

weekly **worker**



**Engels was right: early
kinship was matrilineal
- four-page supplement**

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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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Natural limits, sustainability and socialism



LETTERS



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

Bogus rape

In the ongoing battle over the Assange rape allegations, Heather Downs (Letters, September 13) cites my description of Israel Shamir, who has apparently written an article attacking the two Swedish women at the centre of the allegations in *Counterpunch*, as a fascist and anti-Semite. I stand by that description.

What worries me most is not the allegations of rape against Assange, but his links with Shamir, which has enabled him to run the Wikileaks operation in Russia and Belarus, in the latter case passing on information on dissidents, according to the *Index on Censorship* website, to the regime of president Lukashenko, which was unredacted. Shamir is also a supporter of Putin and these connections are indeed worrying.

As for the allegations of rape against Assange, they appear to be bogus and contrived. One of the two women alleged, so I understand, that he didn't use a condom prior to penetration, as previously agreed. Indeed both women stated to the police that they were not alleging rape or violence. Subsequent to their sexual experiences with Assange, they actually boasted of the encounters in text messages. Indeed one of the women was so upset by the fact that the police were alleging rape that she refused to sign her statement. Although he stayed in Sweden for a further five weeks, the Swedish police showed no interest in interviewing Assange.

I suggest that Heather Downs reads both Naomi Klein's 'Something rotten in the state of Sweden: eight big problems with the "case" against Assange', and the comment underneath by Jettatura (<http://markcrispinmiller.com/2011/02/eight-big-problems-with-the-case-against-assange-must-read-by-naomi-wolf/>), and then say that this case doesn't stink to high heaven. The open letter by Michael Moore, a left Democrat, to the Swedish government makes it abundantly clear what the real agenda is (www.michaelmoore.com/words/mike-friends-blog/dear-government-of-sweden).

Barely 10% of rape allegations in Sweden even make it to court and then the majority of those accused are acquitted. So why was Assange charged and then after the charges were dropped recharged on lesser counts? Could it have something to do with the fact that the Swedish government have hired one Karl Rove as an 'advisor' to them on the case? Rove, lest it be forgot, was one of the authors of extraordinary rendition, a programme in which Sweden played its full part in extraditing two asylum-seekers to Egypt, where they were duly tortured.

Women Against Rape may be alone and the brainchild of Selma James, but that doesn't make what they have to say irrelevant. It is a fact that allegations of sexual violence and rape have been used against black men for decades by colonial and racist governments. Perhaps Heather has not heard of the Scottsboro Boys, nine black boys and men in Alabama who were sentenced to death for rape at the hands of an all-white jury. Their cases led to all-white juries being outlawed by the Supreme Court.

Or perhaps the black peril in Rhodesia and other colonies, where black male sexuality was used ideologically to defend the idea of white femininity and preserve bourgeois values? Feminism posits the unity of women despite class and

race. As such it connives with those forces and it is no accident that New Labour was imbued with rightwing feminists such as Harriet Harman, who nonetheless were ardent supporters of Blair's wars.

We see the same today with Amnesty International's US chapter using the values of feminism to support the Afghanistan war (<http://azvsas.blogspot.co.uk/2012/08/amnesty-international-usas-support-for.html>). That war too is a defence of feminist values.

Feminism in defence of imperialism is nothing new. Andrea Dworkin, icon to the radical feminist movement, was a diehard Zionist. In the 1980s I clashed with Labour Briefing precisely on the issue of Zionist feminism. All too often socialists have been guilt-tripped into saying nothing for fear of having the finger pointed at them.

If there is any merit to the allegations against Assange then the answer is simple. Let Sweden give a cast-iron guarantee that they will not deport him onwards to any third country after they have finished their questioning. If they are incapable of agreeing to this then the reasons for requesting extradition should be blindingly obvious.

Tony Greenstein
Brighton

Dog whistle

When the ruling elite wish to destroy someone, they generally use dog whistle charges that will encourage an attitude of repugnance towards the target and allow the accusers to occupy the high moral ground. In the case of Michael Jackson, it was accusations of paedophilia; in the case of Julian Assange, rape. By 'dog whistle' I mean charges which will attract a bunch of people who will attribute automatic guilt, or at least a 'case to answer', to whomever is being accused.

In the case of Assange, the dog whistle aspect has not been as effective as the accusers probably hoped, as Paul Demarty shows in his excellent exposure (September 12). Along with his article in the previous edition, Demarty manages the difficult task of throwing more light than heat on the 'Assange affair' by placing it into a class perspective.

The rape allegations, not least what constitutes 'rape' as regards Assange, are complex, but, back in the real world, two questions strike me as relevant. Firstly, is it likely that someone who had been raped would then consensually choose to meet the rapist a second time? Secondly, is it likely that someone who had been raped would have texted her mates boasting of having bedded Assange? It appears that these two women did not realise that they had been raped until informed of this by Swedish intelligence.

It is not very politically correct, but I talked to some young (heterosexual) women regarding Assange and their, obviously anecdotal, view was that, with his looks and profile, Assange's problem would be managing the queue rather than having to coerce anyone.

Some of Assange's tormentors make light of the proposal to extradite him to Sweden, as if his contention that he would then be passed to the USA is simply 'paranoia'. However, as Assange's lawyers have mentioned, there is a secret grand jury currently constituted in the USA. Sweden has an atrocious record of handing people over to the Central Intelligence Agency for rendition and Assange has been publicly threatened with death by leading US politicians.

As for the British government's claim that they are duty-bound to extradite Assange to Sweden, compare

this with the case of mass murderer Augusto Pinochet, who used rape as a tool of repression against Chilean women: every type of apology was conceived by members of the ruling class to 'explain' why this sordid man should not be extradited to Spain.

Minimum justice for Assange demands a full public apology, substantial financial compensation and the option of either staying in Britain or free passage to wherever he wants.

Ted Hankin
Nottingham

Aloof

Mike Macnair, referring to the motion passed at the TUC conference calling for the consideration and practicalities of a general strike, asserts: "That does not mean that the immediate task is an all-out, indefinite general strike to force the government to give in" ('Partly off one knee', September 13). His conclusion is: "This political work is work not for the trade unions or even the TUC."

Macnair has misread the situation. He makes some correct criticisms of the Socialist Party in England and Wales and Socialist Workers Party. These are both centrist organisations veering between socialist demands calling for a 24-hour general strike and drawing closer and closer to the left wing of the trade union bureaucracy *vis-à-vis* their support for McCluskey in the recent Unite election for general secretary and for Crow of the RMT and Serwotka of PCS. SPEW, through its organisation, the National Shop Stewards Network, was able to mobilise a significant section of workers on the eve of the TUC conference. To bring 800-1,000 workers to Brighton on a Sunday from places as far away as Scotland and Wales is a significant development.

As a Marxist, you have to understand the contradictory development of these movements. The working class is a revolutionary class, as Marx stated. It is testing out all leaderships in practice. For revolutionaries there has to be a genuine rank-and-file movement as an independent alternative to the bureaucracy, which, as Lenin argued in *Leftwing communism: an infantile disorder*, is the reflection of imperialism in the workers' movement - "until these opportunist, social-chauvinist traitors are exposed, discredited and expelled".

