

weekly worker



The Morning Star's Richard Bagley, the SACP/ANC and cold-blooded murder

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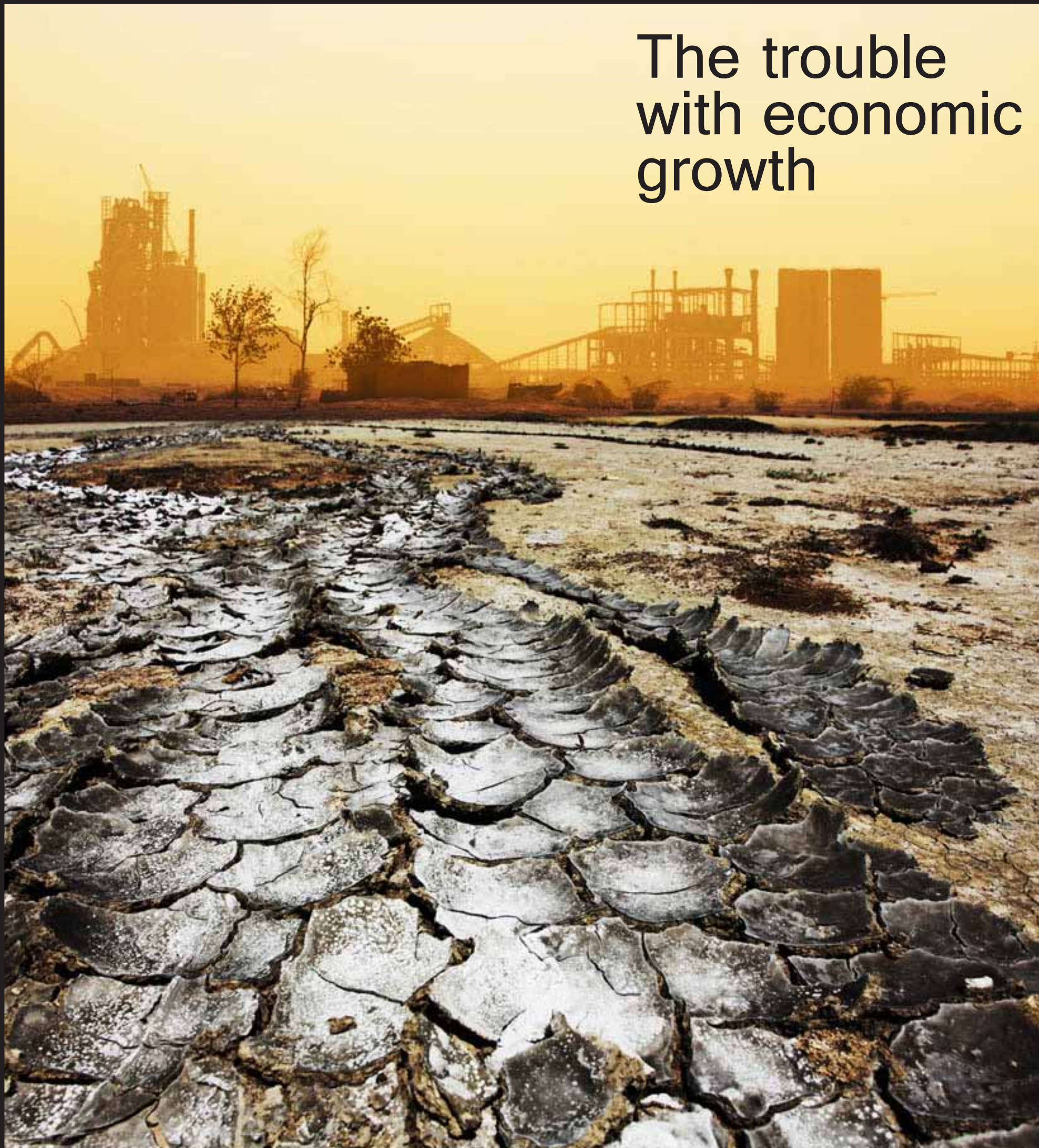
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The trouble with economic growth



LETTERS



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

Value added

Arthur Bough continues to assert that the approach of the temporal single-system interpretation (TSSI) is “to consider things subjectively from the perspective of the individual capitalist” (Letters, September 6). A few paragraphs later, with no hint of embarrassment, he backs up an argument about changes in the value of constant capital by recounting his own personal experience of costing contracts for a protective clothing manufacturer.

I think Arthur’s personal reminiscences are actually quite interesting. It is just a shame that he misrepresents the TSSI. How measuring aggregate prices and aggregate profits across a whole economy constitutes “the perspective of the individual capitalist” defeats me. After all, an increase in the value of capital held by capitalists in aggregate is not a capital gain by one capital at the expense of another. It is precisely an example of “capital as self-expanding value” that Arthur correctly says is the concern of Marxist economics.

Nor is Arthur correct when he accuses the proponents of the TSSI of “holding nominal prices constant”, as he would have discovered if he had bothered to engage with Andrew Kliman’s *The failure of capitalist production* (my review of that book initiated these exchanges).

As for Arthur’s musings on the impossibility of identifying single instances of time, I gather that Arthur is not a fan of modern cosmological theories about singularities of time and space - the big bang and black holes. But since when is measuring change across a specific time period (the “discrete blocks” of time to which he objects) a non-dialectical practice? How else do we incorporate change into our analysis?

Remember, it was Marx who discussed (and modelled) cycles of production, circulation and reproduction that for the purposes of his analysis had a beginning and an end. These models involve radical abstractions from the real world but that is how scientific enquiry proceeds.

And Arthur himself goes on to talk of “commodities of the same kind existing in *the same period of time*” (my emphasis). Yet he denies the possibility of any such period having a discrete beginning or end and therefore - in the caricature of a dialectical universe that he inhabits - any existence. Consistency is not Arthur’s strongest suit.

Nevertheless, there is a serious discussion to be had about how, in the context of changes of value over the course of a production cycle, the exchange values of the constant capital inputs (raw materials, energy, production equipment, buildings, etc) are transferred to the exchange value of the final output. The topic may be dry, but it is central to the debate about how Marxists should measure the rate of profit and whether some of Marx’s central propositions were internally consistent.

The trouble is, Arthur is not really trying to understand my thesis, which, by the way, is not the same as Andrew Kliman’s, much as that may disappoint Arthur, who has seized on me as a proxy for the TSSI dragon he seeks to slay. Of course, individual capitalists are in no position to pass on their individual costs in the prices of their outputs - unless they enjoy a monopoly position. They are constrained by competition to

operate within the general (constantly changing) price levels that apply to all capitalists within an economy. Competition imposes *aggregate* economic reality on *individual* capitalists. If that means they make a smaller profit than their competitors or go bust, too bad.

The question is how we model the formation of those (aggregate) prices and the relationship of prices to exchange values and ultimately the socially necessary labour time required to produce commodities. A fundamental difference between me and Arthur (and possibly me and Andrew Kliman) is that I do not think socially necessary labour time is determined simply by the production conditions from which the latest batch of a commodity has emerged onto the market. In fact I argue that a range of production processes (incorporating those that produced the bulk of commodities still on the market) play their part in forming the socially necessary labour time needed to produce any commodity.

Now, constant capital can be and is devalued. That is, once adequate supplies at a lower value and therefore cheaper price are readily available, the production process which produced the more expensive commodities no longer bears on the calculation of the socially necessary labour time for the production of that type of commodity.

It strikes me that capital appreciation - in the case of commodities that were produced under more favourable circumstances in the past - works differently. In fact it is those commodities that have emerged from production more recently and embody more labour that will struggle to realise their value.

I do not have the space in this letter to develop this argument further. However, it would be worthwhile to draw one or two lessons from Arthur’s tales of life in manufacturing, while bearing in mind Marx’s warning about the fetishistic understanding of the source of surplus value held by capitalists as a result of the procedure of marking up costs described by Arthur - it appears that capital itself rather than labour is the source of profit.

Arthur is quite correct to say that in putting together a bid for a contract, the price or prices he paid for any raw materials in stock (cloth in this case) is irrelevant. But then his expressed desire to make a return in this production round sufficient to maintain production levels in a future production round is equally irrelevant.

Who said capitalist production was a stable phenomenon? Marx explores this aspect of the circulation of capital in volume two of *Capital*. When he wants to model stable reproduction he has to explicitly exclude “revolutions in value”.

What Arthur was doing for his capitalist boss was attempting to submit a bid that would win the contract by being at least no more expensive than rival bids. When costing cloth inputs to the price of the final commodity was he targeting the *current replacement cost* of cloth, as he believes? Well, no. It was the *current* market price at the time he made the costing, but he had not won the contract yet. Production had not begun. He may well not have bought the cloth he would require had he won the contract.

The current replacement cost would have been the market price of cloth at the time the final product (the protective clothing) was sold. The price of cloth required as input to a subsequent production round - for which Arthur insists he could deliver sufficient funding - was several months (or a year or two) down the line.

The market price at the time Arthur made his costing was actually something between the *historical price* (ie, the price of the actual input) and Andrew Kliman’s *pre-production reproduction cost* (the price at the time production began). It just goes to show that in political economy the consciousness of capitalists and their agents do not necessarily coincide with reality.

Two quick points. Arthur has misinterpreted Marx’s July 11 1868 letter to Kugelmann about the law of value, which Arthur thinks operates as an eternal feature of human society. It is actually the “distribution of social labour in specific proportions” that Marx describes as a “natural law” that transcends all forms of social organisation. He does so in contrast to “exchange value” (crucial to Marx’s understanding of *value*), which is appropriate only to a “state of society in which the interconnection of social labour expresses itself as the private exchange of the individual products of labour” (ie, capitalism).

Marx believed that the law of value only fully comes into its own in a society in which commodity production is fully generalised - even to the extent that the human capacity to work becomes a commodity. It is because the law of value came into being, reached maturity and is linked to a far from eternal mode of production that it is legitimate to discuss its *decline*.

Finally, there is the question of whether Arthur is an underconsumptionist. This argument began because Arthur took offence at my critique of the perspective of Marxist economists (Arthur was not mentioned) who offer an *underconsumptionist* interpretation of the 1980s and 90s. It continued because Arthur suggests that a chronic mismatch between production and consumption is the cause of capitalist crisis.

In his latest contribution Arthur quotes a passage from volume three of *Capital* that is often cited by underconsumptionists: “... a rift must continually ensue between the limited dimensions of consumption under capitalism and a production which forever tends to exceed this immanent barrier”. Arthur may understand why I am inclined to think that he should embrace his inner underconsumptionist.

However, it is true that his explanation of why he thinks the rate of profit rose in the 1980s (Andrew Kliman’s book challenges this assumption) lists factors that would be of interest to those Marxist economists who focus on changes in value relationships within production - although he still fails to account for the low rate of accumulation. It could be that Arthur is edging towards a more interesting analysis.

Whether the global production model of Apple or the high profits of Manchester United (do they not have a lot of debt?) represent a fundamental shift in the organic composition of global capital is another question. Generally, the “smoke stacks and assembly lines” that Arthur dismisses have not disappeared. They have either relocated or now employ so few workers operating hundreds of million of pounds or dollars worth of equipment that they barely figure in popular consciousness. Dare I suggest that a focus on a few high-profile ‘brands’ might risk an overly *subjective* view of modern capitalism?

Nick Rogers
Tottenham

Mythology

In ‘A textbook paranoid narcissist’ (September 6) Paul Demarty writes as a textbook rape apologist: “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.)”

And a lot more anti-rape campaigners don’t. Women Against Rape (the ‘anti-rape campaigners’ cited) are alone in their curious position of claiming to be feminists *and* that the two Swedish women should be regarded with suspicion. WAR was based on the work of Selma James, who argued that domestic labour produced surplus value. Is this the position of the CPGB? Various organisations developed from this unusual analysis, including WAR (currently popular on the left), the English Collective of Prostitutes (ditto), Wages for Housework and Global Women’s Strike.

The observant reader will immediately identify the almost total lack of any critique of the material reality of women’s lives; rather an acceptance of the worst aspects of gender inequality is promoted with the optimistic aspiration that an economic solution will present itself. But women currently dependent on these activities do not find them in any way satisfactory. Even well-paid cleaners find the job soul-destroying; 85% of women in the sex industry want to leave, but can’t. The idea of a global women’s strike is ludicrously idealistic - strike against whom? What employer? Hungry children who need nappies changed?

More representative of current thinking is Rape Crisis. Paul Demarty would have been well advised to give the Rape Crisis website’s ‘Myths’ section a quick look before he wrote this piece. One of the myths it mentions is that “The woman did not get hurt or fight back. It could not have been rape”, to which it responds: “The fact that there is no visible evidence of violence does not mean that a woman has not been raped.” There is a long and ignoble history of reactionary ideas about sexual violence, including the quaint notion that women should be prepared to risk further physical injury or death in order to demonstrate the validity of a fundamentally unreliable allegation. We have been advised that by getting into bed with a man, we have agreed to any sexual activity that may occur to him even if we are asleep at the time, with no regard to safer sex practices. George Galloway regards this as “a game”. Paul seems to agree.

The women in the Assange case have been pilloried from the outset. As I have pointed out in a previous letter, the origin of the smears against them is Israel Shamir and Paul Bennett in *Counterpunch*. That’s the same Israel Shamir described by Paul as having “crackpot theories” and, more seriously, by Tony Greenstein (among others) as an anti-Semite and a fascist.

There was no suggestion of fair trials at that stage; rather there was the unedifying spectacle of representatives of left organisations falling over each other in their haste to defend their hero against the feminazi conspiracy. The comparisons with the recent case of Ched Evans are striking and disturbing. The unthinking misogynist vilification of his victim and corresponding blinkered belief in Evans’ innocence by those who idolise him is, basically, no different to the attitude of Assange supporters. We expect this level of reactionary sexism from the more politically

backward terraces, where aggressive ‘masculinity’ is idealised. But the more sophisticated layers of the workers’ movement should give this nonsense no airtime.

Paul believes the ideal of the fair trial is unjustifiably denied to Assange in Sweden. Here, I agree - Sweden has a low rate of conviction for rape, only slightly better than Britain. Although around 23% of women in Britain suffer sexual violence, it is rarely acknowledged. Rape Crisis again: “Only 15% of serious sexual offences against people 16 and over are reported to the police and, of the rape offences that are reported, fewer than 6% result in an offender being convicted of this offence.” So 6% of 15% - which is about 1% of all serious sexual offences - result in conviction. That compares with something like 3% of rape reports being false (including mistaken identity and mentally ill complainants). Simple arithmetic demonstrates that a woman who says she was assaulted is probably telling the truth, while a man who denies being the perpetrator is probably lying even if he has been found not guilty.

But we are constantly told, as the Leveson inquiry found, that we should focus on the negligible numbers of malicious false reports, while ignoring the reality that about one in four women are subjected to sexual violence. One of the main reasons for the reluctance of women to report and of juries to convict is the media’s perpetuation of rape myths. Paul Demarty’s article is just one more example.

Heather Downs

Medway

Battle bus

The plight of the Counihan-Sanchez family has got extensive coverage in *The Irish Post* and *Irish world*. Basically, a family of seven is facing eviction onto the streets because Anthony, the father, inherited nine acres of land in Galway and Brent council decided in January this year that this ‘capital asset’ rendered them ineligible for housing benefit. They were issued with an eviction notice for August 13, which was halted by court action.

But worse was to come for the Counihans. Rose McIntosh, the Brent housing advice officer, sent an email to Isabel detailing the advice she gave her at a meeting on September 3. It seriously proposes that Isabel and her family move to the field that they inherited in Ireland and live in a caravan. She said, though this is not in the email, that Anthony should not give up his job, as they were hard to get these days, but they could commute (from Peterswell in Galway to London).

Isabel pointed out that they did not have a caravan, there was no sanitation on the site and she could not drive, and asked how they would get the children to school, how she would care for Vinny, her four-year-old autistic child. Furthermore, in January they had offered to give the land to Brent, but the council said that would be illegal because they would be “dispersing assets to gain a means-tested benefit”. Now the council says they can sell the land, so what happened to the legal advice from January?

Isabel was traumatised and suicidal after the interview with Rose McIntosh. She rallied and will speak at the demonstration for the NHS to Brent town hall on September 15 and also at the demonstration down Kilburn High Road on October 6. She and her family are not going to hell or to Connaught, and the Counihan Battle Bus Campaign will never let that happen.

Gerry Downing

email

LABOUR BRIEFING

An irresponsible split

Differences should be brought out into the light of day, writes **Stan Keable** of Labour Party Marxists

Delegates were no doubt perplexed to find two rival publications with the same name - *Labour Briefing* - on sale at TUC congress in Brighton this week. Both journals argue for socialist ideas in the Labour Party and both claim to be the continuation of 32 years of *Labour Briefing* as a pluralist forum for the Labour left, trade unionists and campaigners.

Following the democratic decision of the July 7 *Briefing* AGM to make it the journal of the Labour Representation Committee, the genuine *Labour Briefing* (labourbriefing.org.uk) is therefore produced by the LRC. The LRC is led by John McDonnell MP, has 1,200 or so individual members and around 150 affiliated organisations, including national trade unions, and a democratic structure.

The other version - the self-styled “original” *Labour Briefing* (labourbriefing.co.uk) - has no democratic structure. It is a spoiler launched by six comrades for whom the LRC is “too leftwing” or “ultra-left”. They continue to treat *Briefing* as their personal property, despite the open invitation to participate in the LRC’s new editorial board. Other comrades who argued against the merger have nevertheless accepted the democratic decision, to their credit. Jon Lansman, for instance, was a signatory of the anti-merger motion, but has now joined the editorial board.

Despite its much greater resources, it has to be said that the LRC’s initial 12-page TUC special looks like the poor relation, when compared with the 16-page “original”, with its gloss paper and the traditional *Briefing* banner, only slightly amended - the words “the original” appear in small print in the dot above the ‘i’ of Briefing. We must do better with the Labour Party conference issue, LRC comrades!

Feigning exclusion, the six splitters - Lizzy Ali, Stephen Beckett, Jenny Fisher, Richard Price, Christine Shawcroft and John Stewart - say they formed the LB Co-op to act as “a custodian of *Labour Briefing* to protect it against being taken over by a hostile group”. Their version, we are promised, will be “an independent voice and forum for socialist ideas in the Labour Party and trade unions”. The editorial excuses their irresponsible split by repeating the mantra of a “hostile takeover”, despite the fact that the merger proposal originated in the *Briefing* editorial board itself, most of whom were LRC members. It wrongly accuses the pro-merger comrades of “contempt for Labour Party members”, on the basis of a paragraph in LRC joint secretary Pete Firmin’s successful AGM resolution: “*Briefing* is predominantly sold within the Labour Party to Labour Party members. This is a weakness, as membership of the party has been decimated, and the Labour left is almost invisible to the outside world.” But surely this is merely a truthful estimate of our current weakness.

Although a few LRC members have expressed the view that the splitters should be expelled, and never again supported in any Labour Party election, most are more sensible. They want Christine Shawcroft to return to the LRC fold, but will support her in any case. “There is a long list of people I would not vote for before I got to Christine,” wrote one comrade.

In the “original” September special issue, comrade Shawcroft criticises the “tendency on the left to write off the bulk of party members ... in a

game of ‘prolier than thou’”, which “manifested itself on the *Briefing* editorial board occasionally” and “led to *Briefing* drifting away from ordinary party members and away from our original mission of encouraging members to speak for themselves”. Christine argues effectively that the party membership should not be written off. “The ultras” are wrong, she says, to claim “that the fact that David [Miliband] got more votes in the constituency section than his little brother is proof of the inherent conservatism of party members”. In his electioneering, David did not announce “that he was the son of Tony Blair”. “He stood on false pretences, and members were taken in”.

These arguments are all well and good against those who would give up the fight to democratise the party, establish rank and file control over the party bureaucracy, open the party up to include all working class and socialist organisations and tendencies, and win it for the interests of the working class majority and socialism. They are not reasons for splitting from the LRC, whose aim is precisely to transform the Labour Party, not abandon it. As the genuine, LRC-controlled *Briefing* underlines, “The LRC is a democratic, socialist body working to transform the Labour Party into an organisation that reflects all sections of the working class.”

Having backed the successful motion at the July 7 *Briefing* AGM that the journal should “become the magazine of the Labour Representation Committee”, many LRC members, as well as *Briefing* readers and supporters not in the LRC, are variously “outraged”, “disappointed” and “sad” on Facebook and Yahoo at the decision of the six anti-merger comrades to flout the majority decision. However, before getting too righteous about the “disgraceful behaviour” of once “trusted comrades” who “ignore democratic decisions”, etc, we should remember that the boot might well have been on the other foot, so to speak, had the vote gone the other way. Some pro-merger comrades made it very clear before the *Briefing* AGM that “we have had enough”, and “we will walk” if necessary. Indeed, Graham Bash had walked out of the editorial board as early as February.

Mike Phipps, who played a pivotal role in winning support for the merger, explained convincingly to the September 8 meeting of Greater London LRC why it was necessary. *Briefing*, Mike said, has been in long-term decline, because the Labour left has been shrinking. There was a real danger that *Briefing* would become unviable, like *Voice of the Unions*, which had been absorbed by *Briefing*. The 2011 AGM was attended by only about 25 comrades. On the other hand, the LRC was growing and needed a journal. About 80% of the *Briefing* editorial board were LRC members. Should the same overstretched team produce two journals? Nothing was “forced through”, as the “original” *Briefing* claims; indeed Christine Shawcroft, a leading opponent of the merger motion, chaired the AGM. Both sides had mobilised, and the AGM was unusually well attended. The vote was very close: 44 to 37, with three abstentions. Several of those pulled in to oppose the merger were won over during the debate.

So the merger was necessary. But I disagree with Mike’s insistence that the split was about personalities, not politics. On the contrary, the

personal clashes on the editorial board were fuelled by political conflicts. While the splitters use red-baiting to ingratiate themselves with the so-called centre of the party, the LRC is looking outwards to win all trade unions to affiliate to Labour, and to campaigns like Occupy, in the hope that they will supply new blood in the struggle to transform Labour. As Pete Firmin’s merger motion said, “class struggle is the agent of change in the Labour Party”.

The reluctance of *Briefing* cadres to publish their disagreements in the pages of their own journal made it difficult for readers and supporters to discern the unarticulated political differences which gave rise to the eruption of personal hostilities on the editorial board at the start of 2012. As the bulk of the editorial board were LRC members, a merger with the LRC might have seemed non-controversial. But the splitters have been uncomfortable about their association with the LRC, especially its left wing, fearing it will endanger their alliance with the so-called centre of the party, especially the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy and the Centre-Left Grassroots Alliance, which between them got Christine Shawcroft successfully elected to the NEC. Their true colours can be seen in the despicable display of McCarthyite red-baiting in their editorial, where it is alleged: “... members of the LRC - aided by members of the Communist Party of Great Britain, which produces the *Weekly Worker* - attended the AGM of *Labour Briefing* and forced through a vote ...”

The splitters’ “original” *Briefing* hypocritically claims to be “a non-aligned magazine which is open to all” and that it was set up because readers “did not want to be shut up by the LRC”. But aren’t they the ones who, at the January 2012 editorial board meeting, opposed publication of my letter, mildly critical of sectarian comments by Christine Shawcroft? In her short report on the 2011 LRC AGM, Christine had light-heartedly wished the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty, the New Communist Party and Labour Party Marxists - all affiliates of the LRC - would “go and play in someone else’s organisation”. The argument over whether to publish the letter caused a row, and Graham Bash withdrew from the editorial board, unable to remain in the same room as Jenny Fisher. But my letter was published and freedom of expression was upheld - despite the objections of those who now claim to be “open to all”.

Protecting ‘ordinary workers’ or ‘ordinary party members’ from real debate in the hope of not scaring them away does not prevent splits. Spoon-feeding readers with pre-digested consensus obstructs the necessary clarification of ideas for both readers and leaders. Ideas remain undeveloped. True, arguments for and against the merger of *Briefing* with the Labour Representation Committee were carried in single-page articles twice, in the last two issues of the pre-split journal, in June and July. But this was too little, too late. And, although the merger decision was made by a democratic vote, a two-hour debate cannot substitute for the extensive written polemic required for clarification. To the extent that a culture of freedom of expression is not adopted, the same political frictions will inevitably continue to fester in the dark, not only between the rival journals, but within each camp ●

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 16, 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 3b, ‘Means of payment’. Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

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.

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.

Save south London hospitals

Saturday September 15, 1pm: Demonstration, General Gordon Place, Woolwich, London SE18. Organised by Greenwich and Bexley TUC, Save our Local Hospitals and www.ilovethenhhs.org.uk.

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.

Keep Our NHS Public

Tuesday September 18, 7pm: Regular activists’ meeting. Somers Town Community Centre, Ossulston Street, London NW1. Organised by Camden Keep Our NHS Public: <http://camdenkeepournhspublic.org.uk>.

Leeds against austerity

Wednesday September 19, 6pm: Public meeting, Leeds Civic Hall, Calverley Street, Leeds LS1. Build for October 20 with Mark Serwotka and others. Organised by Leeds TUC: www.leedstradesunioncouncil.blogspot.co.uk.

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>.

Facing the abyss

Wednesday September 19, 9.30am to 4.30pm: Conference, Tavistock Centre, 120 Belsize Square, London, NW3. Exploring the challenges for separated children seeking asylum as they turn 18. Organised by National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns: www.ncadc.org.uk/events/facingtheabyssflier.pdf.

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.

Welcome?

Saturday September 22, 7pm: Educational event about the plight of West Yorkshire asylum-seekers, St George’s Church, Great George Street, Leeds LS1. Organised by West Yorkshire Destitute Asylum Network: 07743 189314.

Remember Bhopal

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

Stop G4S convergence

Saturday October 6, 10am to 4pm: UK-wide activist meeting, the Workstation, 15 Paternoster Row, Sheffield S1. Organised by Stop G4S Convergence: stop-g4s@riseup.net.

No western intervention

Tuesday October 9, 7pm: Anti-war meeting on Syria and Iran, University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: <http://stopwar.org.uk>.

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.

TUC

Partly off one knee

The Trade Union Congress decision to consider the option of a general strike represents a small step forward, writes **Mike Macnair**

On Tuesday September 11 the Trades Union Congress voted by a large majority to pass a resolution from the Prison Officers Association titled 'Resisting austerity measures'. The newsworthy part of the POA resolution is its final paragraph: "Congress accepts that the trade union movement must continue leading from the front against this uncaring government with a coalition of resistance, taking coordinated action where possible with far-reaching campaigns, including the consideration and practicalities of a general strike."¹

The BBC headlined this as "TUC backs 'general strike' motion over spending cuts", though the story disappeared quite quickly from the front page of its news website.² Cameron responded, in effect, by briefing *The Times* for a front-page story (September 12) that he plans to use the army to break any public sector strikes in the near future.

Socialist Worker's front-page headline reads: "Strikes now can crack coalition"; while Socialist Workers Party industrial organiser Martin Smith urges: "Turn our rage into a hot autumn".³

The Socialist Party in England and Wales organised through its National Shop Stewards' Network front a lobby of the TUC on September 10 to call for a one-day general strike, and last week (September 5) the front-page headline of *The Socialist* was "March together - strike together." Their website gives enthusiastic reports of both the lobby attended by "up to 1,000 trade unionists and anti-cuts activists" and of the TUC vote and debate.

However, the *Morning Star* (September 12) led with a negative report of Labour shadow chancellor Ed Balls' speech to congress, which attracted some barracking. It is not clear whether this is for technical reasons (that the front-page headline story was settled before the vote) or it was a political choice. The 'general strike' story is headlined cautiously: "TUC backs call to look into general strike".

If it is a political choice, the *Morning Star's* choice is broadly correct: trade union leaders have adopted a policy which has the potential of leading to a one-day protest strike against the cuts; but another face of those same leaders is shown by Balls' speech and responses to criticisms. Labour is the political expression of the trade union leaderships. Unison, Unite, etc, which in their majority voted for a general strike resolution, backed this Labour leadership and continue to back it. And Balls' speech and subsequent responses to questions showed the Labour Party leadership still committed to the general framework of the capitalist consensus. This continued commitment means that the Labour leadership will undermine working class solidarity, and with it both any protest strike and strikes more generally.

Step forward

Nevertheless, the general strike resolution, together with a successful motion from Unison calling for "coordinated strike action against cuts in pensions, pay and jobs this autumn", is a real step forward.

The point is simple. The situation we are in is not, as the

government tries to present it, that of a 'reforming' government fighting against 'special interest' obstacles. Nor does it consist of a series of separate attacks on different groups of workers. Rather, the Tories are applying the tag attributed to Rahm Emanuel, "You never want a serious crisis to go to waste ... This crisis provides the opportunity for us to do things that you could not do before."⁴ The exaggerated 'deficit problem' provides an excuse for the Tories, aided and abetted by the Liberal Democrats, to launch a series of systematic attacks on the working class, steer public work to cost-plus contracts for their donors, and so on.

This coordinated attack demands an equally coordinated response from the workers' movement. It demands taking seriously the old Industrial Workers of the World slogan that "an injury to one is an injury to all". That does not mean that the immediate task is an all-out, indefinite general strike to force the government to give in. As the British workers' movement learned in 1926 - at high cost in terms of massively weakened unions and mass-scale victimisations - an all-out, indefinite general strike immediately poses the question of political power: that is, the overthrow of the constitutional order as a whole. If you are not ready for these tasks - and the British workers' movement certainly is not ready for them now - you should not call such an action.

In reality, as Rosa Luxemburg pointed out in 1906 in *The mass strike*, broad mass strike waves which really pose the question of power are rarely, if ever, called by formal leaderships. They arise because the broad masses themselves decide they have had enough of the existing regime; some spark sets off the prairie fire, and workers in one workplace go out and picket out many of the other workplaces in the city; the action spreads from city to city, and so on.⁵

But this does not mean that more limited protest general strikes - one-day, two-day, and so on - should be off the agenda. Such strikes address the broad masses, union members and non-members alike, with the idea that we have common interests extending beyond immediate workplace conditions; and that we can assert our collective interests by solidarity. They can form part of a campaign, together with partial strikes for more immediate ends, other forms of demonstration, and political action of one sort and another.

It is in this sense that the POA resolution is positive. The Unison policy of coordinating strike action may be more likely to lead to large numbers out in the immediate term. But this still implicitly asserts that the strikes in question are only sectional, not common action of the working class as a class. A one-day protest general strike would precisely assert that basic class unity and solidarity.

