

weekly **worker**



Overcoming illusions: Hillel Ticktin analyses the importance of the Marikana massacre

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Mike Phipps, Simon Hardy and Ben Lewis debate:

What sort of party do we need?



LETTERS



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

Marx's method

Nick Rogers says he does not understand the philosophical argument in relation to time and the temporal single-system interpretation (TSSI) "on the impossibility of fixing a single point in time" ('Rooted in capitalism', August 16). It's rather important to grasp if you are advocating a theory whose basis is temporal!

Trotsky explained it in his demolition of the ideas of the third camp: "Or is the 'moment' a purely mathematical abstraction: that is, a zero of time? But everything exists in time; and existence itself is an uninterrupted process of transformation; time is consequently a fundamental element of existence. Thus the axiom 'A is equal to A' signifies that a thing is equal to itself if it does not change: that is, if it does not exist" (*In defence of Marxism*).

It is perhaps no coincidence that several proponents of the TSSI are connected with the 'third camp', whose ideological basis was provided by the anti-Marxist philosophy of James Burnham. Burnham rejected dialectics and historical materialism. It was a rejection accepted by its other founder, Max Shachtman.

The approach of the TSSI is to consider things subjectively from the perspective of the individual capitalist. Just how far this subjectivism and humanism is remote from Marx's objective method can be seen by considering just two comments:

"In the course of our investigation we shall find, in general, that the characters who appear on the economic stage are but the personifications of the economic relations that exist between them" (*Capital* Vol 1, chapter 2).

"Time is everything, man is nothing; he is, at the most, time's carcase" (*The poverty of philosophy*).

If capitalist A invests capital X on January 1, and at year end finds that X is now worth X+n, due to a revaluation of capital, the TSSI accepts this as a profit, and proceeds on the basis that a discrete period of time has elapsed, the capitalist can now sell up their capital and take their profit. This is the position Nick adopts when he says, "For the purposes of the equation, Arthur (along with the majority of mainstream Marxists) can revalue the input C to 2,000 (irrespective of what was paid for it) if he wishes, but that does not change the reality of the situation - only 1,000 was actually paid."

This has absolutely nothing to do with Marx's analysis, which is based on capital as self-expanding value, and on the basis of continuous and continuing production. Once that is accepted, and concern for the plight of individual capitalists is discarded, it can be seen just how flawed the TSSI perspective is. Now the 'profit' obtained by the capitalist from this revaluation is no profit at all, because, when the capitalist replaces the capital consumed in production, all this additional 'profit' is needed to buy the replacement at its new, higher price! As others have pointed out, the TSSI involves hidden inflation/deflation, by holding nominal money prices constant. Any revaluation/devaluation of capital involves not just a change in its exchange value, but also of the money commodity, which acts as its equivalent value. Marx explains that necessity in chapter 1 of volume 1 of *Capital*.

I don't agree with Nick when he says, "So, if every single producer of K has paid 1,000 for C, it does not matter if the price of C subsequently

changes before, during or after the commodity (or aggregate output) has been produced: competition will ensure that K will reflect the price that was actually paid for C."

Suppose, we have C 1,000 + V 1,000 + S 1,000 = K 3,000. Let us grant Nick that all capitalists have bought means of production at this price, and, in line with his argument, they price accordingly despite the value of C rising to 3,000. When the new cycle of production begins, the capitalist has to lay out C 3,000 + V 1,000 = 4,000. They are 1,000 short, because their income has not covered the current replacement cost of the capital they have laid out! Nick's surplus has turned into a loss. They have a cash-flow crisis, and may go bust.

I have practical experience of this. A long time ago I worked for a company producing protective clothing. It had to buy cloth, to find and bid for contracts, and do costing and invoicing. Whenever, I bid for a contract, the first thing was to calculate the cloth needed, and then get a current price for it. Costing was done on that current price, no matter how much cloth we had in stock, and what we'd paid for it. There is no other sensible way to proceed. If you price on the basis of cheap cloth in stock, then you will not be able to reproduce the material used up at current prices. If material prices have fallen, and you price on the basis of the cloth in stock, you will be undercut by others who have bid at current prices.

Marx knew all this from Engels, which is why he uses current replacement cost for valuing capital, not historic prices. It is competition, and the need to reproduce capital consumed at current prices that forces the value of the end commodity to reflect the replacement cost, not the historical cost of capital.

But there are other reasons why Nick's argument fails here. For most commodities, the capital used in their production is not bought at the beginning of the year and then used during the rest of the year. It is this view of time as discrete blocks that is wrong with the TSSI. Capital is bought and used continuously throughout the year, and it is bought at current prices. A fundamental aspect of Marx's theory of value is that commodities of the same kind existing in the same period of time have the same value. According to Nick, we would have a whole series of different values for commodities of the same kind, perhaps even sitting in the same stock room with different exchange values, depending on when they were bought, and an average price arising from them.

Nick says: "So the rise in the price of constant capital would be expected to lead to a fall in the rate of profit. However, those capitalists who bought stocks of the raw material before the price rise will not experience that fall. Sounds as if the historic price might just be relevant to the determination of the rate of profit after all." But that is not what Marx is saying. He is saying that the rate of profit will fall, but that some capitalists may be compensated for this fall by making a capital gain, and vice versa.

Nick's comments about the identity of prices and values also speaks against him. If some market prices (because there was a lot of finished products on the market produced with lower priced inputs) are lower than their values dictates, then the 'losses' made are cancelled by the gains of other capitalists who buy those inputs. From the perspective of capital in general it can have no effect on the rate of profit.

Nick takes me to task for not dealing with arguments put forward

by Andrew Kliman, but I was writing a response to Nick's article, not to Kliman. In fact, I debated the deficiencies of the TSSI directly with Kliman some months ago (see <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2011/12/08/andrew-kliman-and-the-failure-of-capitalist-production/>).

Nick quotes what I said about crises of overproduction and concludes: "Sounds like a fairly unambiguous statement of the underconsumptionist case to me." Well, if it is then Marx and Engels must have been underconsumptionists too, because its pretty much verbatim what they say!

"Overproduction of capital ... is therefore simply over-accumulation of capital ... The same occurs when there is an overproduction of commodities, when markets are overstocked. Since the aim of capital is not to minister to certain wants, but to produce profit, and since it accomplishes this purpose by methods which adapt the mass of production to the scale of production, not vice versa, a rift must continually ensue between the limited dimensions of consumption under capitalism and a production which forever tends to exceed this immanent barrier." (www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch15.htm).

The answer to Nick's dilemma over why in the 80s rates of profit could be high, yet accumulation low, is simple. The rate of profit does not just depend on the volume of surplus value. It also depends on the value of capital. The whole point is that during this period capital was devalued! It was devalued because of the economic slowdown, because real wages were falling or stagnant, because existing capital was being replaced when it wore out with cheaper, more effective capital. In addition, changes in consumption and production occurred.

Nick's argument relies on a view of productive industry as the old smoke stacks and assembly lines. In fact, modern productive industry is based on knowledge and skill. The most valuable company in the world is Apple. It has relatively little in the way of constant capital. It has a relatively low organic composition of capital, because its value derives from the thousands of highly skilled programmers and developers it employs. The same is true of Microsoft, Google and dozens of other IT companies, as well as the many bio-technology and pharmaceutical companies. The same is true of productive enterprises in the media, leisure and entertainment industry - Manchester United, for example.

Nick oddly argues that planning by firms and states implies the end of competition! On the contrary, such planning has raised competition to new heights! That was what Marxist economists discovered during the 1980s. The point is that it is not the kind of competition that existed in the first half of the 19th century, the kind of competition that is central to the neo-classical view. Moreover, given that Marx describes the law of value as a law of nature that exists throughout man's history, during most of which production of use values was planned, it's hard to see how such planning could abolish it! Indeed, it's hard to see how capitalist planning of the production of exchange values even challenges the form of the law!

I've responded to Nick's arguments in more detail on my blog (<http://boffeyblog.blogspot.co.uk/2012/08/in-time-of-nick-rogers.html>).

Arthur Bough
email

Conciliator

I note with no great astonishment that the *Morning Star* has tried to play the role of conciliator between the oppressed and oppressors following

the horrific massacre of 34 striking South African miners by the police.

So on its website on August 23 there is an offensively bland and neutral report entitled, 'South Africa mourns shot miners'. Here we read that more than more than 1,000 people attended the "government-arranged memorial service" in Marikana, where they listened to president Jacob Zuma calling "on the nation to commemorate not only the miners, but all victims of South Africa's violence" - who then went on to say that the day "should be an opportunity" for the nation to "mourn and promote a violence-free society". Furthermore, the unnamed journalist quotes Zuma piously maintaining that now was "not a time for pointing fingers". Therefore he will not "judge the incident" - rather the "judicial commission of inquiry will do so".

You would almost think from reading this snippet that Zuma was absolved of all responsibility for the killings - hey, nothing to do with me - or that he and the African National Congress were not part of a thoroughly corrupt and repressive government ruthlessly determined to serve the interests of capitalism. An impression reinforced by another anodyne online article from September 2 concerning the decision by South Africa's prosecutors to provisionally withdraw the murder charges brought against 270 miners using apartheid-era 'common purpose' laws - a damning indictment of the ANC government if ever there was one. Surely any self-avowed socialist or communist newspaper would be denouncing those who front or excuse capitalist exploitation and violence?

But, no. All we read in the above article by the *Morning Star*'s "foreign desk" is that the "announcement follows a huge barrage of criticism from political parties, trade unions and legal experts" and that Lonmin is "desperate to restart production at its mines, which have been idle for three weeks". No doubt. The rest of the piece merely informs us of the following:

"And unrest in South Africa's mining industry seems now to have spread from the platinum sector to the goldfields. Mining company Gold Fields have said that about a quarter of its 46,000 workers have walked out on strike, apparently over the extent of a funeral cover agreement. Around 12,000 miners have been on an 'unlawful and unprotected' strike at the KDC mine near Johannesburg since Wednesday. And workers at a mine east of Johannesburg run by another gold producer, Gold One, are said to be preparing to go on strike tomorrow to demand higher wages. Meanwhile, South Africa's police are facing pressure from the watchdog, which has received nearly 200 complaints from arrested miners of being assaulted and abused while in police custody."

Monstrously, but with a certain logic, the *Morning Star* just cannot bring itself to unambiguously condemn the anti-working class ANC government because to do so would also mean criticising the Congress of South African Trade Unions and most of all its 'sister' party, the South African Communist Party - both of which are in formal alliance with the ANC - SACP members are part of the ANC government. But for the likes of the *Star*'s Communist Party of Britain just about the worst crime imaginable is to violate the 'official communist' norms of diplomatic internationalism - far worse, in fact, than shooting dead striking workers.

Principled communists would not only unambiguously condemn the police massacre, but demand the immediate withdrawal from the

alliance of Cosatu and the SACP.

Eddie Ford
email

Dishonesty

Whenever the Unite trade union bureaucrats need a champion, Jim Denham is never far away. In a thoroughly dishonest piece on the *Workers' Liberty* website ('London bus strike a defeat?', which also appeared as a letter in the August 22 issue of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty's *Solidarity*), he rushes to the bureaucrats' aid. He was defending them against an attack by myself in the August 1 issue of *Solidarity* that was also carried on the *Weekly Worker* letters page (August 2).

The dishonesty consists of the title and the way Denham twists the August 1 article - headed 'London bus workers' victory is bittersweet' - to make it sound as if I had called it a defeat. He says: "Okay, the author of the *Solidarity* piece didn't use the word 'defeat', but he might as well have done, given the negative, carping (and none-too-honest) tone and content of the article." He then goes on ridiculously to liken the Len McCluskey leadership of Unite to US Trotskyist leader Jim Cannon and his action in accepting a compromise in the 1934 teamsters struggle in Minneapolis.

Jim Denham championed the United Left stitch-up meeting that elected Len McCluskey as their candidate for general secretary, pouring scorn on Jerry Hicks for walking out and those who objected that the meeting was packed with full-time officers who were in effect voting for their own careers. In the Socialist Unity blog on September 6 2009 he said that the participation of full-timers "may or may not be a good thing".

Now Jim is outraged because I put the victory in its proper context: three years of below-inflation wage settlements and the London-wide introduction of a two-tier workforce with appalling pay rates and conditions for new starters, without a peep of opposition from Unite.

He says: "That's why ['bus driver'] cannot bring themselves to acknowledge that a real victory was achieved - one that can and must provide the basis for further united action, including an all-London pay claim next year." If Unite does put in an all-London pay claim next year, I will be absolutely amazed and delighted, but, given that it abandoned the all-London campaign for parity in 2008 and championed the exact opposite ever since, I would examine that claim very closely. Only one rate and one set of conditions for *all* bus drivers constitutes a real fightback and you can only do that by fighting the competitive tendering of all routes - another basic demand Unite never makes.

In July 1934 James Cannon defended the compromise made by union branches to secure a settlement which won union recognition in the whole region. The Stalinists were still in their ultra-left third period (it would last another year before they adopted the abandonment of class politics in the popular frontism which remains their politics today. They attacked Cannon, saying: "The two Minneapolis strikes have in a concentrated and very clear form exposed the Trotskyite policies on the united front, on the question of social-fascism, on the question of revolution, as well as their reformist conception of strike strategy and tactics" (www.mltranslations.org/US/archive/dunneminn.htm).

Then it was a matter of a rank-and-file movement forcing a union leadership into action and then accepting less than was asked

for because a compromise was necessary. The vital question of union recognition was won. On the London buses it is a matter of a bureaucracy, defended by a fake rank-and-file movement, the United Left, which *is* the trade union bureaucracy to all intents and purposes. Jim Denham strains at a gnat, but swallows a camel. They do absolutely nothing as the bus companies press forward with major attacks on their members and then mount a one-off campaign to win a minor concession, whilst leaving the rest of the major problems unaddressed. Every bus driver knows this. The more militant ones complain about it, but Jim Denham is so defensive of the bureaucracy that he thinks they should ignore all of this, because it is “negative, carping (and none-too-honest)”.

Bus driver
email

Barrels

David Walters says he prefers Arthur Bough’s optimism to my “rather gloomy outlook” when it comes to energy (Letters, July 19). Arthur previously based his optimism on the long wave and the market. Now he adds to this the law of value. As for me, I have never taken a gloomy outlook, because I have always argued that moving away from capitalism provides a basis for finding a solution to any challenges we may face as a result of the decline in oil production.

It is Walters who now argues that the market will solve the energy problems we face. He says that “... it’s amazing how much oil becomes available at \$100/bbl versus \$60/bbl. Imagine what it is at \$150/bbl. That’s capitalist economics and it’s real.” Obviously David does not yet understand the implications of the peaking of global oil production. In 2008, when oil prices rocketed to \$147/bbl, the world economy began to collapse. In other words, long experience has shown that rising oil prices lead to recession, which in turn brings down the price of oil.

What’s surprising is that oil prices even now are still relatively high, even though the global economy has slowed down. A return to global economic growth, if this is possible, will result in the highest oil prices the world has ever seen. In financial terms peak oil means that economic growth leads to rising oil prices, which in turn leads to recession.

Capitalism is facing a problem of growth because of rising oil prices due to the difficulties the oil industry is having in raising oil production. The late LF Ivanhoe, a petroleum geologist, estimated that the date when global oil demand would exceed supply would fall between 2000 and 2010. This prediction may be coming true now, and would represent a turning point for humanity.

According to David, there are hundreds of billions of barrels of oil in the sands of Alberta, Canada, and in the Orinoco, Venezuela. True. But this unconventional oil doesn’t flow nor can it be pumped. It has to be dug up - an expensive process. In other words, unconventional oil is going to be more costly oil, which means it can only marginally replace depleting conventional oil.

David also paints a rosy picture for nuclear energy. However, Michael Dittmar, a scientist at the Institute of Particle Physics in Zurich, has presented a paper with the title, *The end of cheap uranium*. This study estimates a possible peak for uranium production by 2015.

David calls on Marxists to wake up. Well said, but what they need to wake up to is the fact that capitalism is a product of cheap energy from fossilised fuels and is bound to decline and collapse with rising energy costs. Marxist economics doesn’t take energy into account in its theory

of society so is unable to grasp the essence of the present crisis facing capitalism.

Tony Clark
London

Value-free?

Tony Greenstein’s excellent article (‘Comment is not always free’ *Weekly Worker* August 16) on the censorship of Moshé Machover by *The Guardian* over the ridiculous claim of anti-Semitism follows other worrying developments at the paper - the most recent of which is the appointment of Joshua Treviño to its United States political commentary team.

Treviño is a rightwinger whose response to the Gaza flotilla of 2011 was to call via Twitter for the Israel Defence Force to ensure the immediate death of all of those participating: “Dear IDF: If you end up shooting any Americans on the new

Gaza flotilla - well, most Americans are cool with that. Including me.” This was subsequently followed by tweets arguing that the flotilla was “not morally different from a Nazi convoy”.

Surprisingly *The Guardian*’s decision to appoint a journalist who has urged the IDF to shoot unarmed Americans has provoked strong reactions from all, resulting in a hastily assembled non-apology from Treviño for “giving the impression that I welcome killing” - alongside a rewording by the rag of Treviño’s job description to that of a “freelance writer”.

This embarrassed backtracking aside, all this perhaps reflects a significant development in the political direction of the paper. So much for “value-free” commentary.

Bob D
email

Summer Offensive

Home page

Our annual, two-month fundraising drive, the Summer Offensive, this year came up short of our £25k target. When all the Communist University bar tabs were hunted down, when all the stall moneyboxes were gutted and the five-minutes-to-midnight standing orders factored in, our comrades, readers and supporters had raised £23,266.

So not a vintage year by any stretch of the imagination - regular readers may remember that we actually bust through the same £25,000 barrier last year, when we raised a magnificent £29,684. It is probably accurate to say that this year’s SO actually *showed* our comrades more potential than it realised. But still an’ all, it was a fine achievement for a small organisation. Again this year, our people have performed collective and individual financial miracles and the leadership of the CPGB sends its warm congratulations and thanks to every single comrade - whether they are members of the organisation or currently on its periphery - who have contributed to this year’s campaign.

At the SO celebration meal on August 25 - a benefit event for Workers Fund Iran held on the penultimate evening of Communist University - we thanked some of those individuals. Comrade MM was rightly honoured for his magnificent individual finishing total of £1,256. However, it was a particular pleasure for me to see comrades who had put in such hard yards on the redesign/relaunch of the party’s website (which, of course, had provided real impetus to the SO drive itself) get some recognition for their invaluable work. Thanks and congratulations once again to comrades JE, LM and JT for this. (The first of these deserves particular credit, as the comrade comes from a very different political current/tradition to ours - but is a communist with sufficient nous to recognise the precious role that the *Weekly Worker* and the organisation that supports it is playing in this critical period for the revolutionary left.)

In fact, speaking of the role of our paper - and the website where most comrades read it and whose content it drives

forward weekly - prompts me to highlight what I think is the real missed opportunity of this year’s SO. Last year, we “put the paper, and the development of its format and reach, right at the heart” of the Summer Offensive. There is no question that this is what accounted for our brilliant success in 2011. This year, despite our *declared* aim to do the same, a genuine campaign to make this a reality did not come together.

This speaks of a number of organisational problems we drag around with us.

On the one hand, as a political trend we have always operated with a relatively skeletal organisational centre - made weaker over the past few years or so by our unpaid volunteers trying to work around growing time constraints, as social pressures have multiplied and the dull compulsion of earning a crust has become more insistent. So ‘HQ initiatives’ have been fewer and less inclusive this year.

On the other hand, it also underlines the fact that for too long much of the initiative for SOs *has* come from that centre, from a small team of veterans of an annual campaign that has been with us since 1985. A challenge for us over the coming period must be to generalise those aspects of our culture that have been important building blocks of what we have achieved as an organisation; the political/cultural norms that have allowed us to build so much despite an often stubbornly unreceptive audience.

To summarise, this year’s SO should again provide us with optimism and a sense of potential. We should take the momentum we established in its course to properly address what we talked about in the campaign itself: consolidating and building the supporting reader-base of the *Weekly Worker* and utilising the outstanding material it produces to make it simply unthinkable for any serious partisan of the workers’ movement *not* to have our site as their home page.

So, comrades - that’s the next task. How are you going to help? ●

Mark Fischer

ACTION

CPGB podcasts

Every Monday we upload a podcast commenting on the current political situation. In addition, the site features voice files of public meetings and other events: <http://cpgb.org.uk/home/podcasts>

London Communist Forum

Sunday September 9, 5pm: Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by open discussion and *Capital* reading group. Caxton House, 129 St John’s Way, London N19. This meeting: Vol 1, chapter 3, section 3, ‘Money’. Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Saturday, September 8, 11.15am to 5pm: Taster day - an introduction to human origins.

Tuesday September 18, 6.15pm: ‘The science of mythology’. Speaker: Chris Knight. St Martin’s Community Centre, 43 Carol Street, London NW1 (two minutes from Camden Town tube). Cost per session: £10 waged, £5 low waged, £3 unwaged (taster day free). Discounts for whole term. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: www.radicalanthropologygroup.org.

No deportations

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

TUC action call

Sunday September 9, 12noon: Lobby the TUC for a 24-hour general strike. Assemble 1pm, The Level park, Union Road, Brighton. March 1.30pm to Brighton Centre. Organised by the National Shop Stewards Network: www.nssn.org.uk.

No detention, no deportation

Sunday September 9, 2pm to 5pm: Meeting to discuss UKBA procedure, Kinning Park complex (opposite Kinning Park underground station, Cornwall Street, off Paisley Road West, Glasgow G41. Childcare provided. Organised by Unity Centre: www.unitycentreglasgow.org.

LGBT - are we there yet?

Monday September 10, 6pm: TUC fringe meeting, Regent Room, Grand Hotel, 97-99 King’s Road, Brighton. Organised by TUC LGBT committee: www.tuc.org.uk/equality.shopstewards.net.

Build for October 20

Monday September 10, 7 pm: Public meeting, Stockwell Community Resource Centre, Studley Road, Lambeth, London SW4. Build for national TUC demonstration. Organised by Lambeth TUC: www.lambethtradesunioncouncil.com.

No to McNulty

Tuesday September 11, 5:30pm: Rally, Grand Hotel, 97-99 King’s Road Brighton, BN1. Organised by RMT: www.actionforrail.org.uk.

Love Music, Hate Racism

Saturday September 15, 1pm to 1am: Anniversary event, Rich Mix, Bethnal Green Road, London E1. Day and evening: £12 waged, £6 unwaged. Day or evening only: £6 waged, £3 unwaged. From Rich Mix: www.richmix.org.uk. Organised by Love Music, Hate Racism: www.lovemusichateracism.com.

Free Miami Five

Tuesday September 18, 6pm: Vigil, US embassy, Grosvenor Square, London W1 (nearest tube: Bond Street). Speakers include Aleida Guevara, daughter of Che Guevara. Organised by the Cuba Solidarity Campaign: www.cuba-solidarity.org.

Save our services

Wednesday September 19, 6pm: Lobby - defend public services in Lambeth, town hall, Brixton Hill, London SW2. Organised by Lambeth Save Our Services: <http://lambethsaveourservices.org>.

Fight for Sites

Thursday September 20, 7:30pm: Public launch, Toynbee Hall, 28 Commercial Street, London E1.
Friday October 19, 1pm: Demonstration, London Victoria station. One year since police stormed Dale Farm. Organised by Traveller Solidarity: www.travellersolidarity.org.

Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition

Saturday September 22, 11am-5pm: National conference, room B34, Birkbeck College, Malet Street, London WC1. £5 waged, £2 unwaged. Organised by Tusc: www.tusc.org.uk.

Remember Bhopal

Sunday September 23, 2pm to 5pm: Meeting and screening of *Bhopali*, 68 Hope Street, Liverpool L1. Organised by Bhopal Survivors Tour: <http://bhopalsurvivorstourlmu.eventbrite.com>.

Unite the Resistance

Saturday November 17, 10am to 5pm: National conference, Emmanuel Centre, 9-23 Marsham Street, London SW1. Organised by Unite the Resistance: www.uniteresist.org.

CPGB wills

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

SOUTH AFRICA

New declaration of class war

Hillel Ticktin analyses the importance of Marikana

The strike of the Marikana Lonmin platinum mine workers in South Africa is historic. For the first time since 1994, an important group of workers have come out openly in protest against the 'official' African National Congress/South African Communist Party trade union. This is not the first non-ANC strike: for example, workers struck at the Mercedes Benz factory in Uitenhage on a clearly leftwing and internationalist platform some years ago. However, the factory was not a critical part of Mercedes Benz internationally and the strike was defeated, without much impact. There have been other protests among the half a million workers in the South African mines, but they have been contained.

The killing of some 44 persons at the Lonmin platinum mine has shown the world the reality of social relations in South Africa under the ANC and SACP. At last there is an end to the illusion that Nelson Mandela, backed by the Communist Party, had overthrown a system of discrimination and mass poverty for the majority, and wealth and opportunity for the few.

Affiliates to the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) are like those in the former Soviet Union - controlled by the bureaucrats in power. The Communist Party served and serves in the government which controlled and controls incomes and appoints the personnel in leading posts in the trade unions. The SACP has been compared to a tennis player who hits the ball over the net and then runs around the other side to return it.

The fact is that leading members of the ANC, such as the long-time former general secretary of the miners' union before 1994, Cyril Ramaphosa, are multi-billionaires, holding shares and jobs in major mining companies, including, in the case of Ramaphosa, Lonmin.¹ The salaries of the trade union bureaucrats are much like those of British unions: many times the wages of ordinary workers.

"But almost all of the strikers feel the established National Union of Mineworkers has failed them - caring more about mine bosses and political leaders than the worker in shafts. The dominant NUM has been able to keep peace in the sector by typically limiting the duration of strikes to periods that do not cause major harm to the bottom line of mining firms or the purse strings of miners who lose out on wages."²

Wages are abysmal, insufficient for basic food requirements, let alone decent housing. In spite of talk of building millions of good homes for the majority in 1994, the state did little, leaving the issue to the private sector. The vast shanty towns continue to exist. The exact situation with wages is contested, in that Lonmin talks of wages per worker of around 10,600 rand per month, whereas workers say they are actually paid 4,200 rand (13.5 rand=£1).³ As one observer pointed out, "Wages and salaries as a proportion of national wealth have fallen, relative to profit, in recent decades. In the past 15 years, the richest 20% were the only people to experience growth in real wages, whereas the lowest decile endured the greatest decrease."⁴ No doubt the Lonmin miners also lost out, receiving increases which did not compensate for inflation.

In short, the market rules and provides for its usual beneficiaries.

With the rapid decline of gold production in South Africa - from roughly 1,000 tonnes per annum at its peak to less than 200 tonnes today - platinum mining has taken its place as the major export from the country. One researcher has made the point that gold production is continuing to fall and that the major mines are nearing exhaustion,⁵ after causing considerable environmental pollution. Anglo-American, the South African economic colossus, has got out of gold mining completely. Hence the considerable importance of the boom in platinum. Since platinum is the major catalyst used in car exhausts the world over, and South Africa is the world's major producer, the transfer from gold to platinum is fortuitous - and critical to the economic viability of South African capitalism. If production of platinum in South Africa diminishes, it will create a problem for global car manufacturers, and for attempts to deal with climate change.

Opposite effect

The strike itself might have been less immediately important had the police not shot the strikers on August 16, when 34 were killed and 78 wounded. The company, Lonmin, could have conducted negotiations and come to some kind of settlement, whether through a lock-out and starvation strategy or through concessions or a combination of the two. The further action of the government in incarcerating some 259 workers plus the intention of blaming the workers for the event to the point of indicting them, effectively on murder charges, had the opposite effect to that intended. It raised the issue throughout the population. The government, ANC and SACP have attempted to justify their actions by spreading negative and tendentious propaganda about the strike, strikers and the shooting itself. This, in turn, can only inflame the situation. Given the reports of torture of the miners themselves, the company, the police and

the state now stand indicted before world opinion.

The Benchmarks Foundation report, *Communities in the platinum minefields*, says platinum mining operations at Marikana include "high levels of fatalities" and that the "residential conditions under which Lonmin employees live are appalling".⁶

Jay Naidoo, former minister in the Mandela cabinet of 1994, has come out with a sharp critique of the situation: "Many of the leaders [the masses] revered have abandoned the townships for the Armani lifestyle previously exclusive to leafy white suburbs. They have long lost touch with the disgruntlement brewing in society. To compound the situation, a new, predatory elite of middlemen is unashamedly corrupting state officials and stealing tenders and licences. They cloak their crime of looting the state treasuries with militant, populist rhetoric that further inflames the already difficult reality."⁷

Nelson Mandela presided over a settlement in which formal discrimination was abolished, but the market ruled. Top ANC/SACP officials became billionaires and an African junior bourgeoisie and middle class was created, while the situation of the majority did not improve. For the working class, mass unemployment of over 40% remained, while pay was insufficient for survival. Life expectation is low, to a considerable extent because of Aids, but the Aids epidemic could have been greatly reduced if not for the refusal to supply anti-retrovirals much earlier.

Given the outflow of capital

from South Africa, both because of the flow of profits from the mines, like Marikana, and because the South African middle class and bourgeoisie is sending its savings abroad, investment has not gone into what is required. Shanty towns and migratory labour remain, and the government programme for housing is dependent on private enterprise. Talk about nationalisation of the mines - supposedly one of the aims of the ANC programme, the Freedom Charter - has been revived, but it will remain at the level of 'talk', as it has for the last 18 years.

The problem is capitalism itself, not the existence of corruption - of course, corruption does not help, but is not the fundamental cause. Without the state mobilisation of the money earned in the mines to provide the wages, housing, etc, little can change. The desperate struggle for existence in South Africa means that it is one of the world leaders in crime and most particularly in numbers of rapes committed. The government has done little to alter this situation.

Classical victory

To understand the class relationships in South Africa today it is necessary to understand the nature of capitalism in South Africa, before 1994, and its history before that time. The settlement in the period 1989-94 amounted to an agreement that there would be no attempt to move to socialism or even social democracy. Instead, a so-called black middle class would be built up, and formal discrimination abolished, but the existing professional middle class inside and outside the civil service would remain and keep their pensions intact, while business would not be touched. So-called "black economic empowerment" incorporated a small layer of blacks at the top of the ANC and Communist Party plus a few others. Even there, the central direction and ownership of most important big business remains where it always has been. The legally agreed migration of big capital to the London stock exchange shows where real power lies.

On the other hand, it was agreed that the South African government would maintain strict fiscal discipline.

Indeed it became the favoured pupil of the International Monetary Fund. Unemployment, therefore, remained in the region of 40%-60% of the workforce, wages remained low and housing abysmal. The ANC/SACP did not even try to emulate the social democratic policy of the west European countries after the war and go for industrial expansion, a state-provided housing policy with full employment, etc. Nor for that matter did it try to copy the policy of Japan and South Korea, although urged to do so by some of their friendly economists. That would have involved a deliberate programme of high tariffs and support for the building of industry. By doing so the ANC/SACP would have crossed their friends in power in the USA and Europe, but at least they would have been on record as trying.

All this represented nothing less than the victory of the classical capitalist class in South Africa, which had always opposed apartheid, preferring to employ the cheapest labour where possible. Discrimination against so-called 'non-whites' was a policy which the capitalist class accepted as a means of maintaining capitalism itself, through using white workers as a privileged layer who could police industry and the economic system as a whole. However, such an economic form was expensive and inefficient and hence the capitalist class in South Africa, and in the west, was not displeased when they found they could remove it without worrying about the stability of the system itself - successful talks between the USA and the USSR were conducted on the subject. At the same time, the Afrikaner capitalist and middle classes abandoned support for their own privileged working class, while the internal opposition was effectively contained.

The SACP was probably the most slavishly Stalinist of all communist parties, having the dubious distinction of supporting the invasion of Czechoslovakia before the event. That not only meant that it was bewildered when the Soviet Union ceased to exist, but that it would continue its never-ending 'stages' line. In other words, in the first stage they would deal with apartheid, then with something else and something else - until some time in the far future they might think about capitalism. Without any understanding of the present stage of capitalism, they accepted reality and became managers of a transition to a classical capitalism, without the incubus of racial discrimination. Inevitably that meant little or no change for the majority. Indeed, the end of the cold war necessarily led to the present crisis in capitalism, and that has worsened conditions in South Africa.

In effect, the method of abolition of formal racial discrimination has not changed the real situation of the majority - but it has robbed them of the means of changing it. The official trade unions act in the interests of those managing the system itself. That is why the platinum workers' strike is a new declaration of class war which can only reverberate throughout South Africa, Africa and the rest of the world, even if there is not yet any party to take up the issue ●

Notes

1. www.lonmin.com/downloads/NOM_2012.pdf.
2. 'South Africa seeks mine peace, wage deal may be elusive' *Karachi Business Recorder*: www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183/1232092.
3. A England, 'South Africa: a mine of contention' *Financial Times* August 24.
4. M Reddy, 'Marikana the latest chapter in a long saga' *Johannesburg Mail and Guardian*: <http://mg.co.za/article/2012-08-24-00-marikana-the-latest-chapter-in-a-long-saga>.
5. "... it must be accepted that the Witwatersrand goldfields are now 95% exhausted and production rate will fall permanently below 100 tonnes per year within the coming decade. Given the energy and environmental problems associated with ongoing groundwater control, water-resource contamination by acid mine drainage and the possibility of widespread mercury and other factors of pollution caused by illicit underground ore-processing by the zama-zamas, the glory days of South African gold mining appear to have arrived finally at an ignominious end" (CJH Hartnady, 'South Africa's gold production and reserves' *South African Journal of Science* Vol 105, No9-10, September-October 2009).
6. www.benchmarks.org.za/research/rustenburg_review_policy_gap_final_aug_2012.pdf. 'South Africa Lonmin mine massacre puts nationalisation back on agenda' *The Guardian* August 29. The article's strap reads: "Mining the world's richest platinum deposits means misery, death, poverty, illness and environmental damage for many."
7. J Naidoo, 'A wake-up call for South Africa's Armani elitists' *Financial Times* August 27.



Cry freedom

DEBATE

Communist University featured a debate on the question, ‘What kind of anti-capitalist party does the left need?’ Here we publish the three platform speeches

What sort of party do we need?



Stay with what exists

**Mike Phipps,
Labour Briefing**

In my view we need a mass party of the working class which breaks from the economic, social and international outlook of capitalism and adopts popular socialist policies, strengthening its relations with the trade unions and operating an inclusive policy towards socialist societies and organisations. It must be a party that takes power and makes fundamental changes to society.

Let me develop these points. Firstly, anti-capitalism is not enough. It may provide a framework for a necessary united front to bring together the widest possible forces against an offensive of the bourgeoisie that has lasted for over 30 years and is now intensifying, but it is not in itself a programme or even a platform of ideas. Too often anti-capitalism is something that allows the left to retreat into its comfort zone, without having to deal with the tricky issue of a political alternative. But if we do not deal with them, we

will not make much progress. More importantly, we will not be able to put forward a credible alternative.

Recently a prominent UK Uncut activist was interviewed on *Newsnight*. Asked what alternative policies she would put forward, she said it was not her role to do so - it was up to the politicians. This is not a new outlook, but it is wrong. Right now, with the dominant narrative that we are ‘living beyond our means’, it is vital to spell out - even cost out - viable solutions. Where are we going to get the money

from to do what we need to? We can and should answer that. But we must be able to articulate an alternative vision. Call it socialism, if you like, if you do not think the word is too compromised or besmirched.

Articulating an alternative vision means a turn to sustainable reindustrialisation, based on educated and skilled labour; a new model of the welfare state that expands democracy into the social and economic spheres; economic policies that expand domestic markets, not on the basis of

a renewed consumerism, but through collective needs and collective consumption, such as good public transport and affordable housing, based on a new model of public sector that includes consumer representation and involves the socialisation of both banking and energy sectors. None of this sounds unreasonable. Much of it was spelt out in more detail in a recent article by Russian Marxist Boris Kagarlitsky. Most of it would be quite popular - and if you are serious about winning power, it helps to be popular.

DEBATE

Costing it would also make it credible. Most people want Britain out of Afghanistan and the cancellation of expensive nuclear weapons programmes. But that would not fund everything. Nor can there be any return to post-war Keynesianism when the so-called advanced countries funded their reforms at the expense of the semi-colonial periphery.

So if we are going to do what is necessary, not only do we need break with militarism: we are also going to have to make the rich and the corporate sector pay more - and that is likely to lead to confrontation. "Can this be achieved without revolutions?" asks Kagarlitsky. "Perhaps in some cases, but only in the context of revolutions elsewhere, in something like the way that Scandinavian social democracy benefited from the Russian Revolution of 1917."

Likewise, it goes without saying that any movement for fundamental socialist change must be international in character. And obviously this movement would need to be part of a broader international effort to implement a solution to the capitalist crisis that meets the needs of working people elsewhere.

Vanguard party

But if a revolution seems likely, then surely we need to prepare by building a revolutionary party?

Well, not necessarily. As I'm addressing a communist university, let me remind you of how Marx posed the question in *The communist manifesto*:

"In what relation do the communists stand to the proletarians as a whole? The communists do not form a separate party opposed to the other working class parties. They have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole. They do not set up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement."

This issue of sectarianism was one Marx returned to repeatedly. He explained it many years later: "The sect seeks its *raison d'être* and its *point d'honneur* not in what it has in common with the class movement, but in the particular shibboleth distinguishing it from that movement." The true content of the sect, he argued, was to "carry this as an enriching element into the general movement".

I do not quote this because I believe that citing Marx settles the issue for all time. I quote it for its insight.

In my view, the whole idea of a Leninist vanguard party needs to be reassessed. Even in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution - let alone today - it is doubtful if the policy of building separate communist parties was correct, based as it was on wildly inaccurate perspectives. Here is Zinoviev, for example, at the Second Congress of the Communist International: "I am deeply convinced that the 2nd World Congress of the CI is the precursor of another world congress, the world congress of Soviet Republics." Pat Byrne, a *Labour Briefing* comrade, goes so far as to argue that the Comintern's insistence on the creation of a separate party in Italy despite the affiliation of the Italian Socialist Party to the Comintern in 1919 caused immense divisions in the movement that contributed to the triumph of fascism a few years later.

But I do not say this to debate history so much as to make a more general point. The construction of a party today need not be a choice between two rotten apparatuses - that of social democracy or Stalinism. Happily, the experiences - particularly since the 1960s - of social movements, ecological organisations, the different elements of the new left, especially beyond Europe, have enriched our understanding of what is possible.

In the 1980s I lived for a while in Nicaragua. The Sandinistas, nationalist and leftist, were a vanguard party that

practised guerrilla warfare, organised a popular insurrection, seized power and then won a fair election at the height of Reagan's contra war against them before losing office in 1990. They were far more pluralist than the Cuban revolutionaries who inspired them - at one point there were five priests in the government. And they were re-elected back into power a few years ago.

In Uruguay today, José Mujica is the president, a former guerrilla fighter, who founded the Movement for Popular Participation - part of the Broad Front coalition, banned under the dictatorship in the 1970s. According to a report in the *Washington Post* earlier this month, his "entire cabinet signed onto a proposed law, which aims to take over the illegal marijuana trafficking business estimated to be worth \$30 million-\$40 million a year. The law would have government control marijuana imports, production, sale and distribution, creating a legal market for people to get pot without turning to riskier, illegal drugs. The text submitted to Congress declares that the drug war" - that is Washington's drugs war - "is a failure".