In the *Transitional programme*, Trotsky stated: "The chief obstacle in the path of transforming the pre-revolutionary state is the opportunist character of proletarian leaderships." Therefore, the task is to penetrate the trade unions and its left wing, like the NSSN, and win workers to a principled rank-and-file movement independent of the bureaucracy. Grassroots Left is such a movement. It is through practice guided by revolutionary theory that we will win workers to take on and defeat the bureaucracy - the main obstacle in the struggle for socialism and workers' power - not by separating the political and the economic, as Macnair does. The task is to build a genuine rank-and-file movement, not by remaining aloof from the struggle, but consciously building that leadership in the workers' movement.

Laurence Humphries
Socialist Fight

For life

Gabriel Levy's article on ecology and socialism predicts that "in a future world nobody will have to work in dirty, dangerous holes in the ground" ('The trouble with economic growth', September 13).

I'm not sure if that's because they will no longer be dangerous and dirty or because Gabriel thinks this future

world will have abolished the need for mining and we won't need ores and minerals, so no iron, copper, gold, silver, rare earth metals, coal, uranium, potash, platinum, or any other of the hundreds of the key components we mine for almost everything we do on the planet. Of course, you always have the far more ecologically damaging open-cast mining, which doesn't involve working underground, which we as miners' unions across the world oppose, or perhaps we envisage an army of underground robots remotely operated from the surface of deep mines - not inconceivable, of course, by any means. But unless we are contemplating going back to a world of wood and wicker, we will, for the foreseeable future, always need the minerals we mine. I hope too that a future world will not demand anyone work anywhere if they don't want to, and dangerous and dirty or mind-bogglingly boring and alienating work on the surface is also subject to equal scrutiny, not just mining, which seems to stir the anger of the greens and ecologists.

It does indeed throw us back to the 'dialogue of the deaf' when myself and Arthur Scargill invited ourselves to the Kingsnorth power station anti-coal climate camp in an attempt to engage this movement in discussions on clean-coal technology, energy, climate change and class struggle. We had a massive follow-up meeting in Newcastle, organised by the National Union of Mineworkers, to which we invited all the greens and rail and energy unions. There was no agreement found there either.

The division, as one might expect, was industrial workers and union activists on one side; academics, greens and primitive anarchists on the other. We see coal, our communities, our union and its values as crucial elements to energy policy, together with clean-coal production and consumption, and carbon capture and storage. They see coal and, by extension, the miners as the problem; the best they can offer us and our communities is what they call a 'just transition', which basically means we do whatever they have ordained is best but we will be given a little time to get used to the idea. The 4,000 or so greens who squatted the fields round Kingsnorth were not really interested in a discussion with the workers at the power station, the community or the NUM. Anyone who was there will tell you that about 100 people out of the 4,000 turned up to debate with us. Arthur was heckled throughout his contribution because he, like myself, was saying something which these people regard as blasphemy.

The NUM produced a four-sided A4 leaflet for the camp, addressing the issues and offering our view. Distribution of this document, in what one assumed was a libertarian camp, was highly contentious and I was asked a thousand times if I had had permission to give it out. "The committee has to approve anything given out," I was told by squatters and their stewards. I did point out that they hadn't asked the permission of the farmer to have their 'climate camp' and, if they wanted to stop me, they should perhaps ask any of the hundreds of coppers to arrest me. I have since written a fuller version of this document, *Clean coal technology, climate change, the miners, the greens and those bliddy windmills*, which is now out of print. If the *Weekly Worker* gets a couple of slack weeks, you might like to serialise it, although, since it challenges many given assumptions and deeply held instruments of the climate change faith, it is likely to be as controversial as something like the furious ultra-Islamist reaction to the US 'anti-

Muslim' film for what seems to be similarly irrational reasons.

Coming to Gabriel's assertion that many of the young miners in the vanguard of the 1984-85 strike "had no intention of working in the mines for the rest of their lives", these are young miners I have never met. I'm assuming you mean our *working lives* and not until we drop. Yes, we had every intention of working in those mines until it was time to go out to pasture. Certainly, we were demanding retirement at 50 on a full pension, a four-day week and a six-hour day, but we indeed expected and demanded to see out our working days as coal miners. Contrary to many earlier generations, we also demanded that our sons followed us into the mines if they wanted to, that recruitment lists at collieries gave priorities to young unemployed lads from the community before outside labour. I've tried to explain in this paper many times that being coal miners afforded us much more than just the highest paid manual work in Britain, with good holidays and numerous rest days. We also had *licence* to say 'fuck it' when we wanted, rag up and go home or just stay in bed, because the other part of being a miner, perhaps the most important part, was the existence of our union, the NUM.

Being miners and occupying a strategic position over the power source of the economy meant we could intervene socially and politically in life; we could put our stamp on what happened or at the very least seriously challenge what was planned by others for us, not always successfully. The degree of job control we exercised at work on manning, overtime and how the job was done rendered this work less alienating, coupled with the physical challenge and job satisfaction of hard, physical, collective labour. We were proud to be miners and would have chosen it against almost anything else (other than not working at all on full pay, of course). So I don't know which miners Gabriel is talking about.

Certainly, after we lost the great strike, divisions opened up between men who couldn't live with losing, with the new impositions of jackboot management, with attacks on controls and concessions, etc and those determined to fight it out to the end in the hope of turning the tables and winning it back. We thought perhaps that movement of millions in 1992-93 might just be the turning tide, but the other side was stronger than our movement, and we were less capable of taking on an all-out fight-to-the-death struggle again.

But back in 1984-85 the lads on those picket lines were indeed fighting to remain miners, on our terms, as union miners in an advancing struggle for ourselves and society in general. That is what it was about. To that extent it wasn't really about coal mines as such.

David Douglass
NUM

Party on

I really enjoyed the articles covering the debate around 'What sort of party do we need?' (September 13) - and especially those by Mike Phipps and Ben Lewis. I thought Simon Hardy from the Anti-Capitalist Initiative was a bit off the wall. Yet another perfectly formed micro-fragment which is going to become the mass movement. I think not.

The Communist Party's *British road to socialism* used to have a very good phrase in it to the effect that 'changing the politics of the Labour Party is bound up with changing the politics of the working class'. Absolutely right. The Labour Party is a product of the labour

movement in capitalist society. The issues and problems we have with it and its leadership are integral to the problems we face trying to develop a revolutionary alternative perspective in the oldest capitalist and imperialist nation in the world.

As Ken Gill once said, if we can’t persuade the trade unions, trade unionists and individual Labour Party members to turn the Labour Party into a genuine workers’ party, rather than, as Lenin put it, a “bourgeois workers’ party”, then how are we going to persuade them to break away from that existing party and create something more progressive? It is pointless writing off the Labour Party and seeking to create some alternative Labour Party mark two. If we don’t address and tackle the issues which result in the Labour Party being what it is today, we will only recreate these issues and problems again and again.

Mike gave a powerful and captivating picture of the potential for transforming the Labour Party into a genuine mass party of the working class. Ben correctly identified the Labour Party as a prime site for struggle for revolutionaries and complemented this with the struggle to develop a truly unified Marxist party. If the struggle to transform the Labour Party fails or is superseded, we need to focus on creating and building the revolutionary party, not another capitalist, social democratic party.

In these days of open ruling class offensive and attack on the rights and living standards of the working class and on the organised working class movement itself, it is easy, but classic opportunism, to wish for a reborn social democratic party and politics. We forget Lenin’s analysis that social democracy is the hand-maiden of the modern imperialist state and is just as much about maintaining the rule of the bourgeoisie as open class attack.

I remember very well the last social democratic Labour Party government in the 1970s. It was atrocious and led directly to 18 uninterrupted years of Tory government. And, ultimately, to New Labour.

Andrew Northall
 Kettering

Dialogue

It isn’t at all clear to me what the political philosophy of the ‘original’ *Labour Briefing* group is (‘An irresponsible split’, September 13). Now there are two magazines, both of which were sent to me, and two websites. This can only cause confusion. I am all in favour of socialist pluralism and everybody joining every socialist group, to exchange ideas and strategy, but confusion is surely not desirable. Sectarianism is the enemy of the political left.

Sentimentality and an attachment to the way things were in the past are no justification for hanging on to that past. We need a rigorous, reasoned approach. Of course, emotions are valid, but they need to be rationally explored, not separated from rationality. Comrades in the ‘original’ *Labour Briefing* should be involved in an ongoing dialogue, not wilfully separated from those they once regarded as friends. It’s a shame and a political failure that this division now exists.

Michael Chewter
 email

Confused

Nick Rogers confuses terms in his latest response (Letters, September 13).

Firstly, he confuses capital with capitalists. In his analysis Marx distinguishes between ‘capital in general’ and ‘many capitals’. In relation to the latter, he gives examples using real firms. That is what I did in referring to my own experience working for a protective

clothing firm. That is different to a concern for the fate of individual capitalists, which is an aspect of the temporal single-system interpretation (TSSI), and Nick’s argument. If the owners of the firm I worked for had pocketed a capital gain, as a result of a revaluation of the capital assets of the firm, and walked away with it, having sold the business, that would not at all have changed the nature of the individual capital they walked away from. It would simply be owned by a different capitalist!

He then talks about a revaluation of capital across the economy and confuses this with “capital as self-expanding value”. In fact, in *Capital* Marx specifically distinguishes between a revaluation of capital and the self-expansion of capital as a consequence of the accumulation of surplus value. And quite rightly, because any revaluation of capital due to the labour-time required for its production rising implies a devaluation of the money capital required to purchase it of equal amount.

This is just another example of the way Nick fails to recognise that he works with a constant value of money theory. So, for example, he previously believed that a money capital of £4,000 at t2 was worth twice the value of £2,000 at t1. But, at t1, £2,000 bought as much cotton as £4,000 at t2. In other words, the value of the money had halved. In fact, contrary to Nick’s assertion, I did demonstrate this in relation to the TSSI, in direct debate with Andrew Kliman on Michael Roberts’ blog. Nick can’t seem to decide whether he wants to attack me for not dealing with Kliman’s argument or for not dealing with his.

As for the single moment of time, Nick has not answered my and Trotsky’s argument. As for his reference to black holes, it doesn’t help him. Black holes are also subject to change over time. He once more confuses two things. Having made this point, he later says, “But since when is measuring change across a specific time period (the ‘discrete blocks’ of time to which he objects) a non-dialectical practice?”

That is the whole point. It is the rejection of the existence of *points* in time I reject, not *periods* of time, precisely because any point is itself a period. Periods of time are themselves purely arbitrary, man-made constructs. But Nick is wrong to say that even these man-made periods have a discrete beginning and end.

When we say that the financial year ends on April 4, that is an approximation in itself. We do not mean necessarily at 12 midnight, but at close of business, for instance. I would love to see Nick explain, in fact, exactly when April 4 ends and April 5 begins because, I can assure him, that the divisions of time leading up to midnight can be divided into smaller and smaller quantum without actually arriving at the ‘discrete moment’ he thinks exists, just as the moments after 12 midnight can be divided down into infinitely small divisions.

Nick also confuses the fact that I understand his concept and disagree with it with not trying to understand it. In his concept he also confuses values and prices. His concept proceeds on the basis of market prices, which indeed are affected by all the things he describes, and confuses that with values, which are not. Nick is wrong in his analysis of the example I gave. Had a contract been won, the cloth would have been bought on the basis of the previously agreed price with the cloth manufacturer. However, it’s true that this would not necessarily be its future replacement cost, say at the time the clothing was produced. That is a difference between value and price. Usually, if substantial variations arise, there is the potential to adjust prices. But the point is, as Marx points out,

these changes in market prices relative to prices of production tend to cancel each other out.

I have not at all misrepresented Marx’s letter to Kugelmann on the law of value. It is precisely, the “distribution of social labour in specific proportions” which constitutes the law of value, according to Marx! At the beginning of the letter he even writes: “The unfortunate fellow does not see that, even if there were no chapter on value at all in my book, the analysis I give of the real relations would contain the proof and demonstration of the real value relation. The chatter about the need to prove the concept of value arises only from complete ignorance both of the subject under discussion and of the method of science.”

In *Capital*, Marx describes the operation of the law of value at different times of man’s history on this basis, and even in relation to Robinson Crusoe: “His stock-book contains a list of the objects of utility that belong to him, of the operations necessary for their production; and lastly, of the labour time that definite quantities of those objects have, on an average, cost him. All the relations between Robinson and the objects that form this wealth of his own creation, are here so simple and clear as to be intelligible without exertion, even to Mr Sedley Taylor. And yet those relations contain all that is essential to the determination of value” (www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch01.htm#S4).

Nick also has it the wrong way around in arguing that it is Marx’s understanding of exchange value which is crucial to understanding value, precisely because value predates exchange value both historically and logically. Humans were producing use values that contained value - ie, a quantity of human labour-time - long before they were producing commodities, and therefore exchange value. Moreover, because exchange value is itself an average of the values of individual use values, those individual values themselves logically have to exist before any such average can be determined. What is more, exchange values themselves have existed for thousands of years, predating capitalism by a similar amount. Exchange values come into existence at the point societies begin to exchange use values on a systematic basis. Moreover, as Marx sets out in the *Critique of the Gotha programme*, they will continue to exist even after capitalism has been overthrown. What Marx argued is not what Nick claims, but that the specific capitalistic *form* of the law of value only becomes fully mature when commodity production, and particularly wage-labour, has become all-pervasive.

Nick once again misrepresents what I have said about capitalist crisis. I argue, as did Marx and Engels, that a crisis of overproduction arises because capital expands faster than the ability of markets to consume at prices that enable capital to be reproduced. But not all crises are crises of overproduction. Marx, for example, details the crisis caused by the credit crunch arising from the 1844 Bank Act. Marx also distinguishes clearly between ‘financial crises’ and ‘economic crises’. The latter, he says, may always appear to be due to a shortage of money, even though that is not their real cause, but he says that “must be clearly distinguished from that particular form of crisis, which also is called a monetary crisis, but which may be produced by itself as an independent phenomenon in such a way as to react only indirectly on industry and commerce. The pivot of these crises is to be found in moneyed capital, and their sphere of direct action is therefore the sphere of that capital: viz, banking, the stock exchange, and finance” (note 1, p137, Vol 1).

Arthur Bough
 email

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 23, 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 3C, ‘Universal money’. Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesday September 25, 6.15pm: ‘The revolution which made us human’. 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. Discounts for whole term. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: www.radicalanthropologygroup.org.

Fight for Sites

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

Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition

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

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>.

Socialist films

Sunday September 23, 11am: Screening, Renoir Cinema, Brunswick Square, London WC1. UK premiere of Alberto Arvelo Mendoza’s *Dudamel: let the children play* (USA/Venezuela 2010, 90 minutes). Organised by London Socialist Film Co-op: www.socialistfilm.blogspot.com.

Stop the cuts

Monday September 24, 6.30pm: Public meeting, the Black Swan, 67 Westgate Road, Newcastle NE1. Speakers include Jeremy Corbyn MP. Organised by Coalition of Resistance: www.coalitionofresistance.org.uk.

Organise against war

Wednesday September 26, 7pm: London activists meeting, Quaker Meeting House, 52 St Martins Lane, London WC2 (two minutes from Leicester Square tube). Organised by Stop the War Coalition: <http://stopwar.org.uk>.

Out Against Austerity

Thursday September 27, 6.30pm: Meeting - LGBT voices against the cuts. Unite House, 128 Theobald’s Road, London WC1. Organised by Out Against Austerity: www.outagainstausterity.org.

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>.

Austerity, injustice and the power of protest

Sunday October 14, 11.30am to 5.30pm: National conference to defend the right to protest, University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1. Workshops and forums include: ‘Policing austerity’, ‘Defending the right to strike’, ‘Know your rights’, ‘Whose streets?’ Speakers include: Darcus Howe, Owen Jones, John McDonnell, Tony Benn, Alfie Meadows, Nick Wrack, Mark Serwotka, Gareth Peirce. Waged £6, unwaged £3, solidarity £10. Organised by Defend the Right to Protest: www.defendtherighttoprotest.org/national-conference.

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.

ECOLOGY

Natural limits, sustain

Eco-socialists say we must urgently replace capitalism to prevent climate-change disaster. But, argues **Gabriel Levy**, fear is no way to build a movement for socialism. This is an edited version of the second part of his talk at the CPGB's Communist University¹

In discussing natural limits, socialists often feel, with good reason, that they are called upon to respond to Malthusian² arguments: ie, that there are too many people, or - in more recent versions - that there are too many consumers. Judging by the socialists' collective response to the Occupy movement, for example, I am not convinced that we have really got our act together in this respect. I hope the following might help to put this right.

The first point is: there are natural limits within which the economy operates, within which humanity lives, and societies have constantly come up against them in the past. In my view the clearest explanation of the natural limits as they stand at present has been given by a group of scientific researchers at the Stockholm Environment Institute.³ They aimed to "define planetary boundaries within which we expect that humanity can operate safely", and to estimate whether, and to what extent, such boundaries are being breached. They concluded that the economy has already gone over the boundaries in three ways:

1. *Global warming*, the main cause of which is the emission of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere in the process of burning fossil fuels, which in turn results in the 'greenhouse effect'. The range of possibly disastrous effects is well known. As I understand the projections by many scientists, they show that the likely results of global warming include sea-level rise so that large parts of countries such as Bangladesh would be submerged. Even earlier in the process there are weather effects on the tropical zone that make agriculture difficult and in some respects impossible - after a history of imperialism that has already been about, for hundreds of years, the tropical zone being looted by the temperate zone. There is a limit.

2. *Biodiversity loss*, which is happening at an extremely rapid rate. It produces changes in the earth systems that are hard to predict, hard to understand, and very hard for agriculture to adapt to. The disappearance of species, just like the evolution of new species, happens in nature continuously. The point is the *rate* of change: under the impact of industry and industrial agriculture, species are being lost at such a rate that uncontrollable consequences follow.

3. *The disruption of the nitrogen cycle*: ie, the cycle of nitrogen through the ecological system. The amount of nitrogen in its reactive forms (ie, forms that can be metabolised by plants to provide the basis of nutrients) has doubled in the past 50 years, and it gathers in concentrations that cause a range of other environmental problems, which I will talk about in the final part on agriculture.

The argument by the researchers at Stockholm is that humanity, through the world capitalist economy, is impacting on earth systems unsustainably in those three ways. They tried to determine where the limits are for other aspects of the earth's natural systems, including ocean acidification; stratospheric ozone; the phosphorus cycle; and freshwater use. In these cases, they concluded that the impact is



More frequent violent weather changes

problematic, but not yet unsustainable.

We cannot understand the capitalist economy if we do not understand the way that it hits up against these natural limits. I think this is a *modern* version of scarcity - not the sort of scarcity that socialists faced in the 1920s. The type of scarcity that was faced then, which caused millions of people to die from hunger, is still present - largely as a result of capitalist social relations, and there is a great deal of research showing that agriculture, at its present level of technology, could feed a much greater number of people than there are alive now - but this modern version is scarcity of natural systems and natural resources on which the economy impacts.

The second point is that the history of the people-nature relationship is important. People have many times in history come up against natural limits to economic practices. There are known examples, starting from the time when settled agriculture began, that suggest that people, living in various types of social relations, conducted economic activity unsustainably.

There have been discussions in academia about this history: for example, the one about *Collapse*, the popular book on environmental history by Jared Diamond. He argues that in all the cases of societies that in his view collapsed - and that idea of collapse is itself contested - there has been an environmental element among the causes. Diamond surveys many societies, including such well-known cases as the Mayans, the Easter Island society, etc. There are ways in which his argument plays into the Malthusian view of population as the cause of the problem.

Those who are polemicising with Diamond have shown, quite convincingly in my view, that he has exaggerated the extent to which these different cases are related. But

there is little disagreement over one fundamental point: that there are ways in which societies come up against natural limits.⁴ For example, that many societies have practised agriculture in such a way that has caused deforestation, and consequent soil erosion, at a level that reacts back onto agriculture and the humans supported by it. This history needs to be studied.

The third point is that the clash between socialism and Malthusianism is not about whether natural limits to economic activity exist, as they clearly do, but about how the economy confronts those limits and how its unsustainable characteristics are to be measured and understood.

Take for example the recent Rio+20 conference, at which representatives of most of the nations in the world got together and reviewed the targets they had set themselves for making the economy sustainable at the Rio summit 20 years earlier. They had to conclude that they had not come near to meeting these targets.

Prior to the conference, a special issue of *Nature* was published that presented the most relevant scientific research.⁵ When it came to proposals about what action should be taken, it seems to me significant that the most substantial article⁶ was co-authored by the biologist, Paul Ehrlich, who in the 1970s made a reputation as an aggressive, Malthusian advocate of population control. Ehrlich, together with two colleagues, now takes what I would describe as a modified Malthusian stance: they emphasise the importance of reducing population - albeit, for example, by providing contraception, and education, rather than compulsorily - and, while they acknowledge the "enormous inequity in wealth" that must be dealt with alongside "environmental hazard", they retain the approach that the key to dealing with unsustainability is to

reduce the number of people and to reduce their level of consumption.

To my mind, their methodology is crude and wrong and, as far as I know, it has gone largely unchallenged by other scientists or economists. It passes over the important impact of social relations on the environment. The equation used to work out environmental impacts, first devised in the 1970s and still used today, is 'Impact=Population x Affluence x Technology' (Ipat). In other words, the impact of human activity on the environment can be measured with reference to the size of the population, its level of material wealth and the technology used to produce the goods it consumes.

Even some socialist writers accept the validity of this equation completely,⁷ although others have, at least, sketched out the beginnings of a critique of it.⁸ In my view we need to go further. Points that would be included in such a critique of the neo-Malthusian approach are:

- The economy comprises a specific set of social relations - ie, capitalism - and that is driven in the first place *not* by consumption, but by the constant drive of capital to expand itself, and thereby to expand production.

- This economy *by its nature* produces vast quantities of waste.

- Types of consumption are not fixed but socially determined - and those common under capitalism would clearly have little or no place under any remotely human social relations. An extreme example is the consumption of hamburgers, the production of which is so incredibly expensive in terms of the amount of water used, and which are so damaging to the health of millions of people affected by obesity (there are estimated to be 400 million obese people in the world, nearly half the number of undernourished people). Another example is the extent of motor car ownership. The point I am making, as a person living in a relatively rich country, is not that millions of Chinese or Indian people who now wish to own a car should not do so. The point is that that capitalist society has throughout its recent history assumed and encouraged mass motor car production, which requires endless purchases of motor cars. *If and when we live differently*, people would not *want* motor cars in many cases.

The conclusion of this section on natural limits is that we need a rounded approach that (i) explains the impact of the economy on the natural environment, and (ii) envisages a transition to socialism that takes into account the economy's collision with the natural limits, which I regard as the big scarcity of the 21st century. Socialism can and will transcend those scarcities.

Debate

In discussion, the points were made (i) that material goods bring status to people living alienated lives - the example was given of the various devices invented by Steve Jobs, seen as one of the great entrepreneurs of our time, that do not significantly differ in their functions from devices produced by other companies, but sell in their hundreds of millions; and (ii) that consumerism is for many people a form of escapism from their working lives - 'retail therapy' as it is called.

I agreed with the point about

consumerism in relation to status and as 'retail therapy'. There is an ideological issue here, about the 'green' message from the sections of the establishment that seeks to make individuals feel guilty and responsible for damage to the environment. A very good text on this is *Ecological servitude*, by a group of Belgian activists.⁹ It is not for us to advocate that people reduce their individual consumption or feel guilty.

When working class people go shopping, whether for Steve Jobs's gadgets or whatever else, it is often about seeking a sense of fulfilment in this horrible world that we live in. Isn't that exactly what Marx said religion was about? This is powerful ideological stuff. Understanding that there are natural limits is *not* about going round saying to people that they should consume less. That is not the issue.

We should, of course, highlight the way that some types of consumption are very damaging. Earlier on in the discussion someone said - in order to question my argument against 'socialist growth' - that growth is necessary, since there has to be more food, and there has to be more medical equipment and drugs. I would say, it depends. Firstly, because in times and places where people go short of food, where they starve, the cause is almost invariably to do not with a shortage of food as such, but with the way that food is distributed. Secondly, are there not types of food that we do not favour increased production of? Do we really want more hamburgers, to be fed to more teenagers who suffer from obesity? I don't.

Similar things could be said of medicine. A recent article in the *New Scientist* demonstrates just how many drugs used by patients in rich countries could be substituted simply by regular exercise.¹⁰ People walking or running for a little time each day. The article demonstrates scientifically something we all probably understand instinctively. But the problem with exercise is the unnatural lives people lead. So here in the south-east of England, where people work mostly in offices, they may think that their working lives have little to compare with those of our great-great-grandparents who lived in industrial 19th century London. But people live perhaps even more unnaturally. They do not have time to exercise, as people naturally should.

There was discussion about the contrast between life under capitalism and the life of hunter-gatherers. The point was made that in terms of agricultural production and the consequent growth of human population, the 'genie is out of the bottle': there could be no return to the stone-age economy, under which, for example, only half a million or so people could live on the territory of the UK.

In relation to the genie being out of the bottle, I stated that we do not know how people will or can live in their natural surroundings free of alienated social relationships. The reason for this is that, around the time that settled agriculture was established, so too were forms of social hierarchy and alienation. Forms of economy further on than hunting and gathering have never been tested out in history *except* under alienated social relations.

sustainability and socialism

We do not have the data about how it would have been with different types of social relations. We cannot go back; the genie is out of the bottle. In this sense, the transition to socialism is a transition to the unknown. We do not know how humanity will live in some sort of accord with nature, because it has not been tried - at least not consistently, or on a large scale, for a long time. Humanity has only tried living in relatively large numbers in its natural environment under a succession of alienated social relationships, that have to one degree or another ruptured or messed up the relationship with nature. There are physical limits that we have discussed - the limits on the atmosphere, the limited amount of freshwater resources, etc - and the transition to socialism will be a transition to a situation in which we are living in accord with those limits.

I do not accept the bald assertion that we can not sketch out what communism will look like. Of course, we cannot do it in any exact way. And in the future there will be people cleverer and better equipped than us to do so more effectively, as the transition gets underway. But I still think we can do a better job than we are doing.

Global warming

The most important natural limit to the economy and to human activity is the danger of global warming, caused by the rising level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Carbon dioxide emissions produce a 'greenhouse effect': ie, reduce the extent to which the atmosphere reflects sunlight back and retains a greater amount of the sunlight's energy as heat energy in the atmosphere. Before the industrial revolution this was not the most dangerous rupture between people and nature: then, problems such as deforestation were much more pressing. But it is the case now. For that reason, I will make some points about climate science.

1. Although there are some people who think that climate science is a conspiracy by the establishment, or a conspiracy by climate scientists to get lots of research money, I do not think it is worth spending time answering those arguments, any more than it is worth answering arguments about the world being flat. One denialist argument is that all animals, including humans, have lived through changes in climate before and will do so again. That is true, and irrelevant; the issue is about the speed with which these changes take place.

2. There are huge uncertainties in climate science, and particularly about the manner of predicting future climate - as there are with many aspects of research in many sciences - and all serious climate scientists say so.

3. Despite the uncertainties, there are some things about which there is no doubt, including that the atmosphere is warming up more quickly than at any previous time in human history, and the cause of this is the burning of fossil fuels.

4. Despite the uncertainties, there are effects of global warming that are not only visible to scientists, but are already affecting millions of people's lives. The main one of these is volatile weather in tropical zones, which is playing havoc with agriculture in Africa and south-east Asia especially. Farming conditions have changed, or are changing, dramatically, with very serious consequences.

5. Despite the uncertainties about

the speed at which global warming will continue from now, it is possible to measure some of the likely consequences quite accurately: eg, the speed at which sea level rises per degree in average temperature increase is computed quite accurately. 6. An overwhelming majority of climate scientists believe there is a *danger* of global warming reaching 'tipping points'. These can not be predicted with any certainty, and there are many debates between scientists about how likely they are. But the consequences of any of these scenarios would be pretty horrific. In these cases, change would move so fast that it would throw up very serious threats to hundreds of millions of people - and, if it happens under capitalism, poor people in particular. The clearest example is the danger of large blocks of Arctic or Antarctic ice melting. This would cause sea levels to rise much more rapidly than previously, with obvious impacts on the hundreds of millions of humans who live near rivers or sea shores.

As you all probably know, there is much public discussion about whether governments should implement policies to limit climate change, or policies to adapt to it. I think that socialists should keep out of this discussion and continue to do what we are doing: ie, try to bring closer a time when these issues will be dealt with by society as a whole, in a completely different manner.

Given the dangers of global warming, and also the fact that fossil fuels (coal, oil and natural gas) are generally becoming more and more difficult and expensive to access, it seems inevitable that there will be a transition from fossil fuels being the predominant sources of energy for human use to other types of fuels. Good work by socialists working to understand the implications of this - and how approaches to the energy transition may be developed, together with communities who rely on fossil fuels for work: eg, of coal miners, oil workers, etc - has been brought together in a book edited by Kolya Abramsky, which I recommend.¹¹

The energy transition can only be a social transition. An example that might seem to suggest that the problem of global warming can be resolved without drastic social change is that of the ozone layer. As I understand it, this is a case in which governments of the large capitalist countries worked together to fix a serious global environmental emergency: ie, the hole in the ozone layer that was being rapidly enlarged as a result of the emission into the atmosphere of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs). Manufacture of the relevant products was banned outright or strictly regulated, with successful results. The hole in the ozone layer, as far as I understand, is getting smaller. In this case, the position of the manufacturing companies - perhaps like the tobacco companies in many countries - was such that governments felt able to regulate in that way.

However, I suspect that fossil fuels are so integral to the capitalist economy that it will be different. There will probably be a 'green new deal' at some point, but it is very difficult to see how capitalism can adapt in the way that would be needed to cut carbon dioxide emissions on the scale required. In that sense the energy transition is very much part of the transition to socialism.

My conclusions on this are:

● I am opposed to a catastrophist discourse of some so-called eco-

socialists: eg, 'capitalism is causing global warming; global warming will cause disaster; in order to avoid disaster we need to overthrow capitalism'. This is not a guide to any type of action. Instead, we need to develop an understanding of the transition to socialism that also embodies a transition to new forms of energy.

● All previous energy transitions - from human power to animal power, from wood to coal, the introduction of the diesel engine and electricity - have implied huge social changes. The move away from hydrocarbon fuels to other types of energy is also likely to go hand in hand with huge social changes.

Agriculture

Many of the most significant ruptures in the relationship between people and nature occur in agriculture, and often get scant attention from socialists who live and work in cities.¹² Some of the main issues we need to consider are:

1. One of the three natural limits that the capitalist economy is already breaching, according to the research at the Stockholm Environment Institute, is the disbalance of the nitrogen cycle.

The problem concerns reactive nitrogen: ie, nitrogen in chemical compounds that can be metabolised by plants (processed to make protein). The amount of nitrogen in this form has more than doubled over the last 50 years, mainly due to the use of chemical fertilisers that put nitrogen into the soil; production of energy from fossil fuels and biomass. Big concentrations of reactive nitrogen cause problems - mainly eutrophication of lakes and rivers (ie, excessive concentration of nutrients in them), which, for example, can destroy fish stocks. The exponential increase in the use of chemical fertilisers is starting to produce other negative environmental effects: the saturation of soil in some places, and eventually the reversal of productivity improvements achieved by fertilisers. Productivity of industrial agriculture is still improving, but is not improving as fast as it used to.

In the 19th century, Marx wrote and thought a great deal about the dangers of the disbalance in nutrients caused in Europe by concentration of human population in cities, and the fact that nutrients transferred in foodstuffs to the cities were not returned to the countryside. But in the 20th century the invention of chemical fertiliser and the advent of industrial agriculture to some extent turned this problem on its head. Marx was alarmed by the loss of nutrients on agricultural land. As a result of the invention of chemical fertilisers, there is now a problem of an *excess* of nutrients in some places, to the detriment of agriculture as a whole.

2. Other serious problems aggravated by industrial agriculture include deforestation and pressure on availability of fresh water. The stress on many of the world's largest rivers from agriculture means that some of them no longer reach the sea.

3. In my view, there is a strong argument that the tremendous surges in food prices in 2007, and further surges last year and this year, reflected the way that agriculture is hitting the natural limits. For sure, one cause of these surges was financial speculation. But there were other underlying issues: the rising cost of fuel for transport and of natural gas, which is a key raw material for most fertilisers, reflected rising prices of fossil fuels that in turn may reflect the limits of

available resources. Relative shortages of land and water, and slowdowns in improvements of productivity, were also among the causes of the price surges, according to most economists who have researched this.

4. Agriculture is also a field where the deformation of the instruments of labour, which we discussed earlier, is most evident. Technologies to support small- and medium-sized farms are not developed: agribusiness does not invest in them because it is against its interests; small farmers do not do so because they do not have the money. The domination of the agribusiness corporations, which rely on large-scale technology and crop monocultures, is supported by the trading rules (under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) and in many other ways by capitalist states. In the last couple of years another form of expropriation, land-grabbing, has become rampant - so, for example, China buys up land in Africa, with a view to feeding Chinese people who have themselves emigrated from the land into the cities to work. These and other changes in land use have driven literally hundreds of millions of subsistence farmers off the land in poor countries.

Some conclusions on agriculture are:

● Socialists must have something convincing to say about the struggle of small farmers and the rural poor in countries like India, where literally hundreds of millions of people have been driven off the land, but cannot be classed easily as urban or rural, or as workers or peasants. Repeating slogans about nationalising land that were relevant in the 1920s is not good enough.

● We have to have something convincing to say about how we see agriculture in the transition to socialism. In my view that would include much about forms of agriculture that work sustainably and in concert with natural environments.

● We have to develop some 21st century ideas about overcoming the separation of town and country, which was central to 19th century socialism and was prominently highlighted in the *Communist manifesto*, but has largely been lost in the 20th century.

Debate

One comment in discussion was that, in dealing with global warming, time is of profound importance; that climate scientists, and in particular Joseph Hansen, have warned us that time is limited in taking action on carbon dioxide emissions; that this does impart a real urgency to the need to defeat capitalism; for these reasons, is there anything wrong with warning of catastrophe?

In this respect the work of Joseph Hansen, one of the world's leading climate scientists, is really important. He has not only become an outspoken critic of US government environmental policy, but has also written for the general public in order to widen understanding of the issues.¹³ Hansen has a very clear position on the science: he says that he and his colleagues are sure that there are more and nearer 'tipping points' than the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change accepts. He has been fiercely critical of the IPCC on the grounds that its projections of global warming effects have been too moderate. As I understand it, the majority of climate scientists probably think that the IPCC is too conservative, but there is a range of uncertainty and Hansen's conclusions are not the only ones. He is less sceptical about his results

than some other climatologists. The differences between them are not about whether global warming is dangerous; they are about different estimates of how quickly and how ruinously these dangers will materialise, and how sure we can be.

It seems to me mistaken for most of us, who are not climate scientists, to claim that we know which dangers will materialise and when. We do not know, exactly. But we do know that there is a range of dangers about which we are being warned - and, of course, I am as alarmed as anyone by some of the greatest of these dangers - and that these should never be tested in practice. Humanity collectively must not allow these dangers to materialise.

My point about catastrophism is a political one. Nothing is to be gained by shouting, screaming and panicking. Fear is no way to strengthen social movements. Let us say that capitalism, by its lunacy, by its distortion of the relationship between people and nature, has raised this horrible panoply of dangers, all of which humanity should avoid. That is a convincing enough reason to move forward in the transition to socialism ●

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

Notes

1. For the first part, see 'The trouble with economic growth' *Weekly Worker* September 13.
2. Thomas Malthus argued (i) that population increased geometrically while agricultural production increased only in a linear way (which turned out to be wrong: he underestimated the potential of farming technology); (ii) that population growth, rather than capitalist social relations, was the cause of poverty; and (iii) that the state should not do anything to keep alive those impoverished by changes in the capitalist economy. Marx not only denounced Malthus's views on poverty, but also polemicalised against him theoretically, arguing that "surplus population" had to be understood in the specific historical context: ie, this population was surplus to the capitalist economy, not surplus in any other sense. Many 20th century environmentalist writers have embraced Malthusian arguments, often explicitly (eg, Garrett Hardin, author of *The tragedy of the Commons*), sometimes implicitly and partially.
3. J Rockstrom *et al*, 'Planetary boundaries: exploring the safe operating space for humanity' *Ecology and Society* 14 (2): www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol14/iss2/art32. Also see D Meadows, J Randers and D Meadows *Limits to growth: the 30-year update* (London 2004). Written by members of the research team who produced the initial 'limits to growth' report in 1972, it is broadly neo-Malthusian in its approach, but refers to much important empirical research.
4. See 'Collapse and sustainability: arguments we should all hear': <http://peopleandnature.wordpress.com/2012/04/15/collapse-and-sustainability-arguments-we-should-all-hear>.
5. See 'Scientists warn Rio+20': <http://peopleandnature.wordpress.com/2012/06/19/scientists-warn-rio20-biodiversity-loss-may-hit-tipping-points-too>.
6. P Ehrlich, P Kareiva and G Daily, 'Securing natural capital and expanding equity to rescale civilisation' *Nature* June 7 2012, pp68-73: www.nature.com/nature/journal/v486/n7401/full/nature11157.html.
7. See, for example, Minqi Li *The rise of China and the demise of the capitalist world economy* London 2008, pp139-47.
8. J Bellamy Foster, B Clark and R York *The ecological rift: capitalism's war on the earth* New York 2010, pp377-99.
9. Translation of some points into English, and link to French text are available at <http://peopleandnature.wordpress.com/article-ecological-servitude>.
10. *New Scientist* August 29: www.newscientist.com/article/mg21528793.700-encourage-every-day-exercise-not-sporting-elites.html.
11. K Abramsky (ed) *Sparking a worldwide energy revolution: social struggles in the transition to a post-petrol world* Oakland 2010.
12. The best introduction to the wide range of issues by a socialist is: T Weis *The global food economy: the battle for the future of farming* (London 2007).
13. See Joseph Hansen's website at www.columbia.edu/~jeh1. His book addressed to general readers is: J Hansen *Storms of my grandchildren: the truth about the coming climate catastrophe and our last chance to save humanity* (London 2009).

ITALY

Sardinian workers force concessions

The big union battalions are once more talking of general strike action, writes Toby Abse

As summer turns to autumn, the working class is once again taking centre-stage in the Italian crisis. With the latest figures from Istat, the Italian national statistics agency, showing a 2.6% fall in Italy's GDP for the second quarter of 2012 compared to a year ago, there is every reason to think that this trend will continue, regardless of allegedly miraculous stunts pulled by the two 'Super Marios' - Italian premier Monti and European Central Bank chief Draghi - regarding the spread between German and Italian bonds.

The storm centre of the working class upsurge has not been the 'industrial triangle' (Turin-Milan-Genoa), but the island of Sardinia. First the coalminers of the Carbosulcis mine in Nuraxi Figus and then the aluminium smelters of the Alcoa plant in Portovesme have shown a courage and determination so far lacking amongst the factory workers of the northern regions of the mainland, who seem to be still reeling from the defeats over both pensions and article 18 of the workers' statute earlier this year. Both of these Sardinian struggles are about jobs rather than wages or conditions.

Both workplaces, a mere five kilometres apart, face closure in the next few months: in the case of the mine as a result of a European ruling that production must cease, because the heavily contaminated, sulphur-laden coal it has been producing since 1850 is in breach of environmental standards; and in the case of the aluminium plant because the American-based transnational that owns it claims that it is uneconomic.¹ Unemployment on the island is much higher than on the mainland - around 20% - and so older workers would face long-term unemployment and younger ones might well be forced to emigrate.

Both sets of workers have resorted to rather unconventional forms of struggle, which have gained them considerable media attention, despite the relatively small numbers involved - about 1,000 in the aluminium plant and 630 in the mine.² On August 26, 120 miners, armed with 350 kilograms of explosives, barricaded themselves 400 metres underground in one of the mine shafts of Carbosulcis. The occupation lasted for some days and has appeared to force concessions from the government; since 1995 the mine has been the property of the Sardinian regional government, so that former Banca Intesa chief Corrado Passera, Monti's minister of economic development, has a much more direct influence on the outcome than might have been the case with a privately owned mine. At any rate, ministers have said that they will reconsider proposals for new technology to save the workplace "as long as it is cost-effective", but, since the miners first put forward a similar plan in 1995, only to have it ignored by the bosses and government with the connivance of union leaders, some scepticism is clearly in order here.

The aluminium workers had already come to national attention when three of their number barricaded themselves on top of a silo for three days on September 4 and then appeared on national television wearing balaclavas - a gesture which, although it prompted analogies with terrorists and football hooligans, nonetheless generated massive publicity for their cause. Then on September 10 a demonstration by 550 Alcoa workers - who had arrived in Rome on the overnight ferry from Sardinia - turned into a series



Getting the better of the cops

of violent clashes with the police in the very centre of Italy's capital, clashes in which 14 policemen and six demonstrators were injured. Despite the presence of about a thousand policemen, carabinieri and finance guards, wearing helmets and other riot gear (and wielding batons with considerable enthusiasm), the aluminium workers seemed to have got the better of the security forces and clearly terrified some of them by throwing aluminium disks, smoke bombs, fire crackers and other missiles for hours on end. Hundreds of loud explosions were heard in central Rome from early in the morning until late into the evening.

Rarely can so small a march have had so much impact.³ Negotiations between national trade union officials and government representatives went on for many hours. Passera was eventually forced to postpone the aluminium plant's scheduled closure date by a further month - putting back the deadline to November 15 - and promised "my personal direct commitment to find a solution". Whether either of the transnationals that have expressed some degree of interest in buying the plant - Klesch and Glencore - will come up with a more definite bid remains to be seen.⁴

The militancy of the Alcoa workers has also had a direct impact on Susanna Camusso, the general secretary of the CGIL trade union confederation, who - whilst the clashes were still going on in the streets of Rome called in a combative speech to the CGIL executive for "immediate public intervention" on the part of the Italian government to protect "wages and employment" and to save the many companies on the edge of a precipice from closure, "starting with Alcoa".⁵ If no such steps are taken, she has called for a "general strike in October".⁶ Since the CGIL and the UIL confederation have already called a strike across the public sector for September 28, momentum is clearly building up for a general strike on the part of the unions affiliated to the CGIL, especially the metalworkers' union, Fiom.

The statements made over the last few days by Sergio Marchionne, Fiat's Canadian-Italian managing director, suggesting he was abandoning rather

than just postponing the company's plan to invest a further €20 billion in its remaining Italian plants, has provoked Camusso, under pressure from Fiom, into making further attacks on the government and the employers, particularly the Fiat manager. Over the last few weeks Camusso has expressed the hope that the CISL confederation as well as the UIL would join the CGIL in a general strike against the government's austerity policies.

This degree of unity seems much less likely - in part because the CISL has benefited from sweetheart deals with Marchionne at Fiom's expense, and in all probability the CGIL will have to choose between going it alone and backing down in the face of pressure from the Monti government and the parties that support it. Prominent amongst those parties is the ex-'official communist'-dominated Partito Democratico - as PD vice-secretary Enrico Letta put it, "The trade unions go on strike. We are supporting a government and we are not organising a strike against it."⁷

What was particularly notable about the Alcoa workers' demonstration was their intransigent hostility to the PD, including Stefano Fassina, the party's economic spokesperson, who attempted to join their march, only to be pushed and shoved and fairly rapidly driven out of the procession to chants of "Bastards, you have deceived us". It should be noted that Fassina is very much closer to traditional social democracy than the bulk of the increasingly neoliberal PD leadership - he said in an interview with *La Repubblica* soon after the incident: "The PD is the party of labour. Those are its roots. Therefore we have been on the streets, are on the streets and will be on the streets again." However, as *La Repubblica* pointed out, despite Fassina being regarded as a friend by many workers - and being a particular favourite of the taxi drivers in their dispute with the Monti government a few months ago - this week he was attacked by the Alcoa workers as if he was an *ultra liberista* (extreme neoliberal).

Although the Alcoa workers expressed hostility towards all the political parties and to some degree even towards the trade unions (some had a sign saying, "Right, left, trade

unions, you are traitors. At every election campaign you ask for our vote, only to then ally with the bosses"), there is some attempt being made to channel that anger by forces to the left of the PD. On September 11 an "enlarged committee" was formed by Antonio Di Pietro of the Italia dei Valori anti-corruption party (IdV).⁸ The committee included Nichi Vendola of the green left Sinistra Ecologia Libertà (SEL), Rifondazione Comunista national secretary Paolo Ferrero, Partito dei Comunisti Italiani leader Oliviero Diliberto, Green president Angelo Bonelli and Gianni Rinaldini of Fiom. They deposited with the supreme court the text of two proposed referenda questions - the first cancelling the so-called 'reform' of article 18 and the second reinstating the minimal universal rights of the National Labour Contract cancelled by the Berlusconi government. The collection of the signatures necessary to turn the referenda into reality will start in October.

Former CGIL general secretary Sergio Cofferati - who in March 2002 organised a very successful, three million-strong demonstration in defence of article 18 - has given his backing to the proposed referendum and has been denounced by the PD for doing so. Letta said: "I understand his position linked to a battle in the past. But the logic of the PD is different: seriousness." Both PD labour spokesperson Stefano Fassina and former PD labour minister Cesare Damiano claim to support what the rabidly pro-Monti *La Repubblica* calls a "counter-reform" of the new labour law, but oppose the referendum, claiming that a centre-left government would make the necessary changes by parliamentary means.¹⁰

Such divisions in the PD are unlikely to precipitate any serious split in its ranks at a time when it is still the strongest party in the opinion polls and a general election is due in the spring at the latest, although in the unlikely event of the extraordinarily and deliberately divisive extreme neoliberal, Matteo Renzi, winning the primary contest, Cofferati and some of the other more social democratic elements linked to the CGIL might decide to call it a day.

What is perhaps more open to question is whether the projected electoral alliance between the PD and SEL will hold, given their diametrically opposed positions on the referendum and the increasing attacks

on SEL from both the Christian Democratic Unione di Centro, the PD's preferred partner in the almost inevitable event of a hung parliament next year, and the PD's own right wing.¹¹ ●

Notes

1. Many aluminium smelting plants in Germany and the USA may also face closure because of the imminent opening of a massive aluminium smelting plant in Saudi Arabia, which in 2013 will reduce the price from \$2,500 to \$1,700 per ton - see *Corriere della Sera* September 11. I want to acknowledge that much of my account of events at the coal mine is drawn from Hugh Edwards' article, 'Italian miners' occupation forces concessions' *Solidarity* September 5.
2. Figures for the workforce in the mine are taken from *La Repubblica* September 11; Edwards (*op cit*) gives a much more approximate 500.
3. It was the front page lead in both *La Repubblica* and *Il Corriere della Sera* the following day.
4. According to the *Corriere della Sera* (September 11), Gary Klesch is a longstanding friend of Bernie Madoff, whom the paper describes as "the greatest fraudster in history". Making any agreement with such a figure might imply a certain amount of recklessness on the part of the Italian government, although nobody who remembers the way the national airline, Alitalia, was handed over to a strange group of Berlusconi's friends rather than the more reliable Air France would be particularly surprised.
5. Passera and his ministry are aware of about 150 companies in difficulty, employing about 180,000 workers. These include some of the stars of Italy's 'economic miracle' of 1958-63, including domestic appliance companies like Electrolux and Indesit, as well as the former Fiat plant at Termini Imerese - see *Repubblica* September 11.
6. See *La Repubblica* September 11.
7. *Ibid*.
8. As opposed to the original purely IdV committee that is still in charge of collecting signatures for two other referenda directed against *la casta* (literally 'the caste' - probably the nearest English approximation is 'the political class').
9. The PD intends to organise primaries open to all self-proclaimed supporters of the centre-left to elect the candidate for premier. The leading PD candidate is, of course, national secretary Pier Luigi Bersani. He is being challenged in the contest from the right by Matteo Renzi, the mayor of Florence, a neoliberal advocate of 'the Monti Agenda'; and from the left by Nichi Vendola of SEL. Whilst it now seems likely that the much heralded primaries will go ahead, their importance will depend on the precise nature of the electoral reform currently being discussed - particularly whether it awards a premium to the leading coalition or the leading party.
10. Fassina in his *Repubblica* interview said: "No, I am not signing it. I don't like the institution. I agree with the modification of article 18, but with a draft law, because labour laws ought to be written with the social partners, not fought by blows in a referendum" (*La Repubblica* September 11).
11. The photograph of Vendola standing with Di Pietro of the IdV, Green leader Bonelli and the leaders of the two communist parties outside the court building, where they delivered the referenda questions, has been at the centre of this media firestorm. Vendola himself is currently drawing a sharp distinction between, on the one hand, the possibility of an alliance between SEL and a PD led by Bersani and, on the other, the complete impossibility of an alliance with a PD led by Renzi - see *La Repubblica* September 18.

Fighting fund

Step up the pace

With two-thirds of the month already gone, we are barely halfway to making our £1,500 target for September's fighting fund. Which means that we really need to step up the pace over the next 10 days. We rely on our readers and supