurdish guerrilla forces were believed to be based. A brutal isolation regime was also imposed on comrade Öcalan, and the KCK trials were taken to a new level - today even the defendants' solicitors can be arrested and charged.

The 'Oslo process' secret negotiations were leaked to the press. Suddenly the state officials who took part in the negotiations were called before special prosecutors to be questioned for their actions, which were considered an affront to the nationalistic values of the Turkish state. The government was forced to act hastily to save its obedient servants, and rapidly changed the law so that the prosecution of those concerned could only proceed with the prime minister's approval.

Further changes were made to the criminal law, and the powers of the special criminal courts dealing with terrorism cases were curtailed. Many a convicted fascist murderer who had committed brutal crimes during the 70s, but who were only apprehended after the fall of the military regime, were released early.

So the AKP government, which claims to want to bring to justice those responsible for the atrocities of military rule during the 1980s, as well as the top military brass who took part in the last years of the junta, has actually come to a reconciliation with those forces. Its new policy is based on the belief that it can now win a war - dirty or not - against the guerrillas. It also hopes to pacify the rest of the Kurdish resistance by splitting the national movement.

It is toying with the idea of using the Massoud Barzani regime of Iraqi Kurdistan in a new 'peacemaking' initiative, making use of the sympathy enjoyed by the Barzani family among sections of the Kurdish popular opposition to stem the proletarian tide represented by the PKK. The aim is to create a powerful political alternative, bringing former leftwing politicians back from exile, and provoking a split within the BDP, but to date all this has come to nothing.

The government is also stressing plans for the "economic development" of Kurdistan and raising its people's living standards by redirecting resources. However, a declining economy, as well as growing regional problems which seem beyond the capacity of Turkey to solve, indicate that the prospects for the success of such a policy are not very promising.

All that remains of the government's changed policy is the use of brutal repression. However, the entire history of the Kurdish conflict has demonstrated that this road leads nowhere. Democracy for the whole region and the peoples inhabiting it is the order of the day, and every attempt to stem the democratic tide will in the end prove futile ●

## Notes

1. There are many images of the clashes in the Turkish media. A revealing six-minute video of the events at the start of the day can be seen at <http://en.firatinews.com/index.php?rupel=article&nuceID=4936>.



# IRAN

# Sealed trains and class traitors

Yassamine Mather interrogates the excuses used by 'leftwing' supporters of the Iran Tribunal

**D**ebates about the Iran Tribunal - convened to put the Islamic regime in the dock for its massacre of 5,000-10,000 political prisoners in 1988 - continues to occupy a prominent place in the publications and websites of the Iranian left, both in exile and to a lesser extent inside Iran itself.

In a sense it is true that, given the current situation in Iran - not least the disastrous consequences of what the US calls "comprehensive sanctions" - this is a small, irrelevant issue. After all, this week alone another 400 workers lost their jobs in Iran's main car manufacturer, Iran Khodro, as a direct consequence of sanctions: Malaysia, under pressure from the US, pulled out of a contract. It is also true that sanctions are not the same as cluster bombs, but their effect on the Iranian working class can be devastating nevertheless.

The first round of the tribunal, which took place last month in London, attracted very little publicity and was indeed an insignificant event. So why is Hands Off the People of Iran devoting so much attention to it? We exposed the fact that it was organised and paid for by the CIA-sponsored National Endowment for Democracy as another way of building up the momentum for a military attack on Iran. Yet some conspiracy theorists are saying that Hopi chose to do so because we are "supporters of the Islamic regime" - or alternatively we are part of a sectarian plot to discredit sections of the Iranian left. Well, to deal with the second accusation first, the leftwing cheerleaders of this tribunal have made a pretty good job of discrediting themselves.

In the week before the tribunal Hopi activists had been approached by a number of Iranian comrades (who no doubt were ignorant of the politics of the tribunal's backers) asking us to help with publicity in the United Kingdom. We were asked to get involved in translating the proceedings and to encourage John McDonnell MP to support the tribunal. These requests forced us to look into the matter more carefully and indeed every page we turned, every piece of information we came across, made us more wary. So let me make it very clear: we had no hidden agenda. Had the supporters of the Iran Tribunal not tried to engage us in the event, we might not have written about it at all. We might not have been alerted to the highly dubious rightwing forces behind it.

However, once we found out what was going on, to have deliberately kept silent would have been totally unprincipled. Indeed, as I have said before, silence would have been a betrayal of the memory of the comrades who died in the dungeons of the Islamic regime. They would have been revolted by the thought of pro-imperialists making use of their deaths to further the aim of imposing regime change from above.