Mujica lives with his partner on a farm, grows flowers as a business, owns an aging Volkswagen Beetle - his only asset - and gives 87% of his salary to charity. "Be the change you want to see in the world," said Gandhi, a watchword now incongruously borrowed by the centre-left Labour Party grouping, Compass.

You may find this example trivial, or you may find it inspiring. And you will need to inspire if you are to grow, get elected, win and keep power. Yet when we look around at the leaders of new parties in Britain, promising to displace the hegemony of the Labour Party, for these inspiring qualities - Arthur Scargill, Tommy Sheridan, George Galloway - for all their oratorical skills, it is not quite all there. The weaknesses of all these leaders would be manageable in a larger mass party. In a smaller one, these flaws characterise the party. It underlines the point Marx was making about sect and party. And this is even truer in the personalised sects that have dominated the post-war Trotskyist movement - think Healy, Lambert, Moreno, Posadas and so on.

Power is what we seek. And that is why we must insist on the construction of a broad party organically linked to the mass organisations of the working class.

Let me say bluntly: I am not really interested in putting together small vanguard groups - the Socialist Alliance here, the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste in France - in the hope they will win a degree of representation. I am not interested in representation: I am interested in power. Unity of the revolutionaries? No. Agreement on Marxist fundamentals as a precondition? Not interested.

Such organisations have fallen at the first hurdles - personality clashes, as can be seen with SA and Respect or the Scottish Socialist Party. The second hurdle may be programmatic disputes - for example, the French NPA over the hijab. This sort of difference might matter more if the party had any serious electoral prospects. A third hurdle is the more interesting problem of orientation to existing movements. The French NPA fell there too, pretty much splitting down the middle over how to relate to Mélenchon. The Greek communists have been sidelined by a super-sectarian attitude to Syriza. Programmatic perfection is not much use if you cannot get your strategy and tactics right.

Most of the larger left groups stumble at this point. Of course, this problem may be postponed. You can, like the Socialist Workers Party, grow quite large, recruiting socialists up and down the country, while avoiding the problem of orienting to the existing

mass movement. For many years, the SWP refused even to take positions above a certain level in the unions, had no electoral strategy, rejected local government. Long-term, this is unsustainable. When they finally turned to electoral activity, they made every mistake in the book.

And, yes, elections are important. Do not sneer at them as bourgeois democracy: they are the single biggest mass political activity there is. They should be fought - not for propaganda purposes - but to win. That is if you are interested in power, rather than clean hands. To hear people say that it is good Syriza did not win so they keep their hands clean is truly shocking. Meanwhile the Greek working class is being hammered.

To do the kind of things we need to do, we need a mass movement. Once the workers' movement was this - necessarily so - not just the trade unions and the Labour Party, but friendly societies, cooperative shops, a real movement for the whole class, in the same way that when we once referred to the republican movement in Ireland, it was not just a political body, but social, musical, sporting, etc.

Unless you believe that socialism can be implemented entirely from above - I do not - then this is the scale of what needs to be built. But there is a problem. There are already existing workers' organisations. Do we start again from scratch? Some say yes. Rejecting the existing trade unions as irreversibly bureaucratised, Industrial Workers of the World activists are building a new movement from the bottom up. Good luck with that. But more people might agree with Trotsky when he wrote in 'Trade unions in the epoch of imperialist decay': "We cannot select the arena and the conditions of our activity to suit our own likes and dislikes."

Of course, the aim of the bourgeoisie is to neutralise all the organisations of the working class, to destroy them as fighting organisations and turn them into bureaucracies that deliver for the interests of their class. Success on their part is only temporary, just as success on the part of the working class to reclaim these organisations for fighting capitalism is also never achieved in perpetuity. The battle is ongoing.

Labour Party

This is equally true for the Labour Party. Many thought the battle was over when it was delivered by Ramsay MacDonald into a national coalition that attacked the working class. Less than 15 years later, it won the 1945 landslide and introduced democratic socialist reforms which endured for the next 30-plus years - and longer in the case of much of the welfare state.

Sure, some would see the post-war moment as unique in this respect. Fast-forward to New Labour and you see a party carrying out capitalist policies on every front on a qualitatively different level. Qualitatively different - but every erosion of internal democracy, every extension of leadership power, every policy betrayal was carried - at least until we were several years into the New Labour government - at annual conference with the support of the affiliated trade unions. And

this had a real effect on what one could do inside the party. In fact, the party hollowed out in the aftermath of the Iraq war. A third of constituencies stopped sending delegates to the annual conference - after all, if there are no votes, why bother? In 2010, social class D and E voters abstained or voted for other parties in record numbers. But where else can they go?

In defending themselves - not just at the workplace, but on a political level, workers turn again and again to the Labour Party. They have to: they cannot wait for would-be vanguards to get their act together. The fact that the communist and Trotskyist movements fragmented a generation ago and the remnants are once more at the stage of cadre accumulation - well, it is really not their problem.

Even after 13 years of New Labour, the loyalty of workers to the party is astonishing - and should not be derided. In 2010, when *Guardian* readers were being urged to vote Liberal Democrat, the ethnic minority vote of London came out for Labour in proportionately larger numbers than other Labour voters. This was class consciousness, not backwardness.

Labour's resilience is a stubborn fact and you cannot wish it away. To take a local example: in Brent, the Labour council implements Tory policies; the Greens have all the socialist policies. It is tragic to see even their best candidates get a 10th of the vote that Labour gets - and we are talking about a largely working class vote here. If these comrades were inside the party, they could have a huge impact. But even if the small number of socialists in Brent Labour Party cannot wield power, we can exercise a degree of control over those who do. Labour councillors do not like demonstrators and pickets outside council buildings, but they like meeting them in party branch meetings even less - especially when they face

motions of no confidence and deselection, as is happening now.

"The Labour Party is a battleground you cannot avoid," wrote *Briefing* comrade Graham Bash in the *Weekly Worker* in September 2003 - months after the invasion of Iraq! But the unions remained affiliated and working class votes would get Labour re-elected less than two years later. The aim remains: to give conscious expression to the needs of the party's working class base, using the trade union link and what internal democracy exists, at all levels of the party. This is what *Labour Briefing* tries to do in print and what the Labour Representation Committee does politically and organisationally.

Since 2010, some 50,000 new members joined the Labour Party. These are not all careerists. That seems a fertile basis for political activity. The offensive against Progress launched by some in the trade unions shows how quickly the ideological tables can be turned. If the coalition falls before its five years are up or even if it lasts the full term, it will be Labour that people will vote for to defend their living standards and articulate an alternative.

It is an open question whether Labour will ever deliver socialism. But there is going to be a real battle involving the trade unions, the grassroots members and the voting base to commit it to delivering some socialist policies. And I do not see this battle as primarily ideological - Marxism versus Labourism. This again elevates programme over practice, ultimately a form of idealism. It will be a battle of class interests centred on policy and, again, power.

But remember: a party is only a means. Whether social democratic or Leninist vanguard party or anything else, as it gets nearer power, the pressure on it from capitalism to conform intensifies. How long did even the Bolshevik Party in power last before succumbing to that pressure? Less than 10 years. Even by the time of Lenin's death in 1924, less than one percent of the membership had been in the party in April 1917. Perhaps the rise and entrenchment of Stalinism suggests that, the more centralised and vanguardist a party is, the more difficult it may be to reclaim it, once it does succumb to the pressure of the international bourgeoisie - even assuming it has the necessary moral leadership, correct programme and sensible tactics to get it anywhere near power in the first place. Most do not.

Yet the Leninist paradigm continues to exert a baleful influence - elitist, authoritarian, self-isolating, with a tendency to elevate programme over practice. A mass, internally democratic, pluralist movement holds no guarantees, but might be a more fruitful field of work ●



Mike Phipps: electable

Get involved with ACI

Simon Hardy, Anti-Capitalist Initiative

I am active in the ACI and some of you may know me from my 10 years in Workers Power. There was a lot of debate and struggles towards the end of my own and some other comrades' time in WP about the nature of the left and the problem of building small fighting propaganda groups. The criticisms that came out of that quite radically changed our thinking about the left and how it should go forward.

I want to start with a bit of background in terms of where I think things are going, as that will help situate what the left should be doing. I think it is quite clear for anyone with eyes to see it that the current crisis is not just an ordinary crisis of capitalism. Milton Friedman pointed out that you can use a crisis to fundamentally change the organisation and structure of society and that is what the bourgeoisie are doing internationally. They are using the reality and also the excuse of the financial crisis to turn that into a social crisis which will see the end of the period of the post-war welfare state as we understand it.

The consequences of this are enormous. People of my generation - I am 31 now, so I am talking about my age and younger - will not have a standard of living as good as our parents' or even our grandparents'. This is a very serious attack on people's living conditions - all in the interest of sustaining a system which is failing in many ways and struggling to survive.

People are talking about 'zombie capitalism' - what with the bailouts to keep it alive and so on. But it is also 'cannibal capitalism'. In other words, it begins to eat away at the conditions of its own reproduction. That is why I think that the welfare state, the public sector - the strongholds of the left - are being attacked.

So how does the left respond to this? There is a very serious problem with the whole idea of 'capitalist realism', which the social theorist, Mark Fisher, has written about, and I think this is a very interesting idea: even in the midst of the capitalist crisis people cannot really see an alternative. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the collapse of the so-called 'communist' states, there is a situation where China is ruled by the Communist Party, yet is one of the most successful capitalist countries in the world. People are critical of capitalism, critical of what it is doing to them, to their work and to society, but they are not sure what the solution is. Do we want to go back to the Soviet Union? Well, not really. Do we want to go back to the 1950s and 1960s and old Labour? These are very real questions and the left, so far, has not been able to articulate a convincing way forward out of the crisis.

There is, of course, an even bigger problem in relation to the struggle against the cuts and austerity in Britain, and I do not have to point this out to comrades in the CPGB - the real problem is not just the division and failure of the far left: it is also the trade unions. If we move at the pace that the union leaders want us to, then we will not be able to stop *any* government attacks. And there are no serious moves by the far-left organisations to try and remedy this. Some groups talk about rank-and-file movements, they talk about being critical of the bureaucracy and so on, but I do not see anything serious in terms of putting the resources, the consistency, into the fight to actually change that situation.

And the far left itself? Sect-ridden. Divided. Groups of 20, 50, 500 people whose whole *raison d'être* is to simply perpetuate the existence of their own group and their own particular orthodoxy, which they believe is the 'true' Marxism. And they fail to really talk to each other and, most importantly, they fail to organise together. This is not a criticism just of the far left, as these problems have very real practical consequences for the wider movement as a whole. You can see that with the divisions between the various anti-cuts groups. Because we do not have a united anti-cuts organisation, we always just follow behind the trade union leaders - they are the ones with the money and the influence and the ability to call demonstrations. The anti-cuts movement itself withers, declines and is not in a good position after over two years of the coalition government to stop any of the attacks. So I think we can agree that there is a very serious problem.

ACI role

Where does the Anti-Capitalist Initiative fit into that? It is a recognition that all the major projects of the revolutionary left in Britain over the last 20 years have failed. The left, and left groups like the Socialist Workers Party, is smaller now than when I first came into politics. Some groups have stayed about the same size, but none are able to make any kind of breakthrough. And there is a real lack of new thinking.

Now, I am not saying that we should scrap all of the old and burn all the works of Lenin and Marx - of course not! But we have to be more creative and look beyond our own sect orthodoxy to how we might try to win people to the wider ideas of Marxism. And that is what the ACI is trying to do.

The ACI is a network, it is a space. It has a website. It has some local groups and initiatives. It is a place to meet, to organise some small-scale actions. But it is a process - a process of becoming something else. That really is the problem with the CPGB's criticism of the ACI. The CPGB sees it as it is now and says this is an unpolitical space, it is liquidationist, it is an anti-Marxist initiative which is being set up. But it is far from that.

What the Marxists in the ACI want to do is open up a process in which we can build a wider, broader organisation and develop working relationships with activists who may not consider themselves Marxists at the beginning, but to work with them in a political project fighting the cuts, fighting against oppression, opposing the government or if there is going to be an attack on Iran or anything like that. To develop that political basis within the ACI.

We're going to have a conference in December in which we will pass a rudimentary programme. It will not be as long and involved as the CPGB *Draft programme* is - it will be more modest, because the organisation is only just beginning and we are getting things going.

From that we really want to open it up to other forces on the left. Our message is, if you really are interested in revolutionary unity, if you are interested in trying to elaborate new political answers and work with people who you may not normally work with, then the ACI is ready to welcome you, and you should come and get involved. I think it is a real shame that the CPGB has not had a more positive approach, because I think it is exactly the sort of thing that five or six years ago you would have been interested in getting involved in

and trying to influence.

I mean, at the ACI meeting in April you sent Ben Lewis on his own with a leaflet saying that the ACI is not adopting a Marxist programme - but you did not submit a Marxist programme for us to discuss. Of course, you could have done. You could have come along and said, 'This is what we think should be on the agenda', but instead you just turned up with a leaflet saying you did not think it was going to work and then left - you are not going to get very much out of that sort of intervention. There are people in the ACI who might not call themselves Marxists at the moment, but they are interested in left, revolutionary, anti-capitalist ideas and I think that is an audience which genuine, serious revolutionaries should be talking to.