The SWP has been using "TUC, get off your knees - call a general strike!" as a slogan. From this point of view the POA resolution for "the consideration and practicalities of a general strike" might be considered as the TUC getting partly off one knee: it is certainly neither a call for a general strike, nor even a clear call to prepare for one.

From this point of view the coverage in *Socialist Worker* and on SPEW's website is excessively

gung-ho and characterised by 'official optimism'. Leon Trotsky said on several occasions that "the first principle of the Left Opposition is to tell the workers the truth" (in some places he added something along the lines of 'however unpleasant it is'). The SWP and SPEW, both organisations of Trotskyist origin, have plainly forgotten that maxim.

The TUC resolution can only be a small step. There is mass discontent and widespread hostility to the government: witness George Osborne getting booed at the Paralympics.⁶ But, contrary to the line of *Socialist Worker* and *The Socialist*, there is not - yet - an enormous upwelling of anger and willingness to fight. For example, the "up to 1,000 trade unionists and anti-cuts activists" at the NSSN lobby of congress is about the size of SPEW's own membership. Days lost through strike action were higher in 2011 than for 20 years - but still very much lower than in the 1970s and 80s.⁷ The National Union of Teachers ballot for strike action achieved a turnout of only 27%.⁸ Union membership has continued to fall this year (partly because of job losses in the public sector).⁹

In this respect, it is important to recognise that the TUC "represents 5.98 million members" only rather indirectly. It represents immediately the full-time officials, and indirectly the trade union activists who participate in their branches, vote in elections and so on. The activists' links to the broad membership are more problematic. The level of practical organisation at rank-and-file level remains extremely variable and in many unions very weak; the POA and RMT, which seconded the general strike motion, represent relatively strongly organised sectors.

The small step forward consists therefore of beginning to spread the idea of general strikes as expressing general working class solidarity and attacking the political legitimacy of the anti-union laws. This idea in itself can be a part of the process of rebuilding the workers' movement, which remains - for the moment - our primary task.

But this task faces a contradiction. Even if the TUC and the unions decide on action with the potential to rebuild general working class solidarity, the Labour Party leadership continues to set its face against such idea - as Balls' speech demonstrated.

Balls

His speech¹⁰ was very much 'future chancellor' stuff. First we get an 'our great movement' story of congratulations to TUC leaders. Next comes the tale of the Tories messing up the economy. On this issue he begins by associating himself with the TUC: Brendan Barber "called it right", and "I am proud to say that with Ed Miliband and my shadow cabinet colleagues we have stood side by side with you and argued and campaigned and marched to make the case for the economic alternative."

The Tories "help out a privileged few", while the government is "using the cover of deficit reduction to mount a full-scale assault on our public services and those who work in them". This policy has damaged the economy, and its effect is that - first hint of what is to come - "I very much fear that the result will be an economy more prone to inflationary

pressures when the recovery finally comes": code, for anyone who remembers the 1970s, for the proposition that a Labour government would attempt to hold wages down.

He says to the general secretaries: "We understand that you need action now - a change of course and a plan for jobs and growth. The fact is, you and your members cannot just sit back and wait for a Labour government." But the answer he gives is Labour's five immediate demands on government: a bank bonus tax; bringing forward construction projects; a reversal of the VAT rise; a temporary cut in VAT on home improvements; a one-year national insurance tax break for small firms. It is not strikes:

"I am sure that the last thing the vast majority of trade union members want, at a time of such uncertainty, is strikes over the coming months. It is not what we want. It is not what the public wants either. But when coalition ministers warn that they will have to act and legislate if we see a return to the unrest of the 1980s, what we are really seeing is Tories itching to provoke a row about strikes so they can blame the stalling recovery on trade union members and working people."

Dampening expectations continues when he moves to the tasks of the next Labour government:

"Congress, we know now that it will fall to the next Labour government to clear up George Osborne's economic mess. And it's going to be hard ... Which is why - however difficult this is for me, for some of my colleagues and for our wider supporters - when we don't know what we will inherit, we cannot make any commitments now that the next Labour government will be able to reverse particular tax rises or spending cuts ... there will be disappointments and difficult decisions from which we will not flinch."

"Because the question the public will ask is: who can I trust? Who will have the discipline and the strength to take tough decisions which will be needed? ... But a radical plan to kick-start our recovery, put jobs first and transform our economy will only be possible if we can win the trust of the British people that our plan is credible."

"Credible" is code for 'acceptable to capital'. And the positive policy proposals which follow are all about British nationalism and strengthening British capital.

It is, then, unsurprising that Balls faced sharply hostile questioning. The 'We're with you' material is almost completely a token gesture. This is mostly a speech addressed to capital and the media, to reassure them that Labour will be a safe pair of hands. In fact Balls' speech was accompanied by private lobbying of TUC leaders against strikes from Ed Miliband, immediately 'briefed' to the press (*The Independent* September 11).

Right now, Labour is riding high in the polls, with around a 10% lead over the Tories.¹¹ Miliband and Balls presumably draw the conclusion that they are correct to maintain the policy of holding to the right in the hope that the government will mess things up badly enough for sufficient sections of capital, and hence of the capitalist media, to back Labour in 2014.¹²

Whether this is a correct judgment

or not is open to serious question. Assuming a general election in 2014, we are now at the mid-term and the government *should be* at a low point in the polls. The Lib Dems are trapped: their best hope is to hang on. In this situation, Balls offers ... vague promises of tinkering at the edges with current Tory policies, and British nationalism - which the Tories can pretty much always do better than Labour. At most he is offering a return to the Brown government. It is not clear that this will be enough to propel Labour to victory in 2014.

Class solidarity

The policy of the Con-Dem government is one of class war against the working class. It is more gradual in its operation than it might have been: we are not immediately facing the sort of descent into the abyss that is threatening Greece.

Nonetheless, in this situation the central task facing the workers' movement is the need to rebuild itself on the basis of class solidarity. Strikes can play a valuable role in that process, but they can also be demoralising when they do not immediately achieve results. The SWP's suggestion that "Strikes now can crack coalition" is very close to its similar suggestions in winter 2010 that the student movement could defeat the rise in fees and trigger the fall of the government: hype of a sort which will naturally produce demoralisation.

Rebuilding the movement on the basis of class solidarity will not be simple. It requires not only strikes and demonstrations, and patient work at the base, but also systematic political work to delegitimise the government's claims to represent "the public" and the judges' claim to stand above politics, routinely deployed against strikers.

This political work is work not for trade unions, or even for the TUC, but for a political party. It is plain that it will not be done by, or with, the Labour leadership, but against it (whether inside or outside the Labour Party). It is also plain that it will not be done by the sort of 'party' which merely idolises strikes and demonstrations, like the SWP and SPEW on their present political course. The TUC's small step forward, and Balls' speech, should thus remind us yet again that what we need is to get beyond a Labour left which clings to its right, and a splintered and ineffective far left, to a real, if initially minority, Communist Party ●

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Notes

1. The TUC motions are available at www.tuc.org.uk/the_tuc/tuc-21349-f0.pdf.
2. www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-19562394.
3. *Socialist Worker* September 15.
4. www.politicsdaily.com/2010/09/02/rahm-emanuels-misguided-mantra-no-crisis-should-go-to-waste.
5. www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1906/mass-strike/index.htm.
6. *The Guardian* September 3.
7. http://fullfact.org/factchecks/2011_most_working_days_lost_to_strikes_in_decades-27777.
8. *The Guardian* September 7.
9. www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-19521535.
10. www.tuc.org.uk/the_tuc/tuc-21408-f0.cfm.
11. <http://ukpollingreport.co.uk/> - 13% as at September 12, though figures in other polls have been significantly lower.
12. Clearly argued, for example, in Ben Jackson's and Gregg McClymont's 2011 pamphlet, *Cameron's trap* (www.policy-network.net/publications/4113/Camerons-Trap).

ECONOMY

No such thing as a free lunch

With Madrid refusing to take a bailout and Athens still facing the possibility of default, the euro crisis is far from over, writes **Eddie Ford**

By late July the euro crisis seemed to be spiralling out of control yet again. Borrowing costs on 10-year government bonds in Spain and Italy had reached 7.6% and 6.6% respectively - totally unsustainable levels. Both countries are just too big to fail, as far as the euro zone project is concerned - yet too big to bail out either, given that the European Financial Stability Facility/ European Stability Mechanism rescue fund only came to about €700 billion (using the most generous estimate). Nowhere near enough. In response, Mario Draghi, president of the European Central Bank, told an investment conference in London that he was prepared to do "whatever it takes" to preserve the euro - just wait and see.

Then on September 6 Draghi unveiled some concrete details about the plan. If necessary, the ECB would buy "unlimited" quantities of sovereign debt to ensure euro zone governments retained access to funding. Or, to put it another way, guarantee that states struggling to raise funds from financial markets will be helped out by the central bank - rest easy. This new type of financial intervention was instantly dubbed 'outright monetary transactions' (or OMT). Rather than buying new issues of government bonds, the proposed scheme will see the ECB buy *existing* bonds that are already held by pension funds and banks. The aim, naturally, is to provide sufficient demand to drive up the prices of these bonds and so reduce the interest rate on them. And to a certain extent the ECB has already had a measure of success - as of September 12, bond yields stood at 5.7% in Madrid and 5.1% in Rome. Manageable for now.

Predictably, there was fierce opposition to Draghi's plans from Germany's central bank, the Bundesbank - attacking it on the grounds that it comes close to breaking European Union treaty provisions preventing the ECB from bailing out governments. Indeed, the Bundesbank views Draghi's "unlimited" purchase of bonds as seriously increasing the risk of the ECB itself going bust and also enhancing 'moral hazard' - ie, the creation of a licentious situation where borrowers think they will always be bailed out and so renege on their fiscal commitments. With the German taxpayer always there to dutifully dole out the cash or, alternatively, "consigned to economic serfdom" in order to save the euro.¹

Expressing such anxieties, Peter Gauweiler, a backbench Christian Social Union MP, made a formal request to the German Constitutional Court to postpone its decision on the legitimacy or otherwise of the ESM until the ECB has altered its unlimited bond-buying programme. Gauweiler argued that the programme had "created a completely new situation" regarding the ESM, making the impact on Germany's taxpayers "completely incalculable". But the court on September 11 rejected his complaint and the next day ruled that the ESM was legal *vis-à-vis* the German constitution. However, it attached two main conditions: namely, that German liability to the ESM must not exceed €190 billion without "prior approval" by the Bundestag lower house of parliament; and that both houses must be kept "informed" about how the ESM funds are deployed.

So you could say that the new

ECB plan looks like the sort of intervention required. Maybe the euro, as Draghi and others have insisted, is "irreversible" and the crisis is finally drawing to a close?

ECB limitations

However, in reality, the crisis is far from over. There are limitations - indeed potentially fatal flaws - to the ECB's seemingly ambitious rescue plan. Most importantly, the ECB will only buy a country's bonds if its government formally signs up to a euro zone bailout programme and sticks to the "strict and effective" conditions inevitably attached to such a deal - there is no such thing as a free lunch, especially when dished up by the ECB, European Commission and the International Monetary Fund. Spain, of course, has already secured European rescue funds up to the sum of €100 billion for its distressed banks.

A very bitter pill to swallow - perhaps *too* bitter. That seems to be the case for the increasingly beleaguered Mariano Rajoy, the Spanish prime minister. In a TV interview on September 12, he belligerently stated that he had no intention of applying for a bailout - possibly putting him on a collision course with the ECB and Brussels. He declared that his overriding priority was "creating employment", not taking up "what people like to call a bailout". In fact, Rajoy "couldn't accept anyone else telling us what our policies should be" or "where we have to make cuts". National pride would not tolerate it.

During the interview he also admitted that he had reneged on election promises not to raise income tax and VAT. *Mea culpa*. His unconvincing excuse though was that "no one told me" the deficit was €90 billion and not the €60 billion he had been led to expect when first taking office last December - if only he had that 'extra' €30 billion then things "would have been different". Methinks the man doth protest too much. Rajoy also reiterated that he would not adopt any measures that would "harm" pensioners, whilst completely dodging the question of how he is going to 'reform' (ie, cut) the pension system without further reducing living standards.

It is hardly surprising that neither Rajoy nor, for that matter, Italy's Mario Monti is exactly rushing to take advantage of the ECB scheme. If Madrid accepts tough new conditions, it will be seen as prostrating itself before the 'men in black' - inspectors from the EC, ECB and IMF troika - and that may spark more trouble on the streets. Rajoy is already deeply unpopular, if not hated, for the July budget which contained sweeping austerity measures. That €65 billion package included raising VAT from 18% to 21%, which, for example, saw the rate on public transport, hotels and processed foods rise from 8% to 10%; cuts to benefits (reduced unemployment benefit after six months out of work) and public sector pay, like removing Christmas payments; a new fuel tax; raising the retirement rate; and cutting billions off local government spending.

Vicious and painful measures that are being made at a time when the Spanish jobless rate is close to 25% - with youth unemployment now standing at a staggering 53% - and an economy that is mired in recession. The IMF, to name one organisation, expects that the recession will last



Could still shatter

until at least 2014. Extra austerity measures on top of that, even if it were a so-called 'bailout-lite', could amount to political suicide.

Given the intense pressure Rajoy is under, both from the Brussels bureaucracy and a combative Spanish working class, he could twist either way - towards capitulation or defiance. However, the Rajoy administration is being 'encouraged' to make a bailout application before the EU summit at the end of October and before Spain has huge bond redemptions (repayments) to make at the end of that month. Playing for time, Rajoy has stated that he wants to "see what emerges" from the next Council of Europe meeting on October 18-19. This has been widely interpreted to mean that no bailout will be announced before the regional elections, which are due on October 21 in his native Galicia and in the Basque country (just to make Rajoy's life even harder, nationalist/ separatist sentiment has been steeply rising in Catalonia and elsewhere).

Madrid and Rome face other problems as well. Draghi's plan, as things stand now, is for the ECB to focus its purchases on bonds with a maturity of one to three years - ie, *short-term* debt. Therefore both countries still have to find some other way of dealing with long-term debt, which accounts for around two-thirds of what is owed. No easy task. Meanwhile the spread between Spanish/Italian and, for example, German/Dutch/Finnish bond yields is reaching dangerous proportions. For the latter countries, two-year yields have entered *negative* territory in recent months (meaning, at least in theory, that investors could end up losing money if they hold the bonds to maturity). Such extreme divergence - as opposed to convergence, supposedly the euro's *raison d'être* - could split the euro apart.

Yes, investors at the moment are currently relatively bullish about Spain and Italy. But we know that they are notoriously fickle. After all, the good mood engineered at the start of the year by the ECB's €1 trillion of cheap long-term loans to the zone's banks had vanished by the spring. With economies shrinking, and the prospect of tougher political challenges and looming elections, both Rajoy and Monti are in a precarious position. Draghi's bond-buying scheme may have bought them both a little bit of time, bailout 'lite' or not, but if they drag their heels for too long the markets may

well lose patience and snuff them out.

Greek noises

The euro zone has other headaches. Troublesome noises are coming from Athens, for instance. Greek prime minister Antonis Samaras has reportedly asked the ECB to hold over bonds due to mature between 2013 and 2015 until 2020. Obviously, by holding Greek bonds longer, the ECB would be extending the terms of repayment and effectively admitting to losses. Certainly not something Berlin would be too happy with.