The issues surrounding this affair have a significance far beyond the question of the Iran Tribunal. We are living through a moment which for the radical left in Iran is comparable to the US embassy takeover of 1981. At that time sections of the 'left' argued that, as the regime had moved away from the west's sphere of influence and was adopting an 'anti-imperialist' position, its anti-working class, undemocratic political characteristics should be downplayed, overlooked or even tolerated. Groups such as the pro-Soviet Tudeh Party and sections of the Fourth International abandoned working class independence and joined

the bandwagon of pro-regime forces.

The taking of hostages in the embassy - itself an attempt by the new religious state in Iran to divert the ongoing struggles of workers, women and national minorities - marked a clear division between revolution and counterrevolution in the Iranian left. Those who fell behind the 'imam's line', as it was called at the time, ended up spying for the regime, participating in repression and justifying it, all in the name of anti-imperialism; those who opposed the theocracy ended up fighting the regime at a colossal price, often losing their lives as a result of their political activities.

Today, the spectre of war hangs over Iran - indeed a form of war (economic siege) is already being conducted, and the Iranian people are facing mass unemployment and hunger as a result of severe sanctions. The US and its allies are committed to regime change, irrespective of whether Iran makes concessions or ends its nuclear programme. None of this is happening because the Iranian regime is 'anti-imperialist', but because the reactionary mullahs ruling Iran have dared to defy the US.

US regime-change policy has relied heavily on corrupting the opposition with offers of funding, and sections of the Iranian left have slowly but surely moved in the direction of excusing such financial aid. With or without the left, we have now arrived at a situation where NGOs, acting as torch-bearers for 'human rights' in Iran, are key agents of the US foreign policy apparatus - indeed they have become integral parts of the imperialist regime-change drive. Hence the sudden concern of openly rightwing agencies, neoliberal institutions and Conservative politicians about the execution of political prisoners in Iran in the 1980s (while, of course, failing to mention the leftwing politics of these prisoners).

So the Iran Tribunal is far more significant than it might first appear and the attacks on those of us who refuse to follow this descent of much of the Iranian 'left' into total surrender before imperialism, far from deterring us from speaking out, have made us more determined.

## Sealed train

Some of its leftwing supporters have sought to justify the acceptance of imperialist aid by comparing it to Lenin agreeing to board a German sealed train for Petrograd in 1917. This is given as an example of the necessity of pragmatism by deluded sections of the left. It goes without saying that the analogy is ridiculous. Lenin did not meekly allow Germany to dictate the anti-tsarist agenda and act as a tool of German imperialism. He got on that train to Finland station in order to help lead a working class revolution, not to further German war aims.

Over the decades the Iranian left has gradually adopted a complacent attitude towards accepting financial aid from rightwing enemies of the Islamic regime. In fact this is a mirror-image of the position of some on the left in the west, who believe that the enemy of my enemy must be my friend. So if the US considers Iran's Islamic regime an enemy, we must support it. By contrast, for some on the Iranian left for whom the main enemy is Tehran, all kinds of dubious forces who oppose Iran's Islamic theocracy can be regarded as allies. Both positions are wrong and unprincipled.

During the 1960s when pro-Soviet parties dominated the political scene in Iran and Kurdistan, financial and

material support from the USSR was part and parcel of the existence of the left. In the 60s pro-China Maoists could rely on Chinese funding. However, throughout the shah's time Iranian left groups such as Fedayeen and Peykar tried to avoid compromising their independent political line by refusing the *conditional* assistance on offer from the USSR and China, relying instead on their own ability to organise, and financing their activities through bank robberies and other illegal operations. In fact the Fedayeen and Peykar were proud of this independence and the discipline it forced on members and cadres of the organisation.

During and immediately after the revolution of 1979, the left gained massive support. Fundraising at meetings of over 500,000 people was not exactly difficult. Those who worked at the first headquarters of the Fedayeen in Tehran remember how difficult it was to keep up with the sums of money ordinary people donated. Repression, of course, forced the left underground and changed all that. While Tudeh and the Fedayeen Majority continued to benefit from extensive Soviet aid, the rest of the left had to rely on much more meagre income or what was saved from the heyday of 1979-80.

Later, in the mid-1980s, the question of the safety of cadres forced many organisations to move their central committee and editorial members to Kurdistan, and by late 1980s they were followed by most of the surviving members of these groups. Kurdistan had its own history of nationalist groups relying on funding from one dictator (Saddam Hussein) to fight another (the shah or ayatollah Khomeini) - and vice versa. Jalal Talebani, the post-occupation Iraqi president, was already accepting financial aid from Iran's Islamic regime, so Iranian Kurds and later the Iranian left used that to justify their acceptance of support and later finance from Saddam.

When I was sent to Kurdistan to help set up a radio station for the Fedayeen Minority, I was shocked when I was told I had to travel via Iraq. Unknown to me, the Fedayeen had limited relations with the Iraqi regime, including the right of passage via Kirkuk to the Iran-Iraq border. As time went on, the assistance became more extensive. First the Fedayeen accepted a house in Kirkuk and later financial support from Baghdad. This at a time when Iran was at war with Iraq and sections of the international left considered the US to be using Iraq as its proxy. Of course, the radical left in Iran maintained that the Iraq-Iran war was a fight between two reactionary regimes and that neither was anti-imperialist.

Yet financial support was accepted from Iraq and this created many problems for the Fedayeen. First of all, it was considered a matter of security, kept secret and divulged only on a 'need to know' basis. So, although I travelled via Iraq to get to Iranian Kurdistan, no-one among the hundreds of supporters of the Fedayeen in Europe or the US was aware of this.

On one occasion the student paper *Jahan* (which was part of my political responsibility) published a cartoon mocking Saddam Hussein. Controlling the political content of the journal (in case younger comrades deviated from the 'correct political line') was one of my tasks. On this particular occasion I had been delayed overseas and returned to London the day after the paper had been sent to the printers. The organisation decided that the journal could not be distributed except in

Europe and North America. I had the unenviable task of explaining to a bemused editorial group that we could not send the journal to Kurdistan and Iran, as our route was via Baghdad and this would endanger the lives of our militants. The cartoon was removed and we had the ridiculous situation where two versions of the journal were distributed in two parts of the world.

The production team - young comrades who spent countless hours putting together the 68-page monthly - were not told why there were two versions. Some of us broke organisational norms and told them what was what.

However, this incident was only the beginning of the corrupting influence of Iraqi money on the Iranian Fedayeen. It could be said that accepting financial support from Iran's enemy paved the way for the kind of prostituted approach sections of the left displayed as soon as US regime change funds became available. This, and the understandable hatred of the religious state, have created circumstances where many on the Iranian 'left' see nothing wrong in accepting support and direction from the likes of the National Endowment for Democracy, Conservative Party members and the Dutch government.

## Going soft

One should point out, however, that the Islamic regime is so deeply hated by the overwhelming majority in Iran, and its anti-US rhetoric so discredited, that this lends a considerable credence to the west's propaganda. Eg, ordinary Iranians just switch off when they hear of the latest evil action of the 'great Satan'.

After 30 years in power the Islamic regime's 'anti-imperialism' has no serious content whatsoever. Here there is a lesson for all those supporting, for example, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt: the pro-poor, pro-revolution, anti-Scaf slogans might appear radical, but if they are not accompanied by genuine economic and political change, they are a sure recipe for inoculating the population against all criticisms of the west. Imagine if you were a genuine anti-imperialist with illusions in the MB, what would you think when you

saw Mohammed Mursi relaxing with Hillary Clinton and Egypt's military leaders? Wouldn't it cause confusion? After a few years, especially once Mursi turns to the repression that any 'third world' capitalist state (Islamic or otherwise) finds necessary, might you not end up becoming soft on the US?

Wide sections of ordinary Iranians, including the working class, fail to identify international capital as their enemy. They oppose everything the regime stands for. However, one would assume a radical left that has constantly identified the International Monetary Fund and World Bank as responsible for the Iranian state's neoliberal economic policies would have no illusions in the National Endowment for Democracy or Tory lawyers fronting the Iran Tribunal.

In defending their unprincipled position, apologists for the tribunal have unleashed personal attacks on those like myself who have opposed this stunt. Yes, it is true, as they say, that I use my English married name. That is because I do not want to increase the dangers faced by members of my family, most of whom still live in Iran and have at times been under pressure because of my opposition to the regime, not to mention my political dossier as a member of the Fedayeen.

It is also true that my maternal family was not working class and that I attended a French private school. But let me respond to such points with an anecdote. Just before the 22nd congress of the Soviet Communist Party Chou En Lai visited Moscow and, as he arrived, Khrushchev told him: "There is a major difference between us - I am from peasant stock and you are from the aristocracy." Chou said nothing in reply, but on the day he was leaving he turned to Khrushchev and, reminding him of his welcoming comment, said: "You were right about our class origins. However, we also have something in common: we have both betrayed our class."