So what do I want to come out of the ACI? I want a revolutionary party which must have Marxist principles. It must therefore have a class perspective and it must have a much more open approach to debate and differences - the kind of things that the CPGB has been saying for quite a while actually. My experience in Workers Power of the kind of 'democratic centralism' that group practised has convinced me that it is wrong. The idea that everything is just discussed internally and that, even if 40% of your membership disagree, they are not allowed any remit to talk about it publicly or express their reservations in journals and so on - I think this is the wrong approach. There must be a much more open-minded approach to differences. In any case, if you are a small revolutionary organisation it is not really going to matter if you carry something in your journal taking a different position to the majority. It is not really going to change the big picture of the class struggle at the moment.

An organisation that uses a very top-down, bureaucratic 'democratic centralism' to just instruct members - 'Ah, you've joined now and you're paying your subs, so you all have to go to this demo or that meeting' - is not the type of organisation we need. We need a leadership within an organisation that motivates the members in a political project in which they are emancipated, not one that just tells them what to do all the time. I think that is very important.

Will the ACI fail? It could do, of course. It might be the situation that it does not attract enough forces, or does not have enough members or activists in order to achieve 'escape velocity', as it were, and take itself to a higher level. But I think in the current context in which we find ourselves, where none of our groups are going forward in the way we would want them to, where none of the projects of the far left are making the kind of gains we need in this real crisis of the system, I would rather be trying a new approach to win over new layers to revolutionary politics than merely existing. Merely existing as a revolutionary in a small sect of 20, 50, a few hundred people - that really is not

success. We need to have much bigger ambitions than 'Oh good, we didn't collapse this year'.

What will be interesting to discuss is not just what *kind* of anti-capitalist party we need, but how we are going to get *any* kind of mass party, whether you call it a revolutionary party, a Marxist party, a Leninist party ... How are we going to do it? People talk about new workers' parties, they talk about Marxist parties, but no-one has been able to achieve any of these things. So we really need to think about how we get out of our comfort zones and our safe areas in order to reach out and so on.

New formation

It seems to me that whenever the far left begins to make headway, whenever it begins to penetrate the national political consciousness, that nearly always results from some kind of new party formation. For example, the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste in France, Syriza in Greece, Die Linke in Germany. I know you can say that the examples I am giving are all blowing apart or politically degenerating, but the point is that at least there was an attempt to create a party. You might criticise their political basis and I would agree with you, in that the political criticisms I had of these projects as a member of Workers Power have not gone away.

If you think about the success of Syriza in Greece, probably one of the worst things that could have happened would have been for it to have been elected. It would have found itself governing a capitalist state in the middle of a crisis and that would have bust it more quickly than any kind of internal wrangling or factions. But build such a party, get some people elected and take steps forward -

maybe it will fail, but maybe it will succeed.

I think it is very problematic if we just say, 'Oh, it hasn't been set up on the right basis and it's going to fail, so I'm not going to get involved.' That is a passive attitude of the type that socialists should not adopt in relation to such initiatives. If lots of people are joining, then we should join too to try and win it over, to change it.

The anti-capitalist party we need has to be anti-systemic, in that it has to attack the philosophical and organisational nature of capitalism itself. It cannot do that from a reformist perspective: it has to be revolutionary, it has to seek to activate and to explode the class antagonisms at the heart of the capitalist system and do it in a way which empowers the workers to liberate themselves, not expect to have things done for them through top-down directives from central committees and so on. It has to be a process whereby the working class themselves feel empowered to overthrow their oppressors.

I will end on a note of confidence. I think it was Trotsky who said, "We need to drive pessimism out of the workers' movement." I quite like that sentiment. I know that at the moment things are not going very well for the left or the workers' movement in Britain. There are very serious problems which we have not yet been able to find ways of overcoming. Some of the old problems that have existed for years remain in an ever more insidious fashion, but we should not be pessimistic about it.

As I said, the changing nature of capitalism itself, the way that capitalism reproduces the basis of its existence, is going to be very different over the next 10 or 15 years, compared to what we experienced in the post-war years. And the fact of that change itself opens up the possibility for a revolutionary left which is not sectarian, which is not opportunist, which tries to reach out to wider layers and engage them in revolutionary politics in order to build a genuinely revolutionary, class-struggle organisation. That opportunity is still out there: the question is whether we can seize the opportunity when it presents itself, and really follow in the footsteps of Marx and Lenin and all the comrades who came before us ●



Simon Hardy: resist

DEBATE

Fighting on two fronts

Ben Lewis, CPGB

It is certainly appropriate to finish our annual Communist University by debating this question. It is, after all, the most pressing one facing our class today, not only in this country, but internationally: how to organise our class into a party that can challenge the dominance of and overthrow the capitalist system.

We in the CPGB follow Marx in arguing that without a party the working class cannot act as a class. This party must, if the working class is to pursue its independent interests, be a party of millions with real social roots - its own press, educational associations, sports federations, cooperatives, etc. Most importantly, though, it must have a programme to map out how to win the battle of democracy, to address how we are ruled, how to overcome that rule and to usher in workers' power. The fundamentals of this programme must be: working class independence; no strategic alliances with the bourgeoisie; democracy in the state and in our own movement; and internationalism.

Four templates

What kind of party, then? In order to make my case I want to look at four of the templates that are often offered on the left for the kind of party we need.

The first one is the 'Leninist party', the 'fighting propaganda group'. The second one is the 'new' workers' party, which is often based on the idea of the trade unions breaking with the Labour Party. The third is a broad network seeking to unite in action, as comrade Simon Hardy has written, "convinced individual anarchists, syndicalists, left reformists and perhaps even those who do not accept the class struggle". Fourthly, those who see the Labour Party as the only game in town, where we must concentrate all our efforts in order to push the party to the left, towards 'socialism'.

The first template - the Trotskyist-Leninist party, the fighting propaganda group - is, I think, the most important one in terms of understanding where we are and overcoming our divisions. I am a Leninist. For me Lenin was a partyist, a democrat and, like a good Second International revolutionary Marxist, he fought for the unity of the party on the basis of the *acceptance* of a revolutionary programme: unity in action, but freedom to publicly criticise. But today's left, tragically, bears very little relationship to this approach. It is unfortunately the case that even the most vehemently and honestly anti-Stalinist of our comrades today base themselves on a party conception which is steeped in Stalinism and the unhealthiest aspects of our class's culture in the 20th century.

The result is an organisation that restricts debate and open expressions of dissent in the name of activism, where comrades are constantly running around, not 'wasting time' with voicing their criticisms in the party press, etc. That model can be traced back to Joseph Stalin himself.

This party conception, shared by far too many today, is a significant block on our ability to move forward, because it actually leads to an endless cycle of splits - often over silly and unnecessary things. It is not that there are not big divisions or fundamental questions that need to be addressed, but gagging dissident or minority views breeds further splintering and overall fragmentation. Even though the open expression of differences is no guarantee against splits, what certainly *will* guarantee them is if comrades in a minority are effectively

banned from fighting to become the majority. It is bureaucratic centralism passing itself off as democratic centralism.

In order to remain a member of such organisations you must agree - or at least claim to agree in public - with a particular theory or set of ideas down to the finest detail. For these comrades, anything less than upholding their own particular dogma is some manifestation of centrism or whatever. Nonetheless, in their practical, day-to-day approach, centrism is actually what they practise.

This brings me to the 'broad workers' party' model. Fundamentally, many on the left argue for such reformist organisations (Socialist Alliance, Respect, Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition) as a way of gaining some short-term influence beyond their own ranks: ie, beyond the small numbers who will actually agree and defend particular sect shibboleths. The 'broad workers' party' approach, then, seeks a bigger pond in which to swim. And it is conceived - to take an example from Richard Brenner of Workers Power - as "not the revolutionary party we need, but a way of getting there", a kind of first step. Thus, or so the logic goes, concessions to reformism and Labourism are fully justified.

This approach is often accompanied by the view that the trade unions ought to break from Labour. The idea, of course, is that the tightly knit, activist, propagandist group can start from reformist demands that do not scare off the trade union bureaucracy and gradually win broader layers to accept the need for revolution and a revolutionary party.

Now, not only is such a method dishonest - watering down one's true politics and confining one's 'Marxism' to little-read left journals: it also clearly *does not work*. We have seen failure after failure, where purported revolutionaries limit their politics in the name of short-term influence and winning over largely phantom allies to their right.

Social democracy, motherhood and apple pie pledges about defending the NHS, being opposed to racism and so on are not signposts to revolutionary Marxism. The politics of Edward Bernstein do not lead to the kind of revolutionary party we need - no matter how much 'action' we engage in. But this is the common-sense understanding that the left has at the moment. They say: 'Here is our particular interpretation of Marxism, but in order to gain recruits we need to offer them something else.' It does not work.

Anti-Capitalist Initiative

In this context let me briefly refer to some of the debates we have had with comrade Simon Hardy and others around the Anti-Capitalist Initiative. On the surface this model attempts to break with the sect-building approach of the type that Simon Hardy opposed in the latter days of his membership of Workers Power, but at the same time it retains the idea that the way out of the left's current quagmire lies in 'action' - again alongside largely phantom allies in what the comrades conceive as some kind of mass movement: Occupy, UK Uncut, etc.

The ACI, especially since the recent departure of Workers Power, tends more in the direction of network 'activism' than the creation of a new halfway house party, but the flawed, liquidationist method I have described above is still present. Its proponents always stress the 'new' ideas it embodies, the novelty of their

approach. But I am afraid it is a very old, and indeed failed, method.

I was speaking to comrade Stewart King of Permanent Revolution at the founding of the ACI and he was absolutely clear to me that it is the role of Marxists to "minoritise" ourselves in order to appeal to the activists we are aiming to attract. In effect the Marxists in the ACI have 'minoritised' their views - the organisation has shied away from taking up any political positions at all thus far.

But surely it is incumbent on Marxists to say what we believe in, what we hold to be the truth. Unfortunately, we on the far left are already in the minority. We will have to start off in small rooms. But in order to take real steps forward we need to start arguing for what we actually believe in, and not treat Marxism as some sort of add-on, or the exclusive preserve of those *actually* running things behind the scenes. In order to move forward we must unite around the politics we purportedly uphold.

Comrade Simon assures us that no-one in the ACI has renounced Marxist politics or the need for a revolutionary party. But in a letter to the *Weekly Worker* he and Chris Strafford write: "... we are realistic that we simply cannot slap down a Marxist programme and rally thousands to our banner" (May 10). The implication is that, for the moment, we must be "realistic", but in the future, somehow, we will manage to win our allies to Marxism.

So, whilst superficially the ACI offers a critique of the standard 'Leninist party' approach, in practice it throws the baby out with the bathwater and abandons the fight for a genuine Marxist party. To the extent that this is theorised, as opposed to being a mere reaction to the bureaucratic centrism of Workers Power, it is justified by Pham ('Please intervene in Syria') Binh's liquidationist conclusions and/or packaged in terms of building 'something like the First International'. Yet, as we all know, Marx did not actually *set up* the First International. He intervened in it, because it represented a genuine step forward in the mass movement itself. But that intervention strove to push the project in a partyist direction. The 'First International' argument is thus nothing but an ahistorical 'left' cover for broad frontist liquidationism.

Communists and Labour

Despite the efforts of sections of the left to set up a new (Labourite) 'broad workers' party', the Labour Party, of course, still exists. Millions still identify with it, and that matters.

Let me be clear. The Labour Party has never been the kind of party needed for working class self-liberation and socialism. It has always been dominated by nationalism, constitutionalism and imperialism. Like the trade union bureaucracy it is tied to the capitalist state by a thousand strings, yet it continues to enjoy the support and membership of millions of individual and affiliated working class people. So there is a contradiction here that we must seek to resolve.

The CPGB's approach to the Labour Party tries to avoid two traps: on the one hand, we do not collapse into typical Labour entryism, becoming left Labourites and effectively abandoning the fight for a Marxist party. On the other hand, we recognise the importance of and seek to intervene in Labour Party politics, rejecting the claim that it has become a bourgeois party pure and simple.

This is what the CPGB says

in its theses on the Labour Party: "Overcoming Labourism is a central strategic task for communists in Britain. Toadying as loyal lieutenants to left Labourites, keeping one's 'true' politics under wraps, burying oneself in the bowels of the Labour Party and subordinating everything to staying in there till the glorious day when the class struggle transforms it into an instrument of socialism is naive at best. At worst it is downright treachery. On the other hand, to stand aloof from the Labour Party and its internal disputes and conflicts is as good as useless. A typical left sectarian pose" (*Weekly Worker* October 21 2010).

How do we overcome Labourism? Just as we do outside the party, we have to champion the politics of Marxism. In this connection I want to zoom in on one particular question that plagues the Labour left: the notion that somehow it is incumbent upon us to argue and agitate for a Labour government. But a key tenet of Labourism is the strategic alliance between the workers' movement and the capitalist state. While obviously it is possible to win reforms - depending, of course on the balance of class forces - our class cannot gain power and advance to socialism through administering the capitalist state. The aim should be for a government capable of implementing our full minimum programme for workers' power.

As part of the fight for workers' power we must demand the removal of all bans and proscriptions within the Labour Party - together with every other manifestation of capitalist interference in the organisations of our class. We are clear that the fight to transform the Labour Party, in order to turn it into what it originally claimed to be - a federal organisation of the workers' movement as a whole - will not be won overnight. But we must seek to constantly bring out the contradictions between the working class base and the pro-capitalist leadership.

We are also clear that the revolution we envisage is not contingent upon such a transformation. The fight within Labour might fail. What is fundamental to us is not to bury ourselves in Labour Party work for its own sake, but to organise as communists in order to build a Marxist party with its own independent existence, its own programme.

It is absolutely necessary and entirely possible, even with our forces as dispersed and weak as they are now, to fight to change the balance of forces both inside and outside the Labour Party in order to rebuild our movement. But making even the most tentative steps in that direction presupposes getting serious about uniting the vanguard of our class into a party openly committed to the world historical outlook of Marxism, rejecting the 'first step' of Labourism or social democracy, or pandering to anarchism or syndicalism. We want to win over anarchists and syndicalists, just as we want to win over Labourites, but not as they are: we want to win them to Marxism.

Convergence

This is actually where the viewpoints of comrades Hardy and Phipps actually converge. As a Labourite, comrade Phipps thinks that potential 'Marxist' parties cannot be anything more than insignificant sects because they are supposedly based

on ideology. For his part, comrade Hardy appears to be reacting against the doubtless negative experience of belonging to such an 'ideological' sect. But neither seems to countenance the possibility of democratic unity around a Marxist programme.

Marxism should be and indeed is far-sighted, bold and inspiring in its global, historical vision. But currently the far left, with our stupid divisions, our frivolous attitudes towards splitting and frontist fakery, render these ideas pathetic, absurd, almost millenarian in the eyes of the very people we should be winning to our cause. We have a great responsibility and those who remain committed to working class socialism must unite our forces on the basis of our own politics. We will not win over any serious forces, let alone the millions needed for a party capable of taking power, unless we can actually unite ourselves.

Unity does not inexorably result from strikes, sit-ins, demonstrations. As Kautsky and Lenin pointed out, there is nothing innate to the struggle between employer and employee that produces a vision for a higher form of society. We cannot content ourselves with mere cooperation in solidarity work, important though that is.

Unity will not come through stitch-ups by bureaucratic elites. Unity will come through political struggle and the empowerment of the rank and file within our movement - in the far left, in the trade unions - against all bans, proscriptions and gagging orders, whether carried out by a local SWP full-timer, a trade union bureaucrat or a Labour Party leader.

We cannot win that fight by walking away - and here I have to be critical of Simon Hardy and his comrades, who simply resigned from Workers Power and now present themselves as something 'new'. That approach simply speeds up the cycle of splits, whereas we need to challenge the *logic* of splitting.

Let me finish by saying this. Though I recognise the huge problems that we face today, I am at the same time extremely confident. I think that when the penny drops, when comrades realise that revolutionary unity is actually a desirable thing and can be won, then any successful steps we take can be replicated extraordinarily quickly ●



Ben Lewis: principled

TURKEY

Confusion of libertarian socialism

Esen Uslu continues his examination of the Turkish left's attitude to the Kurdish question

Having examined the programme and congress documents of the legal Communist Party, the TKP ('Only through socialism', August 16), I shall look at how other left political parties approach the national question, beginning with the Freedom and Solidarity Party (ÖDP) and its programme.

In the mid-90s the ÖDP was formed by the merger of various groups, and the end result was a hotchpotch or conglomerate. The peculiar conditions of the day - the collapse of the Soviet Union, the aftermath of military rule, the escalating Kurdish guerrilla war, and a rapidly diminishing left - led many groups to seek refuge in unity. However, ideological clarity - unity with what aim? - was lacking. The party brought together groups whose cooperation had been unthinkable just a few years before, such as the rump 'official' communists, Trotskyites and several new-left organisations.

United Communist Party

It may be quite contrary to the saying, 'Never speak ill of the dead', but let me add a remark in passing: as may be remembered, the 'official' TKP of the 70s merged with the Workers Party of Turkey (TİP) in the late 80s to form the United Communist Party of Turkey (TBKP). Two of the new party's leaders returned from exile to seek its legalisation. They failed and were jailed. However, their supporters formed a legal TBKP in 1990 - only for it to be banned shortly afterwards by the constitutional court. In between, the TBKP held its legal congress in 1991 and resolved to liquidate the party!

However, just before closing down, the party congress adopted a document listing the sins of the 'official' TKP. Even in that last-gasp 'self-criticism' document the Kurdish question was dealt with only tangentially. The document dwelt on the 1920s TKP position on the Kurdish question, but it failed to comment on the line adopted in the 1970s and 80s. It chose to deal with the position of party in that bygone era in the following manner:

The TKP was squeezed between the external peace policy of the government of the [young] republic and its repressive domestic policy ... A contentious issue that arose as a result of that dilemma still reverberates today: that is, the attitude of the TKP towards the Sheikh Said rebellion [in 1925]. This issue requires a historical inquiry. It needs to be established whether and to what extent British imperialism played a provocative role against the republic in that incident. Until such a role is proven, it would be sensible to accept that the TKP position on the Sheikh Said incident was wrong. In any case, the TKP should have pursued a more open policy on the Kurdish question in that era.

Years later, in December 2011, the last general secretary of the 'official' TKP, contributing to the liberal daily *Taraf* as a columnist, praised prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's apology over the Dersim massacre of 1937-38 and added a kind of apology of his own:

On many occasions I have criticised the historical position of the TKP and Comintern during the Sheikh Said rebellion and afterwards, as well as our mistakes in regard to our approach to the Kurdish



Kurdish fighters

question [after 1973]. In the past there have been some who engaged in self-criticism on behalf of the party. However, those individual self-criticisms do not remove our obligation to extend our sincere collective apology in relation to the Dersim massacre. Therefore, I hereby extend a sincere apology on behalf of myself, as well my comrades and friends, who share these feelings, in regard to the erroneous attitude of the TKP on the Dersim massacre.

The apology created some rumblings among certain sections of the left, but they were nothing compared to the shock felt by the ardent members back in 1991 when they learnt at the congress that the TBKP was to be closed down. Some were consoled when they learned that a United Socialist Party was to be formed as its continuation. However, after a short while it too dissolved itself and joined in the formation of the ÖDP as a left unity project.

Since the 'official' TKP's policies were based on those of the Soviet Union at various stages of the 20th century, it was full of twists and turns, half-truths and lies, missed opportunities and downright counterrevolutionary dictums. The national question was one of the most important policy issues distorted by those who saw the world through the prism of the 'supreme needs' of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

The 'official' TKP may have died a slow death as an organisation, but its ideological legacy lingers on among Turkey's left as part of the stultifying influence of 'official Marxism'.

ÖDP programme

The ÖDP was deliberately formed as a organisational conglomeration. There was to be no amalgamation within a centralised party: no, it was decided to allow a hotchpotch of groups acting together, while maintaining their own decision-making bodies and internal discipline.

As many had predicted, the ÖDP's puddingstone structure did not succeed in the declared aim of creating unity on the Turkish left. It failed to maintain its initial momentum and suffered a succession of splits. At present all that remains of the party is the rump of Dev-Yol (the 1970s Revolutionary Path).

Many of the groups that split and formed their own organisations, are today part of another 'unity project', called the People's Democratic

Congress - I will deal with its position on the Kurdish question in a later article.

The ideological thrust of the ÖDP programme is directed against the arch-enemy - neoliberalism - which is regarded as the ideology of contemporary capitalism. The aims of the party could be summarised by the phrase "libertarian socialism". The programme lists the principles of this libertarian socialism - such as internationalism, self-governance, democratic planning, ecologism and feminism - and claims:

Overcoming the barriers to revolutionary politics not only requires correct ideas, but the ability to link those correct ideas with the real movement, to organise those whose lives and interests have been damaged by neoliberal policies - in short, the victims of globalisation - winning over the trust of the broad masses and becoming their hope.

Having established this context, the programme deals with the national question in the following manner:

In regard to the Kurdish question, living together on the basis of 'voluntary citizenship' appears to be the most suitable solution in terms of applicability, as well as in terms of its potential to create solutions for the people's problems. Taking into account the fact that the Kurdish question has been the weakest link in the culture of democracy, it should be kept in mind that its resolution would clear the way for the democratisation of Turkey. The enjoyment of democratic, political and cultural rights by citizens of Kurdish origin should never be a matter of contention, and should be a natural element of social life. Demonstrating the state's resolve for a democratic settlement of the question, including a general political amnesty, and ensuring that the people of the region enjoy social services, opportunities for employment and investment as equal citizens, would clear the way for a solution. The strengthening of a culture of living together must be coupled with the tenacious implementation of a 'regional development plan' aimed at removing regional inequalities through social action, and engendering the principle of local self-governance to enable people to

make their own decisions on issues affecting their lives.

Under the section entitled 'Both freedom and equality', the ÖDP programme incorporates the Kurdish demand for freedom to use one's own mother-tongue:

Libertarian socialism ... regards meeting the demands for individual rights and freedoms, as well as demands of identity raised as a response to exploitation, repression, discrimination and exclusion, as a prerequisite of a libertarian society. Within the context of the 'multicultural and multi-identity' reality of Turkey, the party defends the right of the individual to speak in his or her mother-tongue, and to freely maintain his or her own identity, culture and sexual orientation ...

On the other hand, the party draws attention to the mistake of elevating non-integral identity politics above political and social struggle. In this context, it emphasises the importance of creating commonality within the differing fields of struggle on the grounds of intertwined working and living spaces, and every individual having "more than one identity".

Demands

Following these general principles, the 'Axis of struggle and plan of action' section of the ÖDP programme raises the following demands under the heading, 'A democratic and peaceful solution for the Kurdish question':

- Based on the premise that so long as there is no peace within society there can be no overall peace, a political, social and cultural living medium should be created where differences are not denied, but regarded as legitimate, and to that end all necessary measures should be implemented.
- All members of society should be able to exercise fully and equally political, democratic and cultural rights, as well as the right to self-improvement; public education/training opportunities should be offered to all citizens of Turkey in their mother-tongue.
- The structure of a state and politics which has been closed to the multi-identity, multi-cultural social reality, including the constitution, legality and state institutions, should be changed and given a democratic content

through legislation. All legal and administrative barriers preventing the discussion of solutions to this issue should be removed.

- Initiatives to dispel social insecurity, alienation and prejudices created by ongoing conflict, to reduce the tensions between cultures, to increase exchange and interaction between cultures, and to develop a process of diversity should be supported and developed; and the culture of living together under equal conditions should be strengthened in every field of social life.

- Action should be undertaken, together with all democratic forces, to create an alternative oriented to 'peace and tolerance' in opposition to 'nationalist violence' and the spread of a 'lynching culture' within society.

- Public resources should be mobilised to remove the regional inequalities prevailing in eastern and south-eastern [Turkey]; to ameliorate the region's living conditions, which have been devastated and remain economically and socially underdeveloped; to implement measures aimed at resolving the economic and social problems of the region, and increasing employment opportunities.

- Normalisation of the region should be undertaken: those who were forced to migrate from the conflict should be provided with opportunities to enable their return, and those whose homes and property were damaged should be compensated.

- All special warfare units of the gendarmerie, armed forces and police operating in the region, as well as village protectors, should be fully disbanded.

- The prohibitions incorporated in article 83 and chapter 4 of the Political Parties Act should be repealed.

- In view of the fact that those most adversely affected by past developments in the region have been women, every measure should be taken to remove all the effects and consequences of harassment on grounds of female identity, including rape and all other forms of repression seen in the region.

- Special measures should be undertaken against the tribal system and underdevelopment prevailing in the region, and educational opportunities should be extended to women confined to the home, who presently have no access to education, but are restricted to domestic and childcare obligations.

- A general political amnesty should be declared, and the necessary legal and social measures undertaken, to ensure that everybody enjoys political, social and economic rights.

I must also point out that other demands in the ÖDP programme include the call for decentralised and participatory self-government. However, the ÖDP programme clearly indicates a confusion on the Kurdish question, failing to grasp its dynamics and its impact on the whole of Turkey as well as the region itself.

In the next part of this article I will examine the programme of the Workers Party of Kurdistan (PKK), which hopefully will enable English-speaking comrades to put the differing views on the Kurdish question into context ●

COMMUNIST UNIVERSITY

Debate, solidarity and internationalism

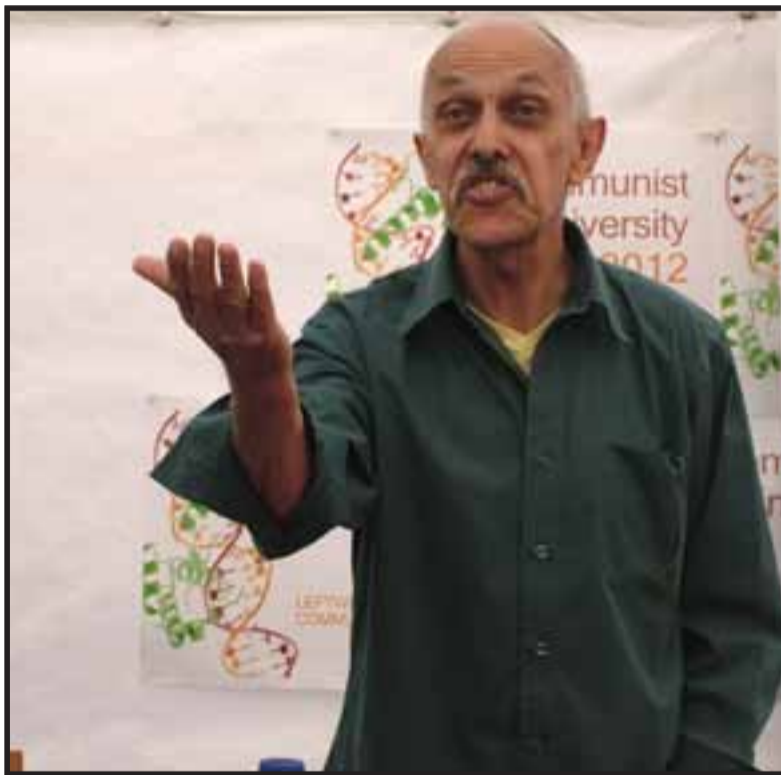
Danny Hammill reports on the CPGB's annual summer school

As comrades assembled on August 20 for the CPGB's week-long summer school at its new south London venue, the London Olympics were slowly being pushed out of the headlines. The reality of Middle East conflict and financial turmoil was once again making it to the front pages: Syria is on the brink of all-out sectarian carnage and redivision; a horrific Israeli attack on Iran seems more than just a possibility and the euro zone limps from crisis to crisis. A 'disorderly' Greek exit from the euro remains a distinct possibility. Given the near apocalyptic economic and social meltdown experienced in that country, it is no great surprise that Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left) came a relatively second close in the June parliamentary elections.

So it was only fitting that CU was kicked off this year with a talk on 'The euro crisis, the left and the question of government' by Mike Macnair of the CPGB. Or, to put it another way, do we want to see a Syriza-led government in Greece? The comrade tried to lend a historical and theoretical perspective to the whole issue, with special reference to the debates and arguments that swirled around on the question of working class parties in office in the First, Second and Third Internationals. Comrade Macnair noted that Marx's views on whether workers' organisations should join coalition governments alongside non-working class elements were developed in reaction to the negative precedent set by Louis Blanc. A respected figure at the time, his decision in 1848 to join the bourgeois provisional government (Second Republic) led by Alphonse de Lamartine proved to be disastrous, only acting to discredit socialist politics - so Marx and Engels consistently argued.

Then there were the fierce debates around Millerandism (or 'ministerialism') in the Second International and the 'workers' government' slogan at the Fourth Congress of Comintern, the full proceedings of which are only just appearing for the first time in English. Comrade Macnair concluded, to the exasperation of some, that the very last thing communists want is for Syriza - and formations like it - to 'take the power', which would surely lead to catastrophe for the Greek working class. Rather they should constitute themselves as parties of *extreme opposition*, a strategic line of march that was, after all, recommended by Marx with regard to Germany - patiently building up an *independent* working class movement that today must seek to organise on an all-European basis.

Directly following this debate there was a discussion on Iran/Israel ('conflict and symbiosis'), jointly introduced by Yassamine Mather, chair of Hands Off the People of Iran, and comrade Moshé Machover, Israeli socialist and a founder of Matzpen (the Socialist Organisation in Israel). Comrade Machover outlined his central thesis that Israel's real motivation for an attack on Iran, if it were to occur, would not be to deal with the so-called nuclear threat - an obvious nonsense only peddled by the tame bourgeois media and gullible pro-imperialist 'Marxist' groups like



Lionel Sims: dragon

the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. Instead, he contended, a hot war with Iran would provide an excuse for the Zionist administration to implement a 'solution' to the Palestinian problem - that is, wholesale 'population transfer' by *force* to ensure that an enlarged Israel became an overwhelmingly Jewish state (and in this way consolidate the foundation myth of Israel as a home for the so-called 'Jewish nation').

In her contribution, comrade Mather detailed how imperialist sanctions against Iran were having a devastating effect on the *working class* - not the reactionary regime in Tehran. Workers were becoming more concerned with day-to-day survival, how to feed themselves and their families, than with the revolutionary overthrow of the Islamic Republic. The persistent threat of an Israeli attack clearly serves to maintain the mullahs' grip on power and in that way imperialism, Israel and Iran are engaged in a deadly dance of death.

War on religion?

Later in the week CU saw the launch of Jack Conrad's *Fantastic reality: Marxism and the politics of religion* - extensively rewritten and re-edited, with four extra chapters. Comrade Conrad explained in his talk that he had decided to excise some of the sections dealing with *immediate* or contemporaneous political questions, which by definition would turn out to be essentially ephemeral or of limited relevance, thereby leaving room for more historical material. Not for the first time, the comrade expressed astonishment at the fact that a question of such vital importance for the working class movement has received such scant attention - barely moving on from Karl Kautsky's magnificent, though far from perfect, 1908 study, *The foundations of Christianity*.

Comrade Conrad emphasised how communists have no interest in fighting a Richard Dawkins-like 'war on religion', let alone in introducing a hellishly oppressive theocracy along the lines of Enver Hoxha's Albania

or some other Stalinist freak society. He reminded us that Marx's famous comment about religion being the "opium of the people" has been continually misinterpreted, even though the intent should be more than clear. In the 19th century opium was routinely dispensed in order to relieve pain. Religion, therefore - or at least as Marx saw it - was a coping mechanism, or spiritual sticking plaster, sought after by those suffering from social alienation, exploitation and oppression ("the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions"). Armed with this truly humanist understanding, we can see that *all* religions - to one extent or another - are promising pie in the sky, or communism, when you die. Trying to 'abolish' religion without first abolishing the alienated material conditions that give rise to religion is actually an *inhuman* policy. And another Stalinist legacy.

There was an interesting minor controversy when a comrade from Socialist Fight advanced the idea that the advent of monotheism was historically "progressive", presumably on the basis that it was an inevitable stage in the ever forward march of the productive forces and so on, ultimately paving the way for the dictatorship of the proletariat. Such a reductionist viewpoint was strongly rebuffed by a number of contributors from the floor, CPGBers and non-CPGBers alike.

Especially interesting, at least for this journalist - given his prior ignorance of the subject - was the presentation on 'anti-German Germans' given by comrade Susann Witt-Stahl of the Hamburg-based Assoziation Dämmerung. This concerned the strange phenomenon of German lefts who claim to be communists - counting Marx as one of their heroes, alongside people like Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer from the Frankfurt school of critical theory - yet are vociferous supporters of the state of Israel, almost equating the Israeli Defence Force with a socialist militia. Some 'anti-Germans' even provocatively maintain that

George Bush is a communist in the tradition of Marx and supported the 2003 invasion of Iraq on that basis - there are others who back imperialist sanctions against Iran on a similar basis.

Over time, the 'anti-German' tendency has become increasingly antagonistic to the German left as a whole, regarding its anti-Zionism purely as the product of a pernicious "anti-Semitism" deeply rooted in German cultural history and hence almost impossible to escape from - meaning Hitler's willing executioners are now opponents of US imperialism, Zionism and the Israeli state. Or so the 'anti-German Germans' would have us believe. Indeed, hostility to the organised left has reached such a point that a number of 'anti-Germans' have forged fraternal links with the English Defence League on the grounds of mutual ideological compatibility - ie, shared pro-Israeli/Zionist and anti-left sentiment.

It would be easy to dismiss the 'anti-German Germans' as a bunch of half-mad cranks or weirdoes not worth bothering with, but that would be profoundly mistaken. Increasingly, we find 'anti-German' activists trying to silence or even intimidate leftwing speakers and gatherings - leading some to suspect that they might have ties with the German secret services. More importantly still, the 'anti-Germans' are living testament to the *decomposition* of the left in Germany - they did not spring from nowhere. Only by rebuilding a genuine mass Marxist movement in Germany can we tackle and defeat non-working class trends like the 'anti-Germans'.

Stimulating

In what many felt was the best session of the week, comrade Lionel Sims of the Socialist Workers Party gave us a stimulating talk on 'Eden: did primitive communism ever really exist?' Of course, this is a highly complex subject - incorporating as it does the detailed study of pre-history, anthropology, archaeology, linguistics, etc. Essentially though, basing his ideas on Claude Lévi-Strauss's conception of invariant syntax, comrade Sims argues that there is a "meta-myth" underlining *all* origin myths, Christian and non-Christian. This accounts for the *universal* appearance of dragons (or serpents) in patriarchy myths concerning our origins as a revolutionary species - ie, the human revolution. Many were particularly intrigued by the Hebrew myth of Lillith, originally held to be Adam's first wife, who was 'disappeared' by those who compiled the Bible - eager to remove all traces of our matrilineal communist past.

Another highlight was Gabriel Levy's fascinating talk on 'The trouble with "economic growth" and "environmentalism"'. A welcome antidote, it has to be said, to the lingering notion of 'socialist growth' that still afflicts some parts of the left - that is, the belief that under a post-capitalist 'socialist' society we would churn out *more and more* stuff. Capitalism on stilts, but this time with red bosses - hurrah, what progress! In other words, our 'Marxist' comrades cannot imagine anything other than the continuation of alienated social

relations. However, the genuine Marxist understanding of abundance is one of a society that satisfies human *needs* - not swamps us with things on the basis of production for the sake of production. With real socialism, there will be no such thing as GDP, etc - why would we bother with such crap? Anyway, comrade Levy's CU introduction is now available in its entirety on his excellent website, *People and Nature* (<http://peopleandnature.wordpress.com>).

There were plenty of other extremely interesting sessions, naturally. As per usual, all the presentations given at CU 2012 will shortly be available on the CPGB website (video and audio files) - not to mention the fact that transcripts and articles based on the various talks will appear in forthcoming issues of the *Weekly Worker*. But it should be mentioned in passing that one popular session was Anne McShane's opening on 'Liberating women: the Bolshevik experience' - where she touched upon, amongst many things, Anna and Maria Ulyanova (sometimes referred to as "Lenin's forgotten sisters" - though, of course, they were serious revolutionaries in their own right) and gave a quick historical overall of the Zhenotdel, the women's section of the Russian Communist Party from 1919 to 1930.

Also of particular interest was the debate surrounding Tommy Sheridan and the sad but distinctly avoidable demise of the Scottish left - so many thanks to comrades Gregor Gall and Sarah McDonald for their very good openings. And it almost goes without saying that CU perennial Hillel Ticktin gave a series of talks on capitalist decline and crisis. Appropriately, CU ended this year with a lively debate on 'What sort of 'anti-capitalist party' do we need?' - which saw sharply contrasting views put forward by Simon Hardy (Anti-Capitalist Initiative), Mike Phipps (Labour Briefing) and Ben Lewis of the CPGB.

A special mention must be made of comrade Paul Le Blanc of the US-based International Socialist Organization. Not only did he stay for the entire week, but he gave three engrossing talks (slide shows included) on the 'real Lenin', 'building the revolutionary party in the USA' and 'Rosa Luxemburg' - revolutionary pedagogy at its finest. In the same breath we also have to praise the comrades from the US Platypus group and the Socialist Party USA, not forgetting comrade Witt-Stahl, who also stayed for the entire week - thus fostering a noticeable spirit of solidarity and internationalism, a legacy we in the CPGB hope to build on for future CUs.

Another welcome innovation of this year's CU was the introduction of fringe meetings: sessions were held by the Socialist Party of Great Britain on Martov's criticism of Bolshevism, comrade Paul B Smith on 'What is Marxist education?' and the Platypus group.

Finally, total attendance this year was exactly 98, including the 30 or so comrades who stayed for the whole week ●

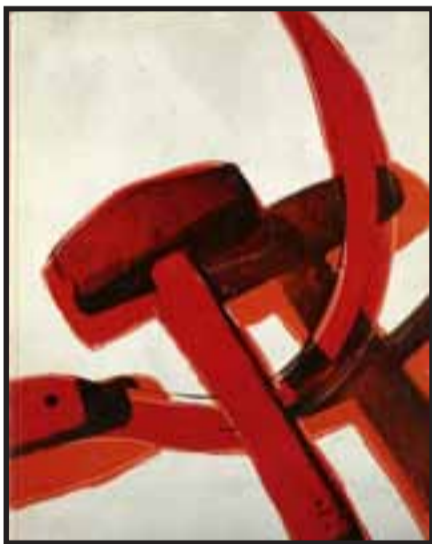
Three overseas visitors reflect on the week

Comrades attending Communist University spoke to the *Weekly Worker* about their impressions

Paul Le Blanc, International Socialist Organization (USA)

The educational gathering of the CPGB was a pleasant surprise. There are political differences, yet also common ground: a commitment to all struggles of the oppressed, to the interests of the working class majority, and to the radical democracy represented by socialism.

A comradely exploration of common



ground, but also of differences, was of sufficient interest to the CPGB for me to be brought in as a speaker, and I benefited from searching discussions of my presentations on Lenin controversies, on Rosa Luxemburg's ideas, and on political organising in the United States.

It was also valuable to learn from Moshé Machover and Yassamine Mather on Middle East developments, from Marc Mulholland's historical survey of 'bourgeois liberty', from Gregor Gall and Sarah McDonald on experiences of the Scottish Socialist Party, from Hillel Ticktin's examination of global capitalism, from Anne Mc Shane's illuminating presentation on women in the Bolshevik movement, and from Jack Conrad's bold effort to shed light on the meaning of religion in the midst of humanity's persistent oppression and liberation struggles.

All this and much more - including the warmth, generosity and genuine comradeliness of CPGB members, as well as others who are decidedly not members. It was a truly good experience ●

Susann Witt-Stahl, Assoziation Dämmerung (Hamburg)

I was impressed by the political culture of comradeship, of progressive collectivism and freedom of speech, at Communist University (the great sense of humour among the participants was an infallible indicator of these essential qualities of a communist movement, which the German left, sadly, has partially lost). The debates were conducted at a high intellectual level, and with a keenness to explore controversial issues that is infectious and motivating.

What I missed, however, was any critical engagement with art and culture. The one-dimensional nature of our

lifestyle is today dangerously evident. The culture industry is the most effective facilitator of false consciousness and a vehicle for the mass deception (eg, for war propaganda) of the whole of western society. We have to respond with a radical and enlightened critique. The Marxist philosopher, Walter Benjamin, was right to say that a communist movement has to face up to the "aestheticisation of politics" - a warning against the process of fascistisation - and must find the only satisfactory response: the "politicisation of art".

But what I missed was much less than what I gained and learned at CU. One of so many things I took home with me was the certainty that there are a lot of people 'over there' who embody and represent the pride and dignity of the working class. That feels damned good.

Comrades, you are doing a great job - walk on! ●

Peter Moody, Socialist Party USA

I have been attentive and sympathetic to the politics of the CPGB for a few years, so I was very pleased to have the opportunity to attend this year's Communist University. It was, admittedly, a slightly intimidating as well as very exciting prospect, considering the high political level of CU sessions.

Nevertheless, once the event got underway, I felt sufficiently able to keep up both with the presentations and the contributions from the floor. In fact, I think physically attending sessions was actually more beneficial, compared to watching recorded sessions online, as the floor debate helped flesh out at least some of the concepts I may have otherwise found difficult. Beyond this, everyone at the school was very approachable in terms of discussion between and after

sessions, to help flesh out any questions I had regarding the presentations or something that had come up during the debate.

A spirit of comradeship predominated throughout the week, which was helped by the collective sharing of tasks like food preparation and setting up the venue for sessions. Even during heated debates on the floor of the sessions, there was a general sense that everyone involved was serious about the left (in whatever country we were from) having a positive future, and we were all fighting for the



same general goal, even if the strategy and tactics used were under severe criticism.

All in all, Communist University exceeded my hopes and expectations for what it would be, and I hope to continue my engagement with the politics of the CPGB, as well as use what I have learned over the week to help build a strong left and a united Marxist party in the United States ●

Fighting fund

Officious

Unusually, this year the *Weekly Worker* has had no enquiries from readers wanting to know why they haven't received their paper for two weeks. We have, of course, just completed our annual August break for the CPGB's Communist University, but all our subscribers seem to have paid scrupulous attention to the notice advising them of this in the last issue!

That issue appeared on August 16 and over the following seven days we had 11,718 readers on the website (as opposed to the print version). But readers continued to visit cpgb.org.uk over the last two weeks - there were 19,574 of them despite there being no new edition to read.

Although nobody has enquired about those missing two issues, comrades have been complaining in recent weeks about being asked to pay a surcharge for delivery of their paper. Royal Mail suddenly seems to have decided that the envelope containing the *Weekly Worker* is too thick to qualify as a 'small letter', but should be charged at 'large letter' rate - even though we have been sending the paper out in exactly the same way for around two years with no problem. The envelope does pass

through RM's measuring template, but we are told that it doesn't "pass freely through" the 5mm slot (you have to push it a bit!).

In order to get round this inconsistent and arbitrary ruling (what exactly does "pass freely" mean?), we have asked our printers to use slightly thinner paper - readers may have noticed the difference. The alternative would be to send out the *Weekly Worker* in a larger C4 envelope and pay the extra 19p postage, but that would mean increasing our subscription rates again. Let's see if the new printing arrangement gets us round Royal Mail's officiousness.

Anyway, postal problems have not prevented our readers donating to our fighting fund. Thanks to a large batch of standing orders in the first few days of the month, September's total already stands at £297. But we need £1,500 every month, so let's hope there's no let-up over the next few weeks.

Robbie Rix

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

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 ready to make revolution - peacefully if we can, forcibly if we must.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Assange
divides a
confused left

A textbook paranoid narcissist

‘**B**eware Greeks bearing gifts’, goes the old saying. People would do well to bear it in mind when taking positions on the increasingly labyrinthine case of Julian Assange. The Wikileaks founder has taken refuge in the Ecuadorian embassy, seeking political asylum from what he claims to be trumped-up allegations of rape, for which he would otherwise have been deported to Sweden.

And so, suddenly, the British state - which, as the headline statistics will tell us, cannot muster up the enthusiasm to convict any rapists at all under normal circumstances, and indeed only outlawed marital rape two decades ago - has reinvented itself as a crusading force against sexual violence. All options have been considered to get Assange out of this country, to be *questioned* (he has not yet been charged) by Swedish prosecutors - up to and including storming the embassy.

William Hague, and his superiors in the cabinet, have not undergone an overnight conversion to Dworkinism - because Assange is no ordinary suspected rapist. He is most famous as the *de facto* leader and public face of Wikileaks, whose periodic revelation of dodgy goings-on at the highest echelons of the US state (including the release of diplomatic cables which, most embarrassingly for the USA, revealed what they actually thought about various regimes around the world) has led Assange to the position of public enemy number one in the States. Obama and his minions want to try him not for rape, but for espionage. The maximum penalty is death.

The situation, on one level, is perfectly simple. Assange is the target of what amounts to a rather demented revenge quest by the US state department, and its pliant little poodle of a government in Westminster. While speculation abounds as to exactly *what* game these Machiavellian forces are playing, it defies credibility to consider insignificant the fact that they are hell-bent on seeing Assange in a Stockholm slammer (not that some gentle souls have not blinded themselves even to this, as we shall see). Under these circumstances, the ‘facts of the case’ are simply irrelevant - the notion that Assange can expect a fair trial in such a situation is transparently bunk, and any resultant conviction will lack the smallest particle of moral authority.

Yet leftwing and progressive-minded people all over the place - especially in the bourgeois commentariat - have been utterly blinded by the most dubious sort of moral authority in existence. This is, in short, the fetishisation of certain crimes in modern society - the suffusion of certain words with such an enormous weight of sheer horror that to utter them in vain is as irresponsible as it is for Harry Potter to name Voldemort aloud. In this case, that word is ‘rape’.

Were Assange being sought for almost anything else short of murder (a bar-room punch-up, for example) the world’s vision would be clear on the matter - but a rape accusation presents the good liberal (or the good social democrat) with a problem. It is

important, to be sure, to stand up to the powers that be - but it is also important to stand with women against sexual violence. What line does one take?

It is in the structure of this kind of bourgeois political ideology - which sees the political as, if you will, a grab-bag of issues, more or less homogenous in substance, on each of which it is necessary to be with the oppressed against the oppressor - to meet conflicts of this kind with political paralysis.

There is no *rational* way out from within this problematic, and so it becomes a matter for the *irrational*. People are being asked to choose between the *possibility* that Assange may never tweak the nose of Uncle Sam again (if he is dispatched to Scandinavia), and the *possibility* that he may get away with rape (if he is left at liberty). The decision must be made by way of personal prejudice one way or the other. Assange claims he is the victim of a ‘honeytrap’ sting, but the real ‘honeytrap’ here is the lure of moral certainty provided by the absolute anathematisation of rape to the confused leftwinger.

Thus, Owen Jones - the rising star of left Labourism - argues that “people who do otherwise commendable work” may commit heinous crimes such as rape: “If presented with rape allegations, they must face them like anybody else, however otherwise worthy their past contributions. Now, these statements should be so self-evidently obvious, it is ludicrous that they need to be said. But the furore over Wikileaks founder Julian Assange sadly makes it necessary.”¹

He lambasts Assange supporters for suggesting that the accusations he faces are of sins short of rape, and quotes no less an authority than one of those well-known friends of women’s liberation, a British high court judge, to this effect. He dismisses the objection that Assange has not been charged, because that is “not how the Swedish legal system works”, and also waves away concerns that Assange would be extradited onwards to the United States, on the absolutely beautiful grounds that in order to do

so, in the opinion of Jones’s learned friends, “Sweden would have to gain the consent of the British home secretary first”. So that’s all right then.

In truth, Jones’s opening sentences need to be inverted. People may be accused - or even guilty - of the most horrendous crimes; but until they are convicted, they should be presumed innocent, and should be given a reasonable guarantee of a fair trial. This is so self-evidently obvious that it should not need to be said - but the idiotic moralisms of the Owen Joneses of this world make it sadly necessary.

An excellent piece by Richard Seymour of the Socialist Workers Party rather blows this whole argument apart: comrade Seymour expresses bafflement at the sudden concern for and supposed expertise on Swedish due process on the part of people who hitherto had not noticed the country save for its famous welfare system, and points out that off-the-peg legal arguments can be had for both sides.²

On this ground, he misses an important detail - Sweden has not issued an extradition request, but a European arrest warrant (EAW). This rather fine distinction has two relevant consequences: firstly, a full extradition application (or, indeed, a formal charge) would expose the prosecutors to the possibility of criminal liability for false prosecution,³ or (less dramatically) civil liability for substantial damages; and secondly, going the EAW route prevents Assange from using the threat of further extradition to the US as a legal defence. Owen Jones prevents himself from considering this matter; a court, however, would be so prevented by the law.

If the Swedish prosecutors are playing subtle games with legality, then the same is true of the UK supreme court, which has had to redefine prosecutors as a “judicial authority” within the letter of the Extradition Act 2003 - *against* the arguments of the government, in passing the law, that they would not fit the bill.⁴ Official bending of the law is hardly a rarity in Sweden and

Britain alike - but, when it happens, it is normally because the powers that be are up to something. Every bit of judicial finagling displayed here has the clear purpose of easing Assange’s extradition to Sweden, however thin the allegations against him.

All this leaves the small matter of whether or not Assange did in fact rape two women in Sweden. This in turn comprises two questions: is Assange guilty of the things of which he is accused, and do the allegations fall under a meaningful definition (rather than, say, the contingent legal definition that obtains in Sweden or Britain) of rape?

The first question is easier to answer: I do not know, you do not know, Owen Jones and the others baying for his blood do not know; nor does William Hague or the king of Sweden. This, again, should be obvious; but there is a certain tendency for those who are accused of rape to be presumed guilty until proven innocent. Still, there is a complication: this is the person of Assange himself.

On a charitable view, he is eccentric. To be less charitable, he has a screw loose. In the last two years, he has managed to alienate almost every ally he has had through his unstable behaviour. He has touted the crackpot theories of Israel Shamir. He has at least as much the public profile of a textbook paranoid narcissist as of a crusading journalist - and he is on record in simply too many places, saying too many odd things about too many people, for it all to be a CIA concoction.

The second question - concerning the nature of the allegations themselves - has already proven to be the most dangerous territory. George Galloway, who likes to make a habit of angering six feminists before breakfast, has come in for a firestorm of criticism for suggesting that Assange is accused of nothing worse than “bad sexual etiquette”.

In truth, he and all those shrieking ‘rape is rape’ in his face are equally wrong. If rape is to include everything from violently penetrating a victim using direct physical coercion to (as

Assange allegedly did) unprotected penetration without explicit consent in the immediate context of a previous sexual encounter, then it is a concept that is getting too bloated for its own good. Put another way, it has the effect of cheapening rape as a whole. (Indeed, some anti-rape campaigners smell a rat in all this.⁵)

On the other hand, the deformed sexual relations engendered by a decaying patriarchy produce a great many more unequal, abusive and exploitative sexual practices than rape as such. Manipulating women into unprotected sex should not be seen as a capital offence, but nor is it a matter of etiquette - it is rather an expression of the structurally sustained subordinate position of women in society at large. As such, it is *part of* a serious political matter, which a man like George Galloway - infamously prone to reactionary politics as regards women - is typically wrong to dismiss.

The problem then becomes a different one. You cannot legislate culture out of existence. Expanding the definition of rape or sexual assault, in order to cover ever more marginal infractions of sexual autonomy, will not liberate women, any more than increasing state tetchiness about expressions of ‘racial hatred’ has eradicated racism. It is necessary to build a different culture, a better one, from the bottom up - and ultimately overthrow the systemic guarantee of sexual inequality, which remains today what it has always been: class society. ●

Paul Demarty

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Notes

1. *The Independent* August 17.
2. www.leninology.com/2012/08/assange-asylum-seeker.html.
3. www.regeringen.se/content/1/c4/15/36/d74ceabc.pdf. For this, and subsequent legal arguments, I draw on the views of my comrade, Mike Macnair.
4. See the dissenting judgments of Lady Hale and Lord Mance in the supreme court decision on Assange’s case: www.supremecourt.gov.uk/decided-cases/docs/UKSC_2011_0264_Judgment.pdf.
5. See Katrin Axelsson and Lisa Longstaff in *The Guardian* August 23.

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