Showing the stress upon Greek society, the country's 'non-political' president, Karolos Papoulias, broke with diplomatic protocol whilst visiting Canada on September 11 when he said that "up until now we've been receiving a merciless lashing", but "we have paid enough for our mistakes and Europe must realise that it needs to help Greece". Papoulias made these scathing remarks as the 'men in black' (some of whom are actually women) want labour minister Yiannis Vrontsis to sanction further cuts to an already traumatised country. The economy contracted by 6.2% in the second quarter compared to a year earlier and since the April-June quarter of 2008 has shrunk by a total of almost 18% - the unemployment rate is now 23.1% (among youth it has almost reached 55%). Troika officials want to see the government in Athens force through €11.7 billion in extra spending cuts if it is to receive the next tranche of bailout money - or go bankrupt.

Vrontsis is thus being urged to raise the retirement age, adopt a minimum wage freeze, make more cuts to overtime and severance pay and introduce a *six-day* working week as part of the draconian terms for the country's second bailout. The demand is found in a leaked letter from the troika sent last week to the Greek finance and labour ministries. The relevant section reads: "Measures: increase flexibility of work schedules; increase the number of maximum workdays to six days per week for all sectors. Increase flexibility of work schedules; set the minimum daily rest to 11 hours; delink the working hours of employees from the opening hours of the establishment; eliminate restrictions on minimum/maximum time between morning and afternoon shifts; allow the consecutive two-week leave to be taken any time during the year in seasonal sectors."²

On the same day that Papoulias lashed out at the troika, Panos Kammenos - leader of the rightwing Independent Greeks - described, not inaccurately, the savage cuts/austerity ('internal deflation') being inflicted on the country as a "death recipe that is killing the Greek people". The country, he declared, could only be saved from recessionary policies if the loan agreement it had signed with its creditors was "abandoned once and for all". Communists find themselves in agreement with Kammenos over that matter, if nothing else. Similarly, Pasok leader Evangelos Venizelos and Fotis Kouvelis of the Democratic Left - both part of the coalition government - have stepped up criticism of the measures demanded by the troika, saying they will "unfairly" hit the most vulnerable sections, particularly pensioners and low-income workers. Nothing more wretched than panicking opportunists.

Samaras is digging in, however. Opening the country's international

trade fair in Thessaloniki at the weekend, he insisted that the cuts - which were originally meant to have been implemented in June - had to be carried through. There is no alternative. It will all be worth it in the end though, Samaras added, as the €31.5 billion cash injection Greece stands to receive in return for the cuts will "instantly improve" the liquidity of the country's cash-starved market. Doubtlessly that will be a great comfort to Greek workers who have had their unemployment benefits cut off or been made homeless by the government's ruthless austerity regime.

Doldrums

Meanwhile, the world economy remains in the doldrums. Data published last week by China's National Bureau of Statistics showed that industrial output increased 8.9% in August from a year earlier, compared with a 9.2% gain in July. August's rise undershot market forecasts for a 9.1% rise and is the weakest since May 2009. China's factory sector has been hit by slowing new orders from Europe, needless to say. Overall, the economy expanded by 7.6% in the second quarter, the worst performance in three years and the sixth straight quarter of slower growth. Beijing will not be coming to the rescue of capitalism some time soon - or ever, if truth be told.

What about that mighty powerhouse, the United States - surely the capitalist knight in shining armour? No, its economy is merely bumping along the bottom at 1.7% in the second quarter of 2012. US manufacturing growth remained sluggish in August too, according to two influential surveys. The Markit Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index was 51.5 last month, a notch higher than 51.4 in July. A similar index by the Institute for Supply Management showed a small contraction, with a score of just under 50 (indicating contraction). Looking at the gloomy surveys, the Federal Reserve has cut its forecast for economic growth in 2012 from 2.9% to 2.4%.

More worrying still, at least for Barack Obama's re-election chances, are the unemployment figures. Although they showed a drop from 8.3% to 8.1%, the fall was mainly attributed to people just giving up the search for work - then god knows what happens to them. Call it economic eugenics. Only 96,000 new jobs were created in August, compared with 141,000 in July - well below the rate of population growth. The US economy needs a growth rate of at least 2.0%-2.5% if it is to keep the employment rate stable, never mind whittling it down.

Furthermore, as if things were not bad enough, the US is on the edge of what IMF director Christine Lagarde referred to as a "fiscal cliff" - an economy-rattling set of across-the-board spending cuts and higher taxes caused by the expiration of Bush-era tax cuts in January 2013. The Senate remains deadlocked over the question - a year ago Moody's cut its outlook on US debt to "negative" precisely due to the ceaseless partisan wrangling over raising the government debt limit ●

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Notes

1. Gunnar Beck, *The Guardian* (September 9)
2. <http://tinyurl.com/8dxroa7>

ECOLOGY

The trouble with

Gabriel Levy calls for a rethink on scarcity and abundance. This is an edited version of the first part of the talk

Let us consider what a socialist response to discussions about 'economic growth' and 'sustainability' might consist of.

Ideas about 'economic growth' and 'sustainability' not only figure prominently in discussions between governments, companies and mainstream economists - ie, the ruling class. They are also widely used in the labour movement and other anti-capitalist movements. The TUC protest march last year, the biggest in recent memory, was for "jobs, growth and justice"; the TUC leadership advocates a "green economic policy"; and there is a campaign supported by much of the left wing of the labour movement for "one million climate jobs".

But these ideas thrive far beyond the trade union bureaucracy. Since the economic crisis began, in all the very varied social movements - from north Africa and Spain to the student protests and Occupy movement here - discussions have been heard about types of economic growth that favour equality and sustainability, or on the other hand about prospects for 'no growth' capitalism.

The impact on these movements of socialist ideas has been minimal. This is not so surprising, not because people are not interested in socialist ideas, but because of gaps and contradictions in those ideas and in the ways they are often presented.

One of the big gaps concerns the socialist response to environmentalism. In most cases, the response has been at a crude political level. Socialists *either* attack environmentalists for believing that something can be done about environmental issues under capitalism, *or* try to convince environmentalists that such issues can only be resolved by overthrowing capitalism.

However, such responses do not address the underlying theoretical issues - in the first place, that the word 'environmental' is applied to a range of problems, many of which are not environmental at all; phenomena that are better understood as ruptures or disruptions in the relationship between human society and nature - a subject about which socialist theory has a great deal to say.

For example: a company digs a coal mine and somehow poisons people, animals and plants living nearby. This is commonly described as an environmental problem. But what is going on is a human activity that in some circumstances and on some levels might be 100% reasonable - getting fuel resources from nature to produce heat and light - being conducted in an alienated, inhuman way under capitalist social relations.

The problem is that labour - that is, the human activity of taking things from nature for sustenance and to provide the basis for culture - has for several thousand years been conducted under alienated, and alienating, social relationships. Karl Marx very clearly saw humans' alienation from each other, from the products of their labour, and from nature - three different types of alienation - as being integrally connected. I think he was right. But many socialists today do not take this approach.

My basic argument is: what is required is *not* somehow to incorporate so-called environmental arguments into socialist ideas - the approach often adopted - but to develop our understanding of social relations and

the way that they deform the labour process and the relationship between people and nature.

Obviously this talk will not put all this right. But it will identify some of the gaps in socialist thinking, with particular reference to 'economic growth' and 'sustainability'. The second part of the talk will refer to the discussion of 'limits to growth', and what these 'limits' mean for energy and agriculture.

'Economic growth'

Here are three points to start with.

1. On 'economic growth', as defined by governments, international financial organisations and mainstream economists, we probably agree that:

- The indicator they use, gross domestic product, more accurately reflects capital accumulation than physical economic activity, let alone people's well-being;

- The universal association by politicians of people's well-being with economic growth and rising GDP is completely ideological;

- The so-called 'green new deal' - ie, state support for renewable energy and other technologies that reduce carbon emissions - solves nothing fundamentally.

2. There are various economists who advocate 'no growth' strategies for capitalism. The most recent is Tim Jackson. The most original and significant is Herman Daly, a former chief economist at the World Bank, who has been writing for many years about what he calls "steady-state economics". These writers take as given capitalism and the capitalist market; they want very wide-ranging regulation to send it down a 'no growth' path.¹

3. What is more important in a meeting such as this is so-called socialist 'growth'. I will argue (a) that 20th century socialism has been dominated by assumptions about so-called socialist economic growth, and (b) that in the 21st century such ideas should be junked: ie, there is no such thing as 'socialist economic growth' and socialists should not go round talking about it.

Prior to the 1920s, ideas about economic growth - in the sense of the expansion of industry and of other forms of economic activity - played almost no part in the socialist or workers' movements. Such ideas were developed by social democratic parties who participated in, or led, governments in capitalist countries, and by the Stalinist leadership of the Soviet Union. A very good article explaining this history was published recently by Gareth Dale in the *International Socialist Journal*.²

In the Soviet Union, the prioritisation of economic growth was justified in Marxist terms, and throughout the 20th century was seen as a model, both in Maoist China and by many other nationalist governments in developing countries.

Obviously, in the period after the Russian Revolution of 1917, the capitalist economic development of Russia was way, way behind that of western Europe. Scarcity was overwhelming. Economic policy discussions centred on the need urgently to industrialise the country. The strategy of putting the economic burden on the peasantry, in order to make this industrialisation possible, was rationalised by Evgeny Preobrazhensky³ with his theory of

'primitive socialist accumulation'.

For the purposes of this discussion, the issue is not what alternatives there were in that impossible situation, but the fact that as a result of this historical process socialist ideas became completely distorted - and that was even before we got to the victory of Stalinism and the five-year plans, which involved the destruction of millions of human beings and the use of slave labour in the name of so-called socialist construction.

The question now, I repeat, is the deformation of socialist ideas. The *Communist manifesto* defines communism as "an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all"; by the time we get to the early 1920s, it had become "soviet power plus electrification" (Lenin). The idea of state-owned industry as the basis for socialism was all-pervasive - be it among social democrats who supported nationalisation in the capitalist countries, among Stalinists, or among Trotskyists who denounced Stalinism and the policy of 'socialism in one country', but still hung on to the idea of this 'degenerated workers' state' as a stepping-stone to socialism.

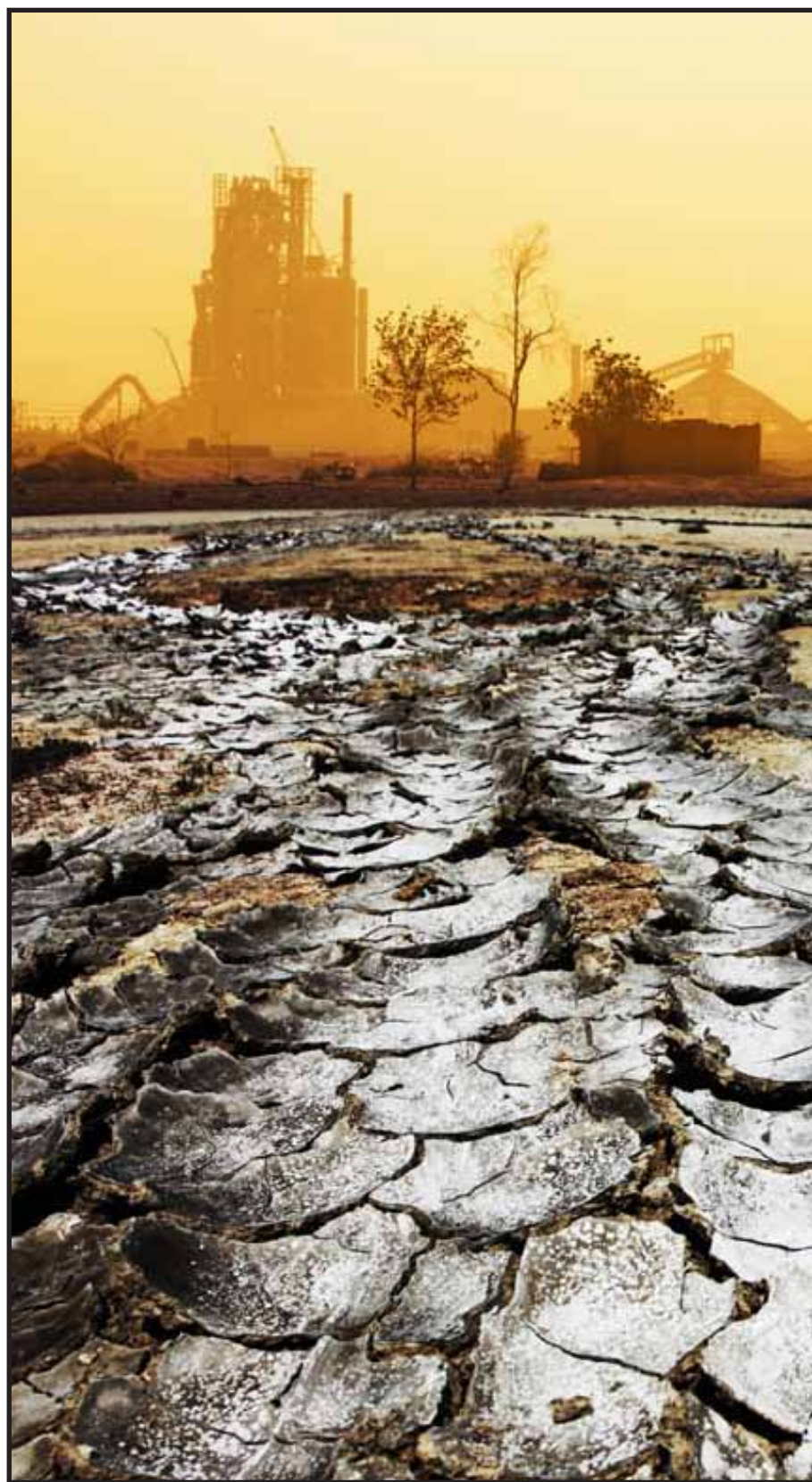
We can argue about the extent to which 'primitive socialist accumulation' or 'soviet power plus electrification' might have been relevant to the circumstances of the time. I will not do so now. Now, I want to give three reasons why those discussions are very much in the past:

First: Capitalism is at a very different stage of its history. The expansion of industry and of capitalist economy, which Preobrazhensky believed the USSR had to replicate on the backs of the peasantry, has now gone much further than anyone in the 1920s could have contemplated. The socialists at the time all believed that, by the 21st century, either capitalism would have descended into forms of barbarism or would have been overthrown internationally. It has not been overthrown; barbarism continues to develop within it. Certainly none of the socialists of that time would have believed that capitalism could have gone so far without producing a successful socialist revolution.

One consequence of this: we have to redefine the role of scarcity. In the Russian Revolution, clearly, scarcity played a big part in cutting down the options available. Today, while many countries still suffer from terrible scarcity, I think its character has changed.

Measured in terms of urbanisation (which is related to, but not the same as, proletarianisation), more than 50% of the world's population now live in cities: ie, a higher proportion across the whole world than there was in western Europe - let alone Soviet Russia - in the 1920s. Across almost all of Africa, Asia and Latin America, urbanisation has now gone far further than it had in the Soviet Union in the 1920s. Measured in terms of technology, millions of people in the poorest countries have access not only to electricity, but also to mobile phones, computers and the internet.

Think about Marx's proposition that the productive forces - that is, the labour applied to the natural resources and the instruments used - as they develop, increasingly come into conflict with the social relations of production. Clearly that tension is today far greater than ever before. For young people in north Africa in



Despoliation

the 2010s - who are spearheading the struggle for social change - ideas of socialism that start with the conceptions around in the 1920s about socialist growth, or socialism 'completing the tasks of bourgeois development', are irrelevant and counterproductive.

Second. The rapid expansion of the capitalist economy in the decades since the 1920s has increasingly brought it up against the natural limits within which it operates - the limits, for example, to the amount of air available into which carbon dioxide generated by burning fossil fuels can be poured, or to the amount of fresh water in the places where it is needed for agriculture (I will return to this in the second part). The amount of material stuff used by the economy, and the consequent impact on the natural environment, really started increasing exponentially in the 1950s; these problems did not exist in anything like this form in the 1920s. To my mind this is a type of scarcity - different from that in the early Soviet

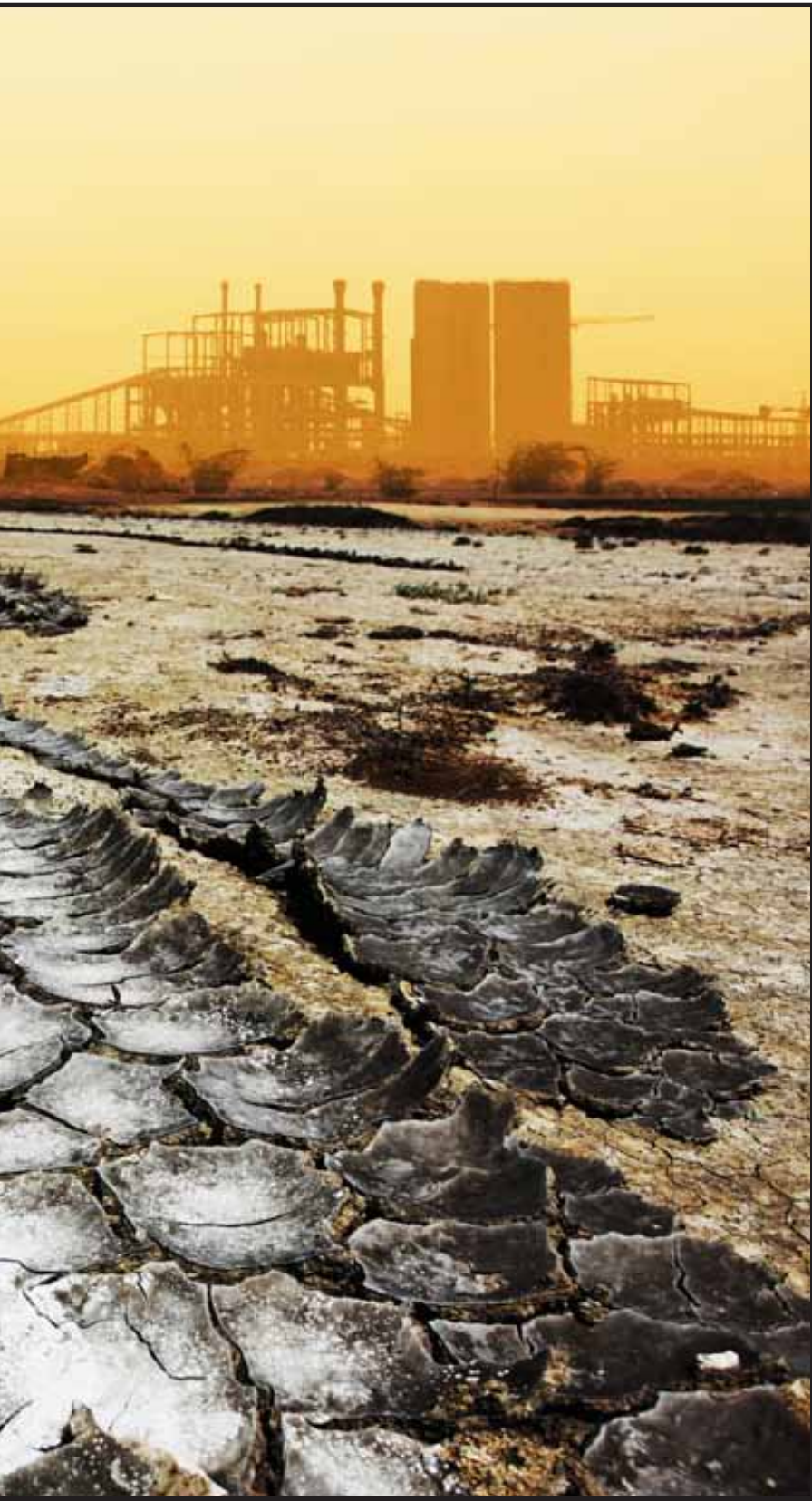
Union, in that it does not pose the type of immediate threat to life and well-being, but poses a potentially greater threat over the long term. This needs to be theorised.

Third. While the Soviet Union has collapsed, Stalinist state socialism in China has evolved into an essential support - perhaps *the* essential support - for capitalist domination internationally. This is a result in practice of so-called 'socialist growth'.

So those are arguments against the idea of 'socialist growth' as a starting point. What then are the starting points? In my view, these have to do with reappropriating Marx's view of the productive forces and social relations of production. We have to work out a view of the transition to communism as a transition that completely remakes the relationship between human beings *not only* in terms of the social relations of production, or the ownership of the means of production, *but also* in terms of (i) the way that the productive

economic growth

What he gave to Communist University 2012



forces - that is, both people and the instruments of labour (tools and machines) that they use to take what they need from nature - are developed, and (ii) types of consumption. This is a side of communist thought that has largely been lost sight of during the 20th century.

Marx, in a chapter of *Capital* about the impact of capitalist production on agriculture, including the division between town and country and the disruption of the nitrogen cycle, wrote: "In agriculture as in manufacture, the transformation of production under the sway of capital, means, at the same time, the martyrdom of the producer; *the instrument of labour becomes the means of enslaving, exploiting and impoverishing the labourer* [my emphasis - GL]; the social combination and organisation of labour processes is turned into an organised mode of crushing out the workman's individual vitality, freedom and independence."⁴

Marx is arguing that we *not only* have the tension between productive

forces and social relations containing the potential of revolutionary change - that tension is not something static; it is not a spring waiting to be let go in an explosion of socialist revolution - *but also* under capitalism the instruments of labour "enslave, exploit and impoverish" the labourer. There is nothing intrinsically good, intrinsically progressive or pro-socialist about those instruments of labour and their development through technology.

Engels, in *Anti-Dühring*, makes similar points: "In making itself the master of all the means of production to use them in accordance with a social plan, society puts an end to the former subjection of men [and women, we would add - GL] to their own means of production. It goes without saying that society cannot free itself unless every individual is freed ... productive labour, instead of being a means of subjugating men, will become a means of their emancipation."⁵ He was arguing that the relationship between people and the tools they use must be

transformed.

The socialist writer, André Gorz, took this discussion further. I think that, although some of what he wrote in his later life was problematic, his work in the 1970s and early 1980s on people, the tools they use and nature is important. In his essay, 'Ecology and freedom', he wrote: "Growth-oriented capitalism is dead ... The development of the forces of production, which was supposed to enable the working class to cast off its chains and establish universal freedom, has instead dispossessed the workers of the last shreds of their sovereignty, deepened the division between manual and intellectual labour, and destroyed the material and existential bases of the producers' power."⁶ This view of the productive forces is clearly at odds with the idea that they are somehow inherently progressive, the basis for socialism. This is a development of Marx's argument that we should think about.

Gorz continued: "Societal choices are continually being imposed upon us under the guise of technical choices ... capitalism develops only those technologies which correspond to its logic and which are compatible with its continued domination. It eliminates those technologies which do not strengthen prevailing social relations, even where they are more rational with respect to stated objectives. Capitalist relations of production and exchange are already inscribed in the technologies which capitalism bequeaths to us."

This is a quotation from a longer work, which I hope you will all read - and I am using it to emphasise one particular aspect of the problem of labour in capitalist society. I am not suggesting - and I do not think Gorz was either - that the development of technology is somehow uniform. For example, the internet - arguably the biggest innovation of the last 20 years - supports democracy in the widest sense of the word and is potentially at odds with capitalist social relations. But there are many other technologies that are best explained along the lines of Gorz's argument. For example, technologies employed in agriculture clearly favour big agribusiness and are used to dispossess - by the hundreds of millions - small farmers; and any number of industrial technologies prioritise types of production that produce profit, that produce unneeded consumer goods and that further smother workers' creativity.

There have been Marxist writers - classically Harry Braverman - who looked at the labour process in capitalist society. But Braverman's book⁷ was published 38 years ago, and I wonder how far socialists, collectively, have really taken these issues since then. There were discussions in the 1970s and 1980s - for example, I have recently discovered for myself material that was published at that time in *Radical Science Journal*, about science, technology and socialism - and these need to be reworked for the present.

Here is some more from Gorz, that I hope we will all think about: "The struggle for different technologies is essential to the struggle for a different society ... The inversion of tools is a fundamental condition of the transformation of society. The development of voluntary cooperation, the self-determination and freedom of communities and individuals, requires the development of technologies and

methods of production which:

- can be used and controlled at the level of the neighbourhood or community;
- are capable of generating increased economic autonomy for local and regional collectivities;
- are not harmful to the environment; and
- are compatible with the exercise of joint control by producers and consumers over products and production processes."

Without this transformation of technology, Gorz argues, people calling themselves socialists can seize state power, but will not fundamentally change "either the system of domination or the relations of men and women to each other and to nature".⁸ And, as well as these issues about the instruments of labour, there are issues about consumption: the use of workers, particularly in the richer countries, as consumers of piles of pointless stuff, the production of which is driven by capitalist accumulation.

Conclusions

I see no evidence for the assumption that socialism implies an expansion of the economy or an expansion of production. It may well imply more production of some stuff, and less production of other stuff. But the main point now is that it certainly implies the overthrow not only of the *ownership* of the means of production, but also of *the relationship people have* with these means of production.

There are no quick fixes at the level of politics. Some socialists campaign for 'one million climate jobs' as a means of trying to push capitalism to minimise its impact on people and on the environment. I think this is based on a view of socialism in which real struggles by real working class people play no part. We can support workers who take action to defend their jobs, without pretending that the road to socialism is opened by the creation of so-called 'climate jobs'.

A picture of the transition to socialism needs to be developed that includes a critique of the labour process - not just at the workplace level, but at the level of society - a critique of the way that capitalism distorts the instruments of labour and destroys the creative potential of people who use those instruments.

A critique needs to be developed of the way in which the capitalist economy confronts the natural limits. I consider this to be a form of potential scarcity, but a very different type of scarcity that socialists were dealing with in the 1920s.

Debate

Among the points raised in the discussion following this talk, someone asked whether we should always support workers who are fighting to defend jobs that are damaging and dangerous to their health and to their lives. The example was given of steelworkers in Italy, who have engaged in strikes and blockades to prevent the shutdown of steel production that is damaging to workers' lives and health, and to the lives and health of their families.

My response was that similar issues arose during an environmentalist demonstration at the Kingsnorth power station some years ago. Representatives of the mineworkers' union were invited to a discussion with the demonstrators, who were

opposed to coal-fired power. It was a dialogue of the deaf that I found very depressing. I think it is absolutely possible, and absolutely right, for communists, for young people who want to change the world, to understand that in a future society nobody will have to work in dirty, dangerous holes in the ground, but at the same time to support struggles such as the strike of 1984-85, in which the state wanted to destroy the miners' union.

Many of the young miners, who were at the forefront of the battle with the police on the picket lines, had no intention of working in mines for the rest of their lives, did not see that as their future and had a very different view of the world from their fathers and grandfathers and older people in their communities. I see no reason why people like those who are here could not go on picket lines and join in such struggles with the state, and at the same time work out - together with those workers - a view of the future: of socialism, which means not more people working in coal mines, but a much, much greater change. Many miners are probably well ahead of many on the so-called 'left' in understanding how this will develop.

In response to questions and comments about the ideas of abundance and scarcity, and about hunter-gatherer societies that live in great abundance despite having few material goods, I stated that abundance and scarcity are socially formed conceptions that develop and change. Abundance is not about having more material stuff. And there is an enormous amount to learn from hunter-gatherers people about how to live.

Clearly there is no simple return to the past. The equations about abundance and scarcity change through history. With each development of agricultural technology - starting with the very use of settled agriculture as opposed to gathering and hunting, which came 9,000 years ago - there follows a big increase in population. That is a cause and effect. I am opposed to the idea that increases in population are bad - but they do change the parameters. We have to look at abundance and scarcity at different stages of human development ●

For more on this subject visit Gabriel Levy's website, People and Nature: <http://peopleandnature.wordpress.com>

Notes

1. See T Jackson *Prosperity without growth* (London 2009). *The steady state economy* (1972) by Herman Daly is usually considered the founding work of ecological economics. His more recent book (1996), still available in paperback, is *Beyond growth: the economics of sustainable development*. The online journal *Real-World Economics Review* in 2010-11 published a socialist critique of Daly's work: R Smith, 'Beyond growth or beyond capitalism?' (*RWER* No56).
2. G Dale, 'The growth paradigm: a critique' *International Socialist Journal* March 27 2012.
3. A biographical note and links to some works can be found here: www.marxists.org/archive/preobrazhensky/1921/fromnep/biog.html.
4. K Marx *Capital* Vol 1, chapter 15, section 10.
5. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1877/anti-duhring/ch25.htm.
6. A Gorz *Ecology as politics* London 1987, p11.
7. H Braverman *Labor and monopoly capital: the degradation of work in the 20th century* New York 1974.
8. A Gorz *Ecology as politics* London 1987, pp19-20.

SOUTH AFRICA

Police slaughter and apologetics

The *Morning Star* has come unstuck with its uncritical support for the ANC, writes **Peter Manson**

The police massacre of 34 striking miners in South Africa on August 16 has left the *Morning Star*'s Communist Party of Britain highly embarrassed at having to defend the appalling apologetics of its South African Communist Party ally.

Let us be clear: what happened in Marikana was cold-blooded murder. Police penned in, tear-gassed and then gunned down workers who had gathered for ongoing protests - as they were attempting to flee. It seems indisputable that many were shot in the back. Sporadic shooting continued for half an hour, as police on horseback or in helicopters hunted down individuals desperately trying to get away. At least a dozen were picked off in this way, some as they were trying to surrender.

Survivors tell of being hunted down by officers yelling, "Ja, you cop killers, you cop killers. You are in the shit. We are going to kill you here."¹ The police were seeking vengeance for the deaths of two of their colleagues, who were among the 10 people killed in violent incidents over the previous few weeks. The South African Broadcasting Company (SABC) televised an interview with a police spokesperson the day before the massacre, who stated categorically that the "illegal protests" would be ended the next day. She did not elaborate on how that would happen, but made it very clear that ruthless measures were to be undertaken.

The strikers were, of course, members or supporters of a newly formed breakaway from one of the country's most important trade unions, the National Union of Mineworkers. Those who flocked to join the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (Amcu) were evidently dissatisfied by the apparent inability of the NUM to win a substantial rise in their poverty wages and improvements in their working conditions. The NUM, led by SACP members, is a key affiliate of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu), which, along with the SACP itself, forms the tripartite alliance in support of the ruling African National Congress.

There is footage readily available - not least the news coverage provided by Al Jazeera - showing the moment the police opened fire. Contrary to official reports, the strikers were not attacking the police, but attempting to escape. The footage shows the workers moving from right to left, in a direction that is at right angles to police lines. However, the version shown by the SABC - and, incidentally, both the BBC and ITV too - omitted the first few seconds of the footage that includes the workers in the background, showing only the police opening fire and being ordered to stop shooting.

The reaction of the SACP and Cosatu was abhorrent, confirming yet again that they are totally subservient to the bourgeois ANC.

President Jacob Zuma expressed profound regret at the loss of life and announced the setting up of an enquiry - the standard means of ruling classes everywhere of deflecting criticism and riding out a crisis. Cosatu president Sidumo Dlamini said: "We will refuse to play the blame game and we will patiently await the outcomes of the judicial commission of enquiry." The idea that we should refuse to "blame" those who murdered members of our class engaged in struggle is truly nauseating.

For its part, the SACP leadership could not bring itself to make any statement at all for three whole days. But the SACP North West region did issue a statement the day after the massacre, headlined: "Arrest Mathunjwa and Steve Kholekile" - the two leaders of the Amcu breakaway. It began: "The SACP NW joins all South Africans in mourning and passing our deep condolences to all mineworkers killed in the platinum mines in Rustenburg as the result of anarchic, violent intimidation, murder of workers and NUM shop stewards." It referred to "this barbaric act coordinated and deliberately organised by Amcu leader Mr Mathunjwa and Steve Kholekile, who both are former NUM members expelled because of anarchy."

No, you have not misread the statement. These 'comrades' are stating that only Amcu is culpable for the deaths (not that they want to "play the blame game", of course) - as though Mathunjwa and Kholekile had shot dead their own members.

After the first meeting of its new central committee on August 19, the SACP leadership eventually got round to issuing a statement "expressing condolences to all those who have lost family members and colleagues" and "our well wishes to those who have been injured, workers and police". It too welcomed the announcement of a commission of inquiry and urged it to "consider the pattern of violence associated with the pseudo-trade union, Amcu".

Clearly for the SACP and Cosatu the shooting dead of 34 workers and wounding of scores of others pales into insignificance when compared to the crime of splitting from the NUM and leading workers away from SACP influence. Of course, it is very rarely correct to walk away from one union - however, rightwing, corrupt and incompetent its leaders - in order to set up a rival. The fight must be fought within existing bodies. But, at the end of the day, Amcu is a working class body, not a tool of the class enemy, as the SACP and Cosatu pretend.

Then there is this disgraceful sentence from the central committee: "SACP members from the area confirm newspaper reports today that the armed workers who gathered on the hill were misled into believing they would be invulnerable to police bullets because they had used [the 'herbal medicine'] *intelezi*..."

These could be the words of an apartheid-era racist - it is disturbing enough that such stories can still be spread by the press, let alone by so-called workers' leaders. No doubt some of the strikers believe in 'tribal remedies', but does the SACP seriously believe that they considered themselves "invulnerable to police bullets"? Why then were they trying to escape those bullets? But the SACP wants us to believe that these workers, who were indeed carrying traditional spears and sticks, left the police with no choice but to open fire in self-defence.

One notorious SACP hack, Dominic Tweedie, went much further - no doubt to the extreme displeasure of the party leadership. He is quoted by rightwing journalist RW Johnson as saying: "This was no massacre: this was a battle. The police used their weapons in exactly the way they were supposed to. That's what they have them for. The people they shot didn't look like workers to me. We should be happy. The police were admirable."²

Tweedie has since said that he was "misquoted", but refuses to explain how these words came to appear in a web article. My experience of him as the moderator of several SACP-influenced internet discussion lists tells me that he is more than capable of coming out with such shocking language - and the quoted words are certainly reminiscent of Tweedie's style of written expression.

Uncritical

True to form, the reaction of the *Morning Star* was to uncritically adopt the line of its 'official communist' allies. The day after the massacre, its report was headlined: "NUM: rival union 'may have planned' mine violence". It read: "National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) secretary general Frans Baleni ... blamed the unrest on the rival Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union making promises which could never be delivered and, in the process, organising an illegal action which led to the loss of lives."³

However, by the time it came to write an editorial on the subject three days later, the *Star* seemed to realise that perhaps it was stretching things a bit to place the entire blame on Amcu. In a piece titled 'Hard questions for SA police', editor Richard Bagley stated: "There can never be justification for a massacre of striking workers and it is essential that the committee of enquiry set up by Jacob Zuma to examine the tragic events at Marikana makes this a central conclusion." It went on: "The South African Police Service must explain why its officers were armed with automatic weapons when an order was issued last year banning the use even of rubber bullets during public protests."

But then the editorial goes on to slate Amcu in terms the SACP would be proud of. It noted that the NUM "accuses one company, BHP Billiton, of initially funding the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union ... whose recruitment efforts across the platinum industry have common features. These include systematic violence, extravagant demands - such as a near trebling of pay at Marikana - and collaboration from the mining companies."

It concludes: "None of this excuses police commanders of their responsibility for arming their officers to the hilt and ordering them to open fire with automatic rifles. But it should give some people

pause for thought before they repeat erroneous allegations that NUM is a sell-out union or that president Zuma ordered the slaughter."⁴

So at one and the same time Amcu demands the "trebling of pay" and enjoys "collaboration from the mining companies". Don't you think you've got your lines crossed there, comrades? But why does the *Star* consider such pay demands "extravagant"?

For a taste of the lifestyle of the Lonmin workers (monthly pay: 4,200 rands, or just over £300), I can do no better than to quote the South African online newspaper, the *Daily Maverick*: "The workers gathered at Marikana live in shacks they have built for themselves, or rent from shacklords. Their tin rooms lack insulation, water, toilets or electricity. Others live in the hostel compounds the mine provides. Callers to a radio show told a Lonmin spokesperson that the hostels are squalid and not even waterproof. Indeed, from the outside one can see the roofs are rusted through."

"The miners in the shacks choose not to invest in their Marikana dwellings. They want to use the majority of their earnings to support their families back home, whether in the Eastern Cape, Lesotho or Mozambique. They know their time at the mines will not be long - they age quickly, mostly from silicosis and other dust-related diseases that enfeeble these once strong men. They live and work under conditions of grave institutional violence."⁵

But we cannot contemplate their pay being increased to £900 a month, can we? If that happened some of them might even be able to move out of their shacks and perhaps take their families just above the poverty line.

As for the NUM being a "sell-out union", its leadership, like those of all unions in all countries, naturally tends towards compromise. Its bureaucracy has its own separate interests which do not coincide with those of the membership. In South Africa this contradiction is complicated by the domination of the SACP, which tries to balance the rival interests of workers and bureaucrats with those of the capitalist state.

What about the allegation that "president Zuma ordered the slaughter"? We cannot know the exact details of communications between police and government, and it is highly improbable that Zuma would have wanted such a bloody outcome. But it also seems unlikely that he would have been completely ignorant of police tactics and decisions - including the decision to arm its elite force so lethally. We can also say that he is hardly rushing to bring the killers in uniform and their commanders to book.

Blame the victims

All this was evident even to some loyal *Star* readers, a couple of whom voiced their discontent at the paper's coverage of the story. One letter-writer said he was "dismayed and disappointed at the lack of outrage shown".⁶ But "lack of outrage" continued to be a feature - for example, when the authorities arrested hundreds of miners (those who were still alive, of course), and threatened to charge them with the deaths of their own comrades!

If ever there was a cause for "outrage", here it was. But the *Star* slipped this piece of vital information halfway down a report headlined: "Miners stay away, as crisis talks continue". It told readers: "But the prospects for peace were not enhanced

when it emerged that, under the South African legal system's doctrine of 'common purpose', all 270 workers detained after the police massacred 34 miners would be tried for murder."⁷

The following day, however, the *Star* was forced to change its tune in view of the "outraged" reaction by the general secretary of the NUM in Britain, Chris Kitchen, who asked: "How can you be charged with murder when running for your life? It's deplorable."⁸ The paper also reported the reaction of South African justice minister Jeff Radebe to the decision of the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) to charge the miners. Under the constitution the justice minister - ie, himself - "must exercise final responsibility over the prosecuting authority" and so he had asked the NPA for an "explanation of the rationale behind such a decision".⁹

Both the SACP and Cosatu quickly came out against the proposed murder charges and so the *Star* was able to criticise the decision too. But note the mealy-mouthed terms of that criticism from justice minister Radebe - his main concern seemed to be that correct procedures had not been adhered to, although he also opposed the actual decision to press charges (it goes without saying that the *Star* did not inform its readers that Radebe is a member of the SACP central committee). Cosatu spokesperson Patrick Craven also opposed the decision on technical grounds: the NPA "should have waited for the findings of the judicial commission of enquiry ... before jumping the gun and laying such charges".

In the face of such powerful opposition from within the alliance, the decision to charge the miners was quickly reversed. But not before many of them were subject to brutal mistreatment amounting to torture at the hands of the police. Neither the SACP, Cosatu nor the *Morning Star* have called for charges to be pressed against the actual perpetrators of the killings - both individual police officers and those who ordered them to shoot.

The *Star*'s line reminds me of its fawning attitude to those who ruled the roost in the former Soviet Union and eastern Europe. When the Polish 'communist' authorities gunned down more than 40 workers in Gdynia in 1970, British 'official communists', while regretting the 'tragedy' and criticising the 'mistakes' of the Polish United Workers Party, remained loyal to its comrades in high office.

And that is the way it is today when it comes to the SACP - some 'solidarity'. Instead of following every twist and turn of the class-collaborationist SACP leadership, the *Star* and its CPB should demand an immediate ending of the cross-class alliance and the adoption by the SACP and Cosatu of independent working class policies. Unless this happens, Cosatu unions will continue to lose ground to rival breakaways and more workers will look for solutions in the politics of black nationalism ●

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Notes

1. <http://dailymaverick.co.za/article/2012-09-10-marikana-murders-the-world-now-believes>.
2. www.politicsweb.co.za/politicsweb/view/politicsweb/en/page72308?oid=320136&sn=Marketingsweb+detail&pid=90389.
3. *Morning Star* August 17.
4. *Morning Star* August 20.
5. <http://dailymaverick.co.za/article/2012-09-10-marikana-murders-the-world-now-believes>.
6. *Morning Star* August 24.
7. *Morning Star* August 31.
8. *Morning Star* September 1-2.
9. *Ibid*.



Richard Bagley: miserable toady

KURDISTAN

Rejection of Marxism

Continuing his examination of the various programmes of the Turkish and Kurdish left, **Esen Uslu** looks at the new-found 'democratic confederalism' of the Workers' Party of Kurdistan

After perusing the programmes of the legal TKP and ÖDP, we will now take a look at the programme of the Workers' Party of Kurdistan (PKK).

Contrary to the view of many, who regard the PKK as a nationalist guerrilla movement, at its inception the founding members of the PKK were not Kurdish nationalists - at least not in the sense that the term could be applied to several remarkable Kurdish organisations in Iraq and Turkey, first and foremost among them the Kurdistan Democratic Party.

The initial bunch of PKK leaders, including comrade Abdullah Öcalan, had their roots in the revolutionary Marxist organisations of the late 60s and early 70s. However, since its foundation the PKK has passed through several political and ideological bottlenecks resulting in a change of programme - among the Turkish left there is a tendency to despise such programme changes.

We must bear in mind that the PKK has been engaged in open warfare since 1985, and despite suffering heavy losses it has still maintained substantial support among the population of Kurdistan. Considering the frozen nature of the Turkish left's positions on the national question, the PKK's attempts to understand the rapidly changing realities of the region and adjust its programme accordingly is actually commendable.

The initial programme of the PKK was altered in 1995; however, the basic demands set forth in the previous programme remained unchanged.¹ Just before the abduction of comrade Öcalan there were apparent preparations indicating an imminent change of policy, and consequently the programme as well. However, Öcalan was captured in February 1999 and the ensuing trial and unilateral ceasefire declared by the PKK to remove guerrillas from the firing line created an organisational upheaval.

It took years to resolve these organisational difficulties and for comrade Öcalan to develop his ideas in captivity and define a new political line. This was only fully worked out in 2008. The new programme showed the new policy lines as well as new thinking. It is quite a long document to deal with in its entirety here. However, I will try to bring your attention the most striking sections. For further reading on the comrade's ideas, there are some English texts available on the internet, and also a recent book.²

Programme

The PKK programme consists of three parts: an introduction and two sections entitled (a) 'A democratic, ecologic, and gender-free society'; and (b) 'Democratic confederation of the Middle East'.

In the introduction, the striking points are as follows:

The restructuring of the PKK, which has come about under the illumination provided by the social and political developments experienced in the world and in the region, is meant to provide solutions to the serious social problems of our people and the Middle East, as well as an alternative solution to the problems being experienced by humanity ... In the 21st century, Kurds - a people of almost eight million with their national identity, freedom and democracy questions unresolved,



PKK fighters

but determined not to be ruled as before - are still the subject of several strategies and devices. Without democratic confederalism, based on a democratic, ecological and gender-free paradigm reaching beyond the classical statist, power-hungry, nationalist and violence-based understandings and policies, the likelihood of Kurds becoming a centre of conflict exceeding the intensity of the tragedy between Arabs and Israel is very high ...

The PKK is unable to achieve these tasks if it remains within its old paradigm. The PKK has travelled along the line of intersection between real socialism and classical national liberation, and has been unable to unearth its true organisational potential, having been subjected to severe outside pressures, while at the same time suffering from internal inadequacies.

Here we find "democratic confederalism" as the mainstay of the programme - a concept not quite familiar to Marxists. Also we find an extended critique of the Marxist tradition and real socialism. The aim of the programme is quite clear:

The PKK bases its restructuring on democratic confederalism, which is not an alternative to the state, but ... if necessary is prepared to accept a principled compromise ... however, [the PKK] regards organised uprisings and self-defence-based guerrilla warfare as a requirement to maintain its respect and responsibilities towards itself, the people, our history and future ... The PKK believes the solution of the Kurdish question lies in living in solidarity and free unity with neighbouring peoples; in the Kurds establishing their own democracies wherever they are, irrespective of political borders; in bringing together all the Kurds of Iran, Turkey, Syria and Iraq in new federations; and unifying all of them within a higher confederation.

It is vitally important that the PKK restructures itself to stop being a party focused on one state, aiming for power and indexed to war, and instead standing for the democratic transformation of Kurdish society and of neighbouring peoples, for their free future.

This approach is not an ordinary or cyclical transformation. Behind it ... lie the aims of: overcoming the malady of statism that has left its mark on the 150-year development of socialism; renouncing the bourgeois concept of the nation-state in order to create a democratic nation; and regenerating the ideals of freedom and equality by basing ourselves on democratic communal

values that have emerged throughout history.

Society

The second section of the programme is the longest part. It starts with an exploration of the concept of society and proceeds to an examination of the history of civilisation, from the Neolithic revolution to the collapse of Soviet Union. I will try to be as brief as possible without losing the train of thought underlying the programme. The basic new idea employed here could be summarised as follows:

Accepting natural society as the initial state of human existence is realistic. Later on, a hierarchical, statist society was developed as an antithesis to the natural society in order to suppress it and push it back. The natural society ... was dominant until the end of Neolithic period (4,000 BC). It continued its existence within the pores of society, albeit in a suppressed state ... The values of the natural society were in contradiction to the hierarchical, statist society. The struggle emanating from that contradiction has been the most important driving force of social history. While the driving force of society has been defined as such, the narrow class struggle was not the only one - the class struggle is only one of several historic dynamics. The dominant role was played by the resistance of communal society values ...

What is the essential for us is the history of the opposite pole in class and gender-based social development. All types of ideas and actions undertaken by slaves of ethnicity, class and gender who stood against hierarchy and political power are essential for us, since they are drawn from the natural society. The essence of our theoretical approach is a democratic, ecological and gender-free society which expresses a synthesis on that basis ... That is, an ethical system that establishes a sustainable, dialectical relationship with nature, that is not based on internal tyranny, and that determines its common features through direct democracy.

Communal life is the mode of existence of a society. The discourse that hierarchy and power enlivens and enriches a society is nothing but a lie ... Religion is the theory of natural society, and ethics is its practice. Those two institutions are sufficient for the administration of a natural society.

The programme continues its exploration of society, condemning the state as an organised apparatus of violence. It states:

Regarding [organised violence]

as the midwife for the birth of an advanced society has been one of the fundamental mistakes that deeply damaged the concepts of state-based revolution and democracy and the practice of organisation/action.

The evident rejection of classical Marxist positions is striking. Further down, the programme spells out what it sees as the historical mistakes of Marxism-Leninism.

Confederation

The final section of the programme deals with the Middle East as a whole. It starts with the keys to unlock the Middle East enigma:

In order to grasp the social history of the Middle East correctly, the following specific features should be considered:

1. The first thing to analyse is the strict dogmatism, utopianism and fatalism in the mental sphere ...

2. Hierarchy and the institutionalisation of the state are the most difficult social phenomena to be analysed ... The region was the centre of primitive communal society in the Neolithic era, and the culture of that era still survives in the deepest social memory ... Also slavery and feudal forms of statist social formations form powerful cultural values within the region. The western culture added on top of that cultural heritage has not much meaning apart from a coat of varnish ... Patriarchy has seeped into every pore of the Middle East ... From the very beginning the despotic and belligerent characters of the state system in the Middle East have been dominant ... Conditions are ripe neither to absorb the capitalist state nor to disperse the traditional one quickly.

3. Another set of serious problem as grave as the state is the social mentality and behaviour centred on the family and women.

4. Within the problematic of the Middle East, defining phenomena such as ethnicity, nation, country, class and property correctly at the conceptual level has great importance. It is true that ethnicity has not fully dissolved within the nation and class. Therefore, instead of the rejection of ethnic relations, what is important is their democratisation. In the Middle East, democratisation based on the communal values of ethnicity is more realistic than a democratisation based on individuality ... In the Middle East, the nation is a political rather than a sociological concept ... Nationalism is the most important tool for legitimising itself. Religion is the genome of the state, and nationalism is the modern form of it ...

In the Middle East, classes are never revealed in their bare structures, but are veiled by ethnicity, religion and sects. Therefore in every ethnic, religious, sect or other type of community and in every type of clash of ideas there is a class essence.

At present the political status quo in the Middle East created after World War I is unsustainable ... The conditions for developing a democratic civilisation in the Middle East could be summarised as follows:

1. For nation-states to maintain their existence in their present form is quite difficult.

2. Within the framework of a third giant move to globalisation, the USA is intervening in the region and clashing with backward-looking nation-state structures ... The region's social oppositions are striving for radical freedoms and democracy and their demands are on the rise. The USA is already in a quagmire. Therefore the US seems rather unlikely to succeed in achieving its aims in the Middle East alone.

3. The struggles of the popular/toiling masses have increasingly become a significant force in overcoming the chaos in the Middle East ...

The basic forces taking part in the struggle for Middle East solutions indicate that the transformation to democratic civilisation in the Middle East will result in a varied democratic regime.

The era of solutions based on the nation-state has passed ...

The era of dictating the nature of a regime through the unilateral will of imperialism has also been cast off into history ...

Despite their opposition the popular/toiling forces do not yet have adequate awareness and organisation to create their own democratic, ecological and gender-free social system. A principled conciliation of differing sections that create a varied democratic regime is the most likely outcome. The most important thing of all is not to display a blind resistance to the restructuring of the system and not to enter into unprincipled conciliations.

The PKK's new political line is directly premised on its changed programme. A unilateral truce has been declared, and covert negotiations pursued under the auspices of the British secret services. Recently revealed documents indicate that an agreement on the basis of European Charter of Local Self-Government is almost ready. However, all this suddenly came to an abrupt end, and last year the armed conflict flared up again.

Whether or not the PKK maintains its present programme is open to question. Its leader has been kept in isolation for more than a year now. He is unable to see his lawyers and his relatives have not been allowed to visit him on the prison island of İmralı in the Marmara Sea.

This examination of the PKK programme completes our general overview of the various trends in Turkey. In the next article we will start looking at the programme of the HDK (People's Democratic Congress) and the proposed platform for this 'party of unity' in the making ●

Notes

1. For the English translation of the 1995 programme see http://kurds-kurdistan.blogspot.co.uk/2005/12/party-programme-of-kurdistan-workers_27.html.
2. A *Öcalan Democratic confederalism*: www.freedom-for-ocalan.com/english/download/Ocalan-Democratic-Confederalism.pdf; A *Öcalan The road map to democratisation of Turkey and solution to the Kurdish question*: www.freedom-for-ocalan.com/english/download/Abdullah_Ocalan_-_The_Road_Map_-_Summary.pdf; A *Öcalan War and peace in Kurdistan*: www.freedom-for-ocalan.com/english/download/Ocalan-War-and-Peace-in-Kurdistan.pdf; A *Öcalan Prison writings: the PKK and the Kurdish question in the 21st century* London 2011.

REVIEWS

Inferno for the proletariat

Bill Emmott **Good Italy, bad Italy: why Italy must conquer its demons to face the future** Yale University Press, 2012, pp299, £18.99

Bill Emmott's *Good Italy, bad Italy* appears at first glance to be the very first English-language book-length response to the fall of Silvio Berlusconi and the installation of Mario Monti's technocratic government in November 2011. In reality, on closer examination, it proves to be an updated and expanded version of an earlier book by the same author, which did not appear in English. Nonetheless, this new text contains a number of references to events, such as the corruption scandal that ended Umberto Bossi's political career, that took place as recently as April 2012, shortly before the book's publication in June 2012.

Its more general sections are very clearly focused on the present and it concludes with a check list of objectives which would need to be achieved by 2020 if Italy is to move forward. Although the book has been reviewed in the *Financial Times* and - inevitably - in the pages of *The Economist* (for which Emmott worked for 26 years, being editor-in-chief by the time of his resignation in 2006), so far *Good Italy, bad Italy* seems to have been overlooked by the majority of commentators. This is probably because, while it contains much interesting material about the Italian economy, it has only very brief references to the personal life of Silvio Berlusconi. However, Emmott's opening lines make it quite clear that the whole project arose out of what became a very personal duel between himself and Berlusconi: "This must begin with a confession. For all Italy's undoubted attractions, it is plain that one man has been chiefly responsible for making this old Asia hand become so engaged and fascinated by his country. His name is Silvio Berlusconi" (pviii).

The feud started with an issue of *The Economist* dated April 26 2001 with a front cover entitled 'Why Silvio Berlusconi is unfit to lead Italy' and a far more thorough discussion of Berlusconi's murky financial dealings and ongoing legal difficulties than had ever appeared outside Italy. Berlusconi, who had often resorted to the courts in bids to silence Italian investigative journalists, responded with two libel suits against *The Economist*. The first of these was won by the magazine in 2008, when the Milan court rejected Berlusconi's claim, although he has appealed against the judgment. The second case was subsequently won by *The Economist* in 2010, but Berlusconi chose not to appeal, perhaps because by that time *The Economist's* claims about alleged financial impropriety were getting less attention in Italy or abroad than his sexual escapades and no victory could have restored his international reputation.

Nor was Berlusconi's retaliation against *The Economist* confined to the courts. *Il Giornale*, the daily paper nominally owned by Berlusconi's brother, branded the British magazine "The E-communist" and claimed that there was a clear physical resemblance between Emmott and Lenin. Prior to 2001 Emmott, whose principal area of specialised expertise had been in Japan's economy, had no particular interest in Italy and the issue of his magazine that gave rise to such controversy was researched and written by other journalists on its staff, not by Emmott himself. However, in due course, Emmott, evidently goaded by Berlusconi's obsession with his periodical, learnt Italian and,



Bill Emmott: Lenin lookalike?

after becoming a freelance journalist in 2006, travelled extensively in the country in the course of preparing both the two versions of his book and a forthcoming television documentary.

Emmott's view of Italy is coloured by both his personal experience of bitter conflict with the Berlusconi camp and his own ideological commitment to a quite hard-line version of neoliberalism - or, as he would describe it, "liberalism". This means that, whilst he is unquestionably a man of the right, hostile to strong trade unions, nationalisation and most forms of regulation, he does not have any great sympathy for the main manifestation of the Italian right over the last two decades - Berlusconi's Forza Italia/Popolo della Libertà - and often has something positive to say about some political figures who are nominally on the Italian centre-left or even on the left: for example, Nichi Vendola, the president of the region of Puglia and leader of the Sinistra Ecologia Libertà party. Although Emmott tells us, "I remain unconvinced about how far Mr Vendola's conversion towards capitalism and globalisation has really gone" (p161), the very fact

that Vendola was eager to impress Emmott, whose connection to *The Economist* would have been known to him, is in itself cause for concern on the left.

Emmott's notions of 'good Italy' and 'bad Italy', whilst perhaps slightly Manichean, cannot be reduced to a dichotomy between either left and right or north and south. Some of what he sees as 'bad Italy' would be equally abhorrent to anybody analysing the current situation from a leftwing perspective - he is well aware of the deep-rooted problems posed by the Mafia, Camorra and Ndrangheta, by widespread corruption and clientelism, by the concentration of media ownership and by the deficiencies in the Italian legal system, the last of which he has experienced at first hand. It is far from clear whether the reference to Peppino Impastato, killed by the Mafia in 1978, as "a candidate for a city council seat for a similarly non-party list" (p155) rests on a misapprehension or is a deliberate distortion: the young man in question was an active member of the far-left Democrazia Proletaria. Given the rather crass and ham-fisted reference to "the great Marxist philosopher",

Gramsci (p211), ignorance is the most likely explanation.

Emmott is also aware that many problems that superficial observers, both Italian and foreign, label as confined to the south are in fact, in varying degrees, characteristics of the country as a whole. For example, he lambasts an "off the record" statement from "a very senior official at the Italian treasury" in January 2011, that "the Italian economy could be summarised as consisting of the north, which grows by three percent a year, and the south, which shrinks by two percent a year, producing the apparently weak annual growth rate of about one percent" (p169). Emmott points out that it is "nonsense on every level" (p170) - both mathematically, given that the south does not have equal weight to the centre-north in economic terms, and factually, since these figures for growth rates are grossly inaccurate. His impatience for crude scapegoating of the south is also apparent in his section on the Lega Nord. After mentioning the newspaper *La Padania* and Radio Padania, Emmott remarks: "The only thing missing, however, is a genuine region called Padania that could demand secession on some plausible historical or ethnic grounds. Such a country has never yet existed" (p62).

Emmott's work is in many ways very useful and informative, particularly in its detailed discussion of individual Italian firms, both large like Ferrero and small like Loccioni - demonstrating that some of the often repeated generalisations about small firms in Italian industrial districts which were valid in the 1980s and 1990s are now out of date. However, its underlying thrust is very aggressively neoliberal. Nobody can deny the brutal honesty of chapter 3, 'Il purgatorio economico', whose first subheading (p82) is 'Burdens and obstacles: (1) labour'. This section mounts a frontal attack on the workers' statute of 1970, which made it illegal for firms employing more than 15 workers to dismiss them without 'just cause', and on the persistence of centralised, nationwide collective bargaining.

Needless to say, Emmott favours a move towards bargaining at a regional and company level and explicitly presents the move away from national contracts in Germany since the mid-1990s as a good model. Moreover, Emmott notes with evident distaste that "In 2010 35.1% of employees were trade union members, compared with just over 18% in both Germany and Japan" (p85), whilst "Back in 1970, all three countries had a broadly similar level of unionisation" (p85).

As one might expect, not only does he advocate regional wage cuts and the destruction of job security for those groups that still possess it, but he also feels that even in retirement the workers are dragging down the Italian economy. Writing about public pensions, Emmott notes: "At 15% of GDP, such spending is also the highest in the OECD, about three-four percentage points higher than in France and Germany, whose public pensions also predominate over the private sort, but almost treble the levels in America or Britain. Average spending for pensions in the OECD area is seven percent of GDP. No wonder that when the Monti government felt obliged in November-December 2011 to cut public spending, their main target was still pensions" (p97).

Although Emmott sees both the 'super Marios' - Italian prime minister Mario Monti and European Central Bank director Mario Draghi - as heroes, he does not share the official view expressed by Monti this August, that Italy has "good fundamentals". Emmott's argument is that Italy was already in serious trouble in 1992-94 and by and large failed to take the opportunity to make a new start during "the past 20 wasted years" (p4). He believes that the present crisis is "Italy's second chance" (the title of chapter 1). Whilst he acknowledges that the general euro zone crisis was the immediate trigger for Italy's current difficulties, he sees their origin as far more deep-seated.

He notes that "Between 2001 and 2010 Italy's average growth rate was just 0.25% a year; since its population was growing, thanks to immigration, this meant that during that period Italy's national income per head actually shrank. As *The Economist* pointed out in 2011 with rigorous cruelty, this meant that of all the countries in the world for which GDP figures are published, only Haiti and Zimbabwe did worse during that decade" (p79). He argues that Italy was not always like this, emphasising that in 1950-70 it "grew at an annual average growth rate in real GDP by 5.8% per year, compared with 8.9% for Japan and 4.1% for the rest of the OECD area" (p74) and that "in 1970-90 its average annual growth rate was still 2.9%, compared with 4.0% in Japan and 2.6% in the rest of the OECD area" (p75). As pointed out above, Emmott blames Italy's more recent weakness in large measure on the strength of organised labour and comparatively high pensions, although he also makes some reference to the lack of competition and what he regards as excessive regulation.

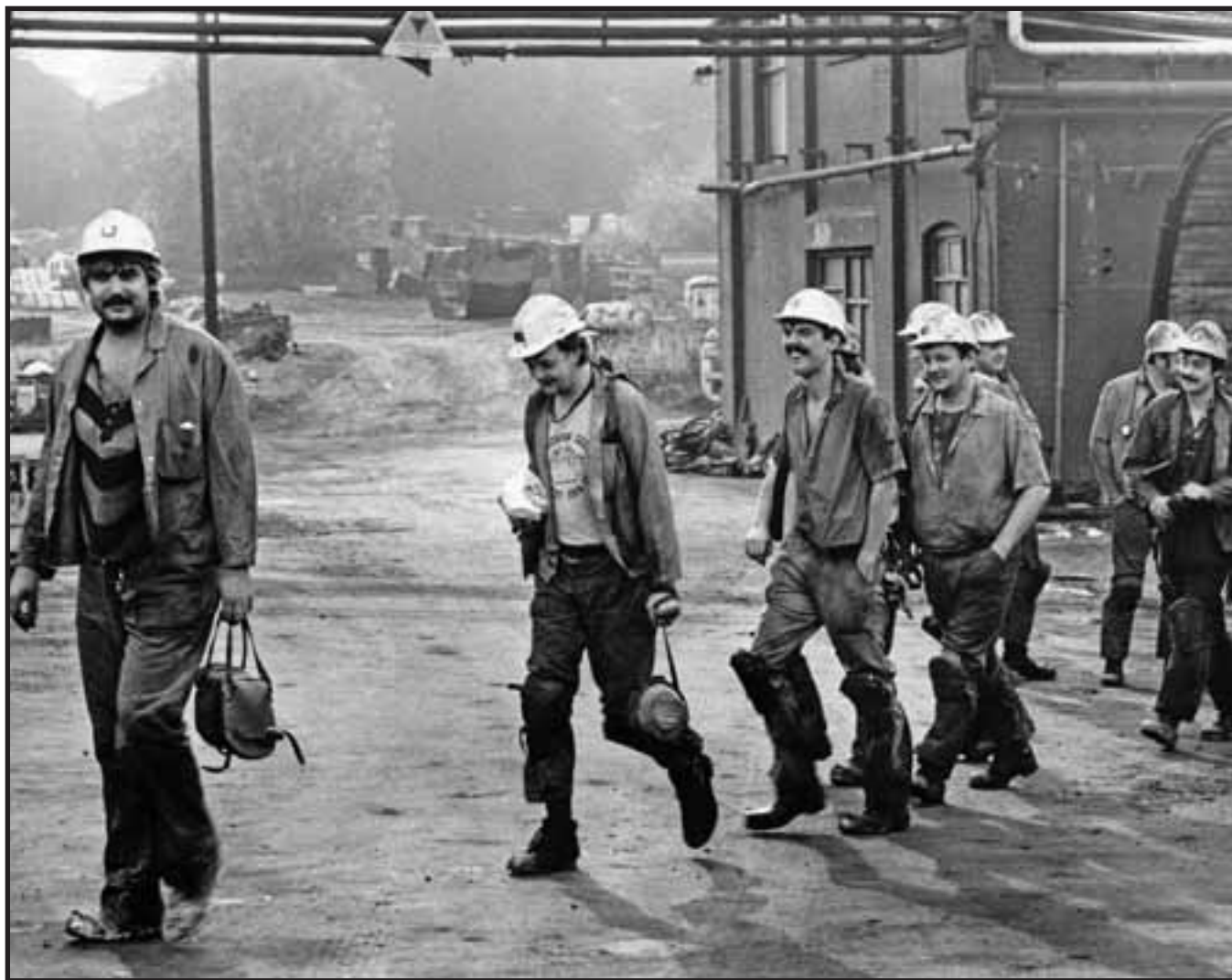
In essence he believes that Monti's government has gone some way towards turning things around, but that it will not have enough time to complete the job ("15 months is never going to be adequate" - p259) and therefore a lot depends on what comes next - "the test will be whether whatever coalition of parties succeeds the Monti government decides to continue and extend what Monti's team will have begun" (p259). It is worth noting that unlike most 'liberal' commentators, especially most academic political scientists in UK and US universities, Emmott does not advocate 'bipolar majoritarian government' or emphasise the 'need for alternation'. In discussing the best way of changing Italy's electoral system, he favours "the single transferable vote method that is used in Ireland", although he could see some merit in other systems, provided they "discourage bipolar politics and force consensus-seeking instead" (p266).

One might conclude that this very lucid spokesman for the international bourgeoisie realises that a grand coalition is a much more effective method of imposing ever increasing austerity on the workers than either a centre-right or a centre-left government. Whilst, as at least one earlier reviewer has suggested, Emmott's attempts to apply the categories of Dante's *Divine comedy* to contemporary Italian reality are a rather unconvincing literary device, Emmott's *paradiso* ('good Italy') would certainly be an *inferno* for the Italian proletariat ●

Toby Abse

Scenes of collective confidence and heroism

Peter Tuffrey *Yorkshire people and coal* Amberley Publishing, Stroud 2012, pp128, £12.99



Last shift at Cortonwood

As a photo-historian, Peter Tuffrey hit something of a rich seam when he gained permission from the *Yorkshire Post* to publish this collection from the paper's extensive photo archive. This is the third in his *Yorkshire people* collection: the other two were *Yorkshire people and railways* and *Yorkshire people at work*.

Certainly his greatest task in preparing this book must have been narrowing down the huge volume of photos into a comprehensive coverage of the last 50 years - shooting fish in a barrel comes to mind. It is a shame really that the *Weekly Worker* does not have the space to publish a selection - although the *Miners' Advice* website hopes to carry seven of the photos from the hundreds in the book on its review page (www.minersadvice.co.uk).

As 'the national newspaper of Yorkshire' in the heart of Britain's biggest coalfield, the *Yorkshire Post* has been unique really in chronicling the life, and frequently the deaths, in the vast Yorkshire coalfield communities of the last half century. Its archive records disasters, showing scenes from the pitheads, victims and rescuers - perhaps the only time the paper had any sympathy for us. By contrast to this excellent photo coverage of the strikes and pickets from the 1960s, through our most testing period in the 80s, to the final stand in the early 90s, the actual commentary stank to high heaven. The *Yorkshire Post* was the rightwing voice of middle class Yorkshire - rooted not in industry, but in the rural Tory heartlands. Arthur Scargill, president of the National Union of Mineworkers during the biggest battles of the 80s and 90s, was continually at war with the paper, which few if any pit families ever bought anyway.

Fortunately Peter does not borrow much from its commentary on the photos he presents, and there are some excellent, well chosen, evocative images here - many of them haunting or powerful; none of them pretty or scenic.

In the nicest possible way I find the book sad - sad to the point of tears. Is it just a nostalgic sigh for all that's past? I think anyone who looks through this book and dwells on the scenes of collective confidence, mass struggle and victory, alongside the horror of loss and injury, as well as god-almighty heroism in strikes and disaster, can forgive me for that. Aye, it is who we were: any of these photos of smiling, 'pillicking', piss-taking miners ascending the shafts, fighting the earth or,

arm in arm, rank on rank, facing down the mass ranks of armoured guardians of property and power, could be of us and our mates. The book records what and who we were - and sadly what we and our communities and union are no more.

It will stir mixed emotions, but is certainly a credit to Peter, who, correctly in my view, regards the period and scenes covered in his book as the most eventful and important in mining's long history ●

David Douglass

Fighting fund No fortune

The highlight of this week's fighting fund is the £50 donation from comrade EJ, made via PayPal. Knowing that he has previously contributed frequently to our fund, but usually rather smaller sums, I emailed him not just to thank him, but to ask whether he had come into some unexpected fortune.

Well, not quite. But the comrade now has a new job, which pays ... just above the minimum wage. Well, that accounts for it! Joking aside, it really does say something about the nature of our supporters that, however meagre their income, they always think about the needs of their paper if a little bit of cash comes their way. Comrade, you set a fine example.

Other PayPal donations this week came from comrades TG (£10) and HJ (£15). They were among 11,567 online readers over the last seven days. Then there was a total of £75 in standing orders - thank you, GD, SM, DV, RP and ST. Finally two £10

add-ons to their subscription cheques came from comrades OL and DS, taking our week's total to £180 and the September fighting fund to £477 so far.

But we are nearing the halfway point in the month and we need £1,500, so we are not even a third of the way there yet. In other words, a little bit of acceleration would not go amiss. How about those of you who just once in a while put a little cash our way? Would now be a good time?

By the way, following on from my comments last week about the shenanigans of Royal Mail, we do not seem to have had any problems since we switched to slightly thinner paper. Please let us know if your paper hasn't been delivered ●

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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Pushing the button

The Julian Assange furore is about war, not sex, argues Paul Demarty

The Julian Assange-related silliness juggernaut rolls ever onward.

George Galloway, whose clumsy and half-cocked defence of the embattled Australian led to an establishment onslaught of vituperation - spreading from the front page of *The Sun* to editorials in *The Guardian* and *The Independent*, not to say the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, which would criticise Galloway for helping little old ladies across the street¹ - now faces political backlash in his own organisation.

First, Kate Hudson, general secretary of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, sometime member of the *Morning Star*'s Communist Party of Britain and then high-profile defector to the Respect camp, withdrew her candidacy for the upcoming Manchester Central by-election. "I cannot in all conscience," she wrote, "stand as candidate for a party whose only MP has made unacceptable and unretracted statements about the nature of rape. To continue as Respect Party candidate in this situation, no matter how much I object to and oppose his statements personally, would be in effect to condone what he has said. That is something I am not prepared to do."²

Second, and perhaps worse for Galloway, Respect's so-called leader, Salma Yaqoob, quit the organisation, citing a "breakdown in trust". Apparently she too was upset by his "deeply disappointing and wrong" comments on Assange. However, she preferred to confine herself to a few utterly anodyne formulations in her resignation statement: the last few weeks had been "extremely difficult" for the party and for her, she had taken her decision with "deep regret" ... yudder, yudder. Nonetheless, The BBC, Channel 4, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, the *Evening Standard* all used her to stoke the anti-Galloway fire.

Of course, Galloway is not the only figure to have been targeted. The American feminist, Naomi Wolf (an odd sort of feminist, it is true, but at least identifiably leftwing in sympathies), has been merciless in her criticism of this whole circus from the very beginning, penning a sarcastic letter of thanks to Interpol back when the allegations first arose, proclaiming herself "overjoyed to discover your new commitment to engaging in global manhunts to arrest and prosecute men who behave like narcissistic jerks to women they are dating".³

Like elephants, the establishment, and its leftist patsies, will never forget such a sin. And so it has been truly remarkable to note the almost universal slamming that Wolf's new book on vaginas has received (for all this writer knows, well-deserved; but remember, these are the same journalists who said nice things about Caitlin Moran's *How to be a woman*); and how frequently

her dismissal of the accusations against Assange has factored in as subsidiary evidence against her in these reviews - a tic which unites the *Evening Standard*, *The Guardian*, *New Statesman* and, alas, *Socialist Worker*.⁴

While the sour grapes directed at Wolf have a certain absurdity - coming from the quarters they do - the wooden spoon, surely, goes to comrade Hudson. There are those of us, this paper included, who have been vociferously critical of Galloway's record on women's rights for many, many years now. He is a Catholic, and he is of one mind with Benedict XVI on the question of a woman's right to choose. Abortion, for him, is murder. This is a thoroughly worked out and thoroughly reactionary position, which, however, Galloway is most unlikely to retract any time soon - if anything his rhetoric gets *more* religious as the years draw on.

Was this not a problem for you, comrade Hudson? Was it not a more *serious* problem than a single dodgy formulation on the accusations against Julian Assange?

Martin Thomas of the AWL rather takes the cake by asking "... why do activists like Hudson and Yaqoob, self-respecting and independent-minded, serve such a party [as Respect]?" What part of Hudson's statement can have given Thomas the bizarre impression that she has a mind of her own? Let's have another look: "To continue as Respect Party candidate in this situation, no matter how much I object to and oppose his statements personally, *would be in effect to condone what he has said*. That is something I am not prepared to do."

This is the most classically Stalinist way of doing politics imaginable. On one face of the coin: to be part of a common movement with somebody implies agreement; and so one cannot criticise whatever

dubious allies one has at the given moment. The other side: when some arbitrarily decided line is crossed, one has no option but to resign. It is the argument of someone who has long made peace with the lack of a mind of her own.

Mutatis mutandis, if to be a member of Respect is to implicitly condone all of Galloway's politics, then comrade Hudson was quite happy to condone Galloway's reactionary views on abortion, which have been a matter of record for some years, and about which she cannot plausibly have been ignorant. A less principled or more absurd split would be hard to design.

Common nonsense

When a pro-imperialist Stalinophobe like Thomas has nice things to say about a Stalinist peace-movement hack like Hudson, there has to be something fishy going on. The screamingly obvious matter is this: the AWL and the likes of Hudson are in agreement not only with each other, but with *the entire bourgeois establishment*, on the matter that the accusations against Assange are sufficiently serious *as accusations* to overrule any other concern (the AWL explicitly calls for Assange to go to Sweden and face the music⁵).

Rape is one of a few matters to have that kind of overriding significance (that the number is increasing is testament to the political decrepitude of the left). An obvious comparison can be made with anti-Semitism - to face serious accusations of Jew-hatred in the post-1945 world is the road to lightning-fast anathematisation.

In both cases, there is a partly healthy impulse at work. Rape and anti-Semitism are both reflections of the most barbaric and irrational potentialities in human society; it is a positive feature of today's society

that at least even the people who defend the class society that gives rise to each are ashamed by their persistence. No communist should be stupid enough to treat either as some kind of irrelevant non-issue.

Yet there is a very serious danger in the way these issues, and others, are treated. That danger stems from the broader social grounding the hatred of rape and anti-Semitism now have - both have been recuperated as a kind of bourgeois common sense. This has the most immediate effect of hypostasising the issue, abstracting it from the political into a *moral* register. In doing so, the historical ground for irrationality and barbarism is repressed; and so the latter are no longer subject to rationality. The hatred of irrationality becomes itself irrational.

History, however, is not so easily done away with. This is more clear in the case of anti-Semitism - it is clear that probably the vast majority of accusations of anti-Semitism to issue from the Zionist movement are utterly spurious, and in fact rest on the identification of a notionally transhistorical essence - 'the Jew' - with a particular historical existent: the state of Israel. Violent discussion on the matter of exactly where the line between criticism of Israel and Jew-baiting is to be drawn is unavoidable to anyone who opposes, however meekly, aspects of the Zionist project, *because the moral injunction against anti-Semitism is so shamelessly exploited by the Zionists*.

Digging a grave

Today, as it happens, the fate of Julian Assange and his persecutors in Washington turns in part on the matter of what rape is, and what it is not. But there is more at stake. Since the mass anti-war demonstrations of 2003, and the subsequent debacle in Iraq, the imperialists have struggled consistently to regain legitimacy. Part

of that struggle, naturally, consists in *delegitimising* anti-imperialism; and so when an opportunity comes up to smear, besmirch or incarcerate a prominent opponent (and win hearts and minds in doing so), they will take it. The closer such accusations come to the truth, the better the opportunity - see, for a counter-example, the disastrous attempts to smear Galloway immediately after the Iraq war.

It is thus unfortunately true that the left is doing most of the work of the US state department in this affair. This problem is particularly acute with comrade Hudson - she has spent a good portion of her life trying to keep the anti-war movement alive, but on the Assange affair she takes up some of the spadework for its grave. The AWL's support for the anti-war movement was always Janus-faced at best, and interventions such as this one are simply par for the course for an organisation deeply committed to moralisms of various kinds. The right buttons have been pushed, and so the left finds itself in utter disarray.

This impulsive irrationalism is utterly inimical to Marxism, which first began to take shape as "the ruthless criticism of all that exists". The greatest power Marxism has is its ability to cut through the 57 varieties of bullshit that obscure the real state of things; and the more a particular issue takes on the character of a murky territory whose exploration is forbidden, the more urgent is the need to cast it in the light of reason ●

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Notes

1. See, for one example among many, Martin 'Surgical Strike' Thomas's short piece here: www.workersliberty.org/story/2012/09/04/why-did-hudson-stand-down-and-not-galloway.
2. <http://kate4manchester.org/?p=114>.
3. www.huffingtonpost.com/naomi-wolf/interpol-the-worlds-datin_b_793033.html.
4. September 15.
5. www.workersliberty.org/julianassange.

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