I have the same thing in common with those on the Iranian left who see nothing wrong with accepting funds from neoliberal organisations ●

yassamine.mather@weeklyworker.org.uk

## Communist University 2012 August 20-26

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## MATZPEN

# Standing the test of time

On July 9, the CPGB hosted a fringe meeting at Marxism 2012, which served as a pre-launch of the recently published collection of essays by **Moshé Machover**. His talk was based on the preface to *Israelis and Palestinians: conflict and resolution*<sup>1</sup> and this is an edited version



Israel: a colonial settler state

The ideas, theoretical analyses and political statements included in the book are collective products of a remarkable group that I helped to found, the Socialist Organisation in Israel, better known by the name of its journal, *Matzpen*, the importance of whose heritage is disproportionate to its small size. I am not trying to hide my light under a bushel: I believe I played a significant part in producing, elaborating and formulating these ideas, and especially in arguing publicly for them. But that is what it was: a *part* in a group dialectic, inconceivable without this collective matrix.

*Matzpen* was formed in 1962.<sup>2</sup> The impetus for this had little to do with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; rather, it was a resolve to break away from the Stalinist tradition and launch an independent, radical socialist organisation. In this respect we were, without at first realising it, part of a 1960s-era world movement of socialist regeneration. In the early years, our main activity was propaganda for promoting workers' rights by the creation of genuine trade unions, outside the corporatist-bureaucratic stranglehold of the Histadrut. It has taken nearly 50 years for this idea to begin to become a reality, with the recent creation of the *Koah La'ovdim* (Power to the Workers) union federation.<sup>3</sup>

Of course, being consistent socialists, we were anti-Zionists. But it took us some time to elaborate an independent, detailed analysis of Zionism and the Israeli-Arab conflict. Fortunately, we had breathing space to do so. The early formative years of *Matzpen* happened to fall within a period in which the Israeli-Arab conflict was at its most quiescent: between the immediate aftermath of the 1956 Suez war and the June war of 1967. So we were able to deliberate over these issues rather than being forced to react off the cuff to a fast-moving reality under the pressure of current events.

By the time the catastrophic 1967 war broke out, we were equipped with conceptual weapons for confronting it and its consequences. Our analysis can be summarised in the following four points:

1. Zionism is a colonising project,

and Israel, its embodiment, is a settler state. The core of the Israeli-Arab conflict is the clash between Zionist colonisation and the indigenous people, the Palestinian Arabs.

This did not require great perspicacity; it was a straightforward observation of evident facts. Nevertheless, it is remarkable how few people in the west see things in these terms even today. In the Israel of the mid-1960s, *Matzpen* was alone in expressing this view explicitly and clearly. (The Israeli Communist Party avoided using such terms as 'Zionist colonisation', and confined the brunt of its critique of Zionism to the latter's alignment with western imperialism against the Soviet Union.)

2. We pointed out that Zionist colonisation belongs to a different species from, for example, that of South Africa and Algeria: rather than being based on exploiting the labour-power of the indigenous people, it sought to exclude and eliminate them.

This observation - which has profound implications regarding the nature of the conflict and its eventual resolution - came quite naturally to us as Marxists. It was, of course, obvious to the Palestinian victims of Zionist colonisation, and was noted also by many of their Arab and third-world supporters. But it eludes many thinkers and activists whose attitude to colonialism is *purely* moral: for example, those who regard it as a *consequence* or *manifestation* of racism rather than the other way around. For many years we were virtually alone in Israel and the west in stressing the fundamental significance of this feature of Zionist colonisation. In recent years it has been picked up by some academic critics of Zionism, but most of them have failed to recognise or admit that we had long anticipated them.

3. We insisted on the regional context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Due to the specific features of Zionist colonisation, the balance of power is heavily tilted in favour of Israel (backed by its imperialist sponsor) and against the Palestinian people. The imbalance could only be redressed, and Palestinian liberation would only become possible, as part of a revolutionary transformation of the region, by an Arab revolution led

by the working class, which would overthrow the repressive regimes, unify the Arab east and put an end to imperialist domination over it.

We were not alone in holding this view: it was shared by leftists in the Palestinian resistance movement. However, as reaction strengthened its hold on the Arab world from the 1970s, many people who initially looked forward to an Arab revolution lost hope and sought short cuts to resolving the Palestine problem - which, predictably, proved to be illusory. We remained rather isolated in clinging to the revolutionary regional perspective.

But very recently, while I was putting together the present book, the eruption of a revolutionary tempest in the Arab world has lent much greater credibility to our regional perspective. I shall return to this point below.

4. Our regional view of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict applied not only to the *process* whereby it would be resolved, but extended also to the *form of the resolution itself*. Unlike almost all who addressed the issue, we did not believe that a resolution would occur within the confines of Palestine (established by the British imperialists and their French allies following World War I). Thus, we did not advocate a so-called 'two-state solution' in a repartitioned Palestine, nor a 'one-state solution' in a unitary Palestine. Instead, we envisaged incorporation of the two national groups - the Palestinian Arabs and the Hebrews (so-called Israeli Jews) - as units with equal rights within a socialist regional union or federation of the Arab east.

## Topicality

This book contains a selection of essays, articles, statements and short pieces written by me, or co-written with my comrades, over some four and a half decades, between 1966 and 2010. Inevitably, during this long and eventful period, the original ideas and insights outlined above have evolved and been modified in response to changing reality, as well as in the light of further reflection. The items are presented as they were published originally, except for minor stylistic editing. They represent my opinions at the time of writing; and I would

certainly put some things differently today, with the benefit of hindsight as well as second thoughts.

One essay is extremely dated; it is also the one that has been most often reprinted and republished in several versions and widely read on the left. It is the essay on the class nature of Israeli society, which I co-authored with two comrades in 1970-71. It is thoroughly dated due to the profound socio-economic transformation of Israeli society that has taken place, beginning from the 1980s. Savage privatisation has shrunk the public sector - formerly about half of the economy - to a mere vestige of its former self. And neoliberal policy has devastated the welfare state, which had been relatively one of the most well-provided in the capitalist world, at least as far as the Jewish population was concerned. During these recent decades, the 'socialist' Zionist parties, such as the Israeli Labour Party, formerly politically dominant, have been reduced to near insignificance. I included this essay in the book primarily due to its historical interest.

On the other hand, the political analyses of Zionism and the Israeli settler state, and their conflict with the Palestinian people and the Arab region - some of them written several decades ago - have for the most part retained their topicality and are hardly dated at all. I say this with some sadness.

When I started putting together the material for this collection, on the one hand, I felt like a Cassandra: my comrades and I were pretty accurate in foretelling the moves made by the forces of oppression. We expected

the worst from their side and we warned against trusting in illusory 'peace processes' manipulated by them. But few people believed our predictions. On the other hand, I was disappointed by what appeared to be the failure of the forces of our side, those of progressive transformation and regional revolution, to manifest themselves as we had expected and predicted. While never losing faith in the ultimate victory of the forces of progress, and eventually of socialism, I felt that this was a vision for the very long term.

This somewhat wistful mood changed while I was still busy gathering the material for this book, with the eruption of the Arab revolution, which seemed to presage the developments that our theoretical analysis had pointed toward.

Of course, it would be very naive to expect the present upheaval to lead to a decisive victory of the revolution in the near future. Setbacks and counterrevolutionary reactions are most likely. But a victorious Arab revolution is no longer an abstract projection: the events of the Arab awakening of 2011 make it a tangible potentiality. And these events also demonstrate the necessary connection between the revolutionary liberation of the masses of the region and the decline and eventual demise of imperialist hegemony over it ●

## Notes

1. Haymarket Books, [www.haymarketbooks.org/pb/Israelis-and-Palestinians](http://www.haymarketbooks.org/pb/Israelis-and-Palestinians).
2. For material in English relating to *Matzpen*, see its website at [www.matzpen.org](http://www.matzpen.org).
3. See <http://workers.org.il/english>.

## Summer Offensive

### Painstaking

Our annual fund drive - the Summer Offensive - this week clawed in another outstanding haul of £2,805, taking our running total to £7,516. From past experience, I know that this is an extremely healthy pot to have three weeks in and bodes well for the campaign's target of £25k.

Comrades who deserve special mention are that old stalwart, TM, for his fantastic £800 and MM for a whopping £1k - brilliant! Then there is AL, a comrade from the days of *The Leninist* (predecessor of the *Weekly Worker*), who waded in with a sturdy £250 donation, and LW who stumped up a tidy £50.

A number of these comrades were among those prompted to donate by the party's e-bulletin, *Notes for Action*, plopping into their inboxes this week. *Notes for Action* has had a fitful sort of existence for some years now, but the Summer Offensive is always an opportunity not simply to innovate with the brand spanking new, but to buff up the old. A good £500-plus of this week's total was a direct result of the first two mailings of *NfA*. We will be expanding the list of recipients, as this campaign unfolds.

There is a connection to the past here. One of the many pleasures

associated with the launch of the new party website has been that that we have been able to make *The Leninist* available to a wider audience. I wrote last year that this factional journal was a "thumping good read", despite our occasional youthful absurdities. The sooner we get the *TL* archive up on the website, the better, I thought. The comrades who helped make this happen are to be roundly congratulated.

The CPGB faction around *The Leninist* produced not simply a paper, but also internal bulletins like 'Party Notes', 'Build the Party', resolutions from conferences, etc - all instructive publications and all, from my memory, distributed before the days of email via the painstaking manual process of stamp-licking and envelope-stuffing. But no more, thankfully ...

We intend to put the vast bulk of this material online. The money generated by the Summer Offensive - an intense period of fundraising for the work or the party in all its spheres - will be vital for this ●

**Mark Fischer**

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**REVIEW**



August 2011: let's have a chat

# Profound questions, no profound answers

Archie W Maddocks *Mottled lines* (director: Henry Bell)

Inspired by the outbreak of underclass rage that rocked the UK in August 2011 and dedicated to “those who rioted and those who didn’t”, *Mottled lines* is the debut of the 23-year-old playwright Archie W Maddocks. At its sharpest, the play accurately captures the psychological and ideological motivation of its protagonists - in the case of its two Tory characters frighteningly so. At its wobbliest, it appeals to nothing more progressive than the idea that people should be nicer to each other.

Fear and a resulting breakdown of communication are the central themes of this fragmentary observation of a ‘dog eat dog’ society. Instead of merely depicting the events of August 2011, the play sets out to explore their causes through a string of monologues. Characters such as The Thug and The Fight are intended to represent archetypes from a cross-section of British society rather than specific individuals.

A black working class woman, The Sparkle, depicts the bleakness and fear that set the tone in her neighbourhood - to intense, yet easily achieved effect. Likewise, few *Guardian*-educated members of the audience would have found it difficult to comprehend the frustration of The Fear, a young gang member who is not given a piece of the cake and consequently extorts crumbs at knifepoint. A guilty concern for the lower orders (provided they do not live next door) is a capacity that the middle strata of British society have long been trained to possess. However laudably intentioned these sentiments may be, challenging they are not.

More interestingly, we encounter a frustrated copper, contemptuous of unemployed youths and disillusioned with the lack of support he receives from his masters. Initially appearing like a stereotypical authoritarian, he soon reveals his profound fear of the angry mob he has to confront - and gradually wins our empathy. Similarly, the way in which the Conservatives’ monologues make us question whether the ultra-competitive

training ground for overachievers and alpha males, the British public school, can be in any way considered a humane means of bringing up children, and make for uncomfortable moments of contemplation - despite the characters’ revolting sense of entitlement.

If the all-too-familiar, personalised narrative of greedy bankers, corrupt politicians and racist cops, whose ill will is supposedly the root of all evil, is undermined, if something a little more systemic is hinted at, then it is not entirely unreasonable to anticipate a radical calling into question of the very pillars upon which our society rests. Regrettably, however, that is where *Mottled lines* lets us down, based as it is upon an erratic premise. Fear, prejudice and the sectional ideologies held by the characters are not understood as symptomatic of the underlying social conditions, but as the very causes of social conflict. It is implied that a change of attitudes, a simple overcoming of prejudice, would facilitate communication and relieve the tensions perceived to be eating away at society like a cancer.

Consequently, the playwright lamented in the Q&A session after the performance that politicians, the police and the underclass do not “chat to each other” enough. Meanwhile, the very existence of social classes, the relation between rulers and ruled, was virtually taken as a natural fact of life. For *Mottled lines* is, ultimately, a very British play - a play about ‘us’. As such, it is far less removed from its Tory characters’ lamenting “our once great nation” or Cameron’s real-life talk of a “broken Britain” than it imagines itself to be. For all its - somewhat toothless - invoking of the MP’s expenses scandal, it is essentially informed by the spirit of Miliband’s ‘Let’s all sit around a table and negotiate’ and Cameron’s ‘hug a hoodie’. True to the nationalist dream shared by everybody from the liberal left to the extreme right, it wishes for a class society without class antagonisms (or perhaps

just not quite so many class antagonisms, because, as the director and the playwright agreed during the Q&A, a society “in perfect harmony” would be “a bit Star Trek”, as well as “a bit Stalin”).

Most of the monologues that Maddocks conceived were sharp and the characters terrifyingly authentic. No doubt we are dealing with a gifted young playwright. It is a pity, then, that at a time when the youth are getting restless and Marx is being discussed in bourgeois newspapers once more, the most radical probing he subjects our society to resembles a hangover of post-left academia. It is that woolly zone where all oppressive relations derive from a fear of the Other, where class is just another ‘identity’, and cultural voluntarism can make the world a better place - or at least a place with a friendlier-looking veneer.

Sometimes, people conceal their helplessness by claiming they wish to avoid preaching, and if the *Mottled lines* publicists billed their play as “thought-provoking” and “asking questions rather than offering solutions”, then part of the reason is that there *are* no solutions as long as class society persists. During the Q&A session, it was all very well for the assembled liberals to ponder whether the play contained sufficiently strong female characters. But what about the society that throws up generations growing up on benefits - collateral damage in the global competition of rival states? They are fully aware they serve no purpose and are therefore viewed as mere scum. Could the British political class really solve this problem, even if it actually wanted to?

If Maddocks has a genuine desire to challenge the status quo, he will have to dig deeper to illuminate the root of the problems he sets out to examine. After all, talent is not what he is lacks ●

Maciej Zurowski

***Mottled lines* first ran at Richmond’s Orange Tree Theatre from July 10-14**

## 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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# weekly worker

The problem  
is macho  
culture

## Football through the looking glass

The John Terry racism trial has made for a sorrier spectacle than the average England match, writes  
**Harley Filben**

Conservative cultural commentators have always been snuffy and suspicious about the emergence of new genres and art forms. Television rotted our brains; then video games encouraged the young to psychotic violence. Of course, it is not television, cinema, popular fiction, games or anything else that is the privileged cultural practice in Britain today - that accolade belongs to football.

It is thus becoming wearisomely familiar for broader society - and especially the so-called chattering classes - to whip itself into an almighty frenzy about the bad behaviour of footballers and fans. The latest opportunity has come with the trial of John Terry, the Chelsea and England defender widely noted for being led repeatedly into trouble by his mouth and his penis alike.

Terry - as readers cannot fail to have noticed at *some* point over the last year - was alleged to have called Queens Park Rangers player Anton Ferdinand a "fucking black cunt" during a game last season. Much soul-searching was trudged through at the time, since it coincided with a similar incident involving Liverpool's Luis Suarez. Suarez was landed with an eight-match ban; extraordinarily, Terry was charged with a "racially aggravated public order offence".

The trial tells us nothing new about the supposed ingrained racism in footballing culture (of which, more later). It is, at least, a timely reminder of the general function of the British courts, which is to dispense justice in rough proportion to the money thrown at barristers. Terry is hardly a poor man himself - and behind him, he has Chelsea Football Club, the footballing colony of Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich.

It is not impossible that John Terry used the words 'fucking black cunt' in a straightforwardly malicious manner. With sufficiently expensive lawyers, however, enough doubt can be cast on the *context* of the insult that Terry can be acquitted. So it duly happened: the presiding magistrate was convinced enough by a frankly Byzantine argument (that Terry was sarcastically repeating Ferdinand's previous accusation of using the offending phrase) to let him off.

In a sane world, Terry would not even be accused of this 'crime'. He would not have to resort to formal-logical games or require the vast expense of a top-tier legal team - the notion that a verbal altercation between two football players constituted *any* kind of "public order offence" would be laughed out of court.

### Fever pitch

Ours is not a sane world, however - and thanks to its absurd over-valuation of soccer, all the collective neuroses and structural imbalances of contemporary British society manifest themselves in the beautiful game as in a fairground mirror: stretched and distorted to the point of caricature. The sheer volume of establishment tetchiness on display



John Terry: best lawyers

in the last couple of weeks has been staggering, given the insignificance of the Loftus Road incident.

The smaller displays of silliness are sometimes the most beautiful - the insistence, for example, of the media on styling the offending phrase "f\*\*king black c\*\*\*", dancing delicately around the officially designated curses, while leaving the word that supposedly caused public disorder unmolested; or indeed, the moment of chief magistrate Howard Riddle's judgment, in which the good, worthy gentleman was required to say, in the tone of high official seriousness: "Weighing all the evidence together, I think it is highly unlikely that Mr Ferdinand accused Mr Terry on the pitch of calling him a black cunt."

Above all, however, what is on display is our culture's utterly neurotic attitude towards race. The bad old days are supposed to be gone; not even the Tory right can get away with open racism these days. Nelson Mandela was once a byword in such circles for dangerous terrorist fanatics - now he is a secular saint.

In the last 50, and especially in the last 30 years, the British state

has bent over backwards to clear out its old imperial racist baggage. The result has been the state policy of multiculturalism, and a state-sponsored anti-racist ideology. Black, white or anything else, we are all Britons - united in our participation in those timeless British values of tolerance, liberalism and democracy. (It need hardly be said that the purported 'timelessness' of these values is a very historically specific ideology.)

Racism, nevertheless, persists. Its predominant expression today would be Islamophobia, which presents itself as a defence of the aforementioned 'British values' against intolerant Muslims - yet the bottom line is the same as it was with the biological racism of an Arnold Lees: harassment, up to and including physical attacks, of the brown-skinned Other.

There is also what you might call 'capillary racism' - the use of racial epithets and racist jokes remains broadly accepted in common language (although now only on the basis that all participants in the discourse accept that none are 'really' racist). The offensiveness of such language is hard to gauge, and depends largely on context - certainly it does not carry the same weight of popular prejudice as it did in the relatively recent past, but nor is it as neutered as the word 'sinister', which once implied that the left-handed were creatures of the devil.

The state is officially anti-racist, but unable to extinguish racism. Its necessary commitment to a chauvinist fetishism of the British nation, combined with the long-term legacy of colonialism and imperial hegemony, is enough to see to that. This is not enough to stop the plucky little anti-racists of officialdom trying - through ever more repressive legislation and police actions.

That these actions do not really work is clearly visible in the present case. Consider poor old Anton Ferdinand - he did not bring any complaint or initiate the court

proceedings, or indeed do anything apart from allegedly being called a "fucking black cunt" during a football match; but the trial has, if anything, forced him *more* into the spotlight and subjected him to the tribal wrath of Chelsea FC loyalists.

### 'Football culture'

It is this general aspect of the affair - the unseemly aggression apparently inherent in football, as well as its chequered history *vis-à-vis* race - that has triggered, as usual, the largest volume of chattering-class angst.

Whether or not football is *racist* in its fundamental culture today is rather hard to judge: racism is, in this country at least, officially frowned upon to a sufficient point that no racist player would be stupid enough to reel off his opinions if he thought anyone was listening. The days of black players having banana skins thrown at them by idiotic crowd members are more or less over. Certainly, it seems very unlikely that John Terry is some sort of white supremacist, being as he is the captain of a team drawn from all over the world.

Indeed, the great and final leap into self-parody last week came when Rio Ferdinand, Anton's brother, accused Ashley Cole, who testified in Terry's favour, of being a "choc-ice" - which seems to be a very British version of the African-American 'Oreo cookie'. His attempts to disclaim any racial content to this jibe were frankly even more ridiculous than Terry's 'sarcasm defence'; but the important thing is that the insult was only provoked because Terry's black team mates were quite eager to rush to his defence.

This means, of course, that they had to be comfortable with their captain allegedly throwing around racial epithets on the pitch. There is, apart from the obvious, no reason they wouldn't be - because football culture, far more than it is racist, is *macho*. Players hurl all the abuse

at each other that they can muster - the more offensive, the better. They squabble, cajole and occasionally shove each other around like yobs in the worst kind of pub.

The culture of the dressing room is based around macho male-bonding rituals. The victims are the obvious ones - women and especially gays, who must surely exist in significant numbers in the English game, but well and truly dare not speak their names. Justin Fashanu, to this day the only openly gay professional footballer in English history, was hounded to his suicide; Graeme Le Saux was the target of homophobic abuse throughout his playing career, more or less on the bases that he had been to university and read *The Guardian*.

The closest analogue to this culture is that of the barracks; and, just as any form of abuse will serve the drill sergeant in his campaign to dehumanise every recruit, so it is on the football pitch. The least important thing about racist abuse in this context is that it is racist.

Given the absurd hysteria over cases like this, it is easy to fall into a kind of cultural complacency - calm down, it's all just a bit of fun ... That is a temptation to be resisted. It is hardly healthy that the culture surrounding football thrives so completely on casual offensiveness; and the terraces' overlap with far-right politics is very real (the English Defence League is an obvious example, and there are more disturbing ones on the continent).

Yet this phenomenon is simply a peculiarly acute version of a deformed subjectivity typical of capitalist society more generally. Culture cannot be abolished by fiat. The left should not be led by its salutary opposition to racism and bigotry to support for official anti-racism, which in its own perverted way is just as divisive as racism itself. In the terraces and in wider society, it does not solve the fundamental problems: it aggravates them ●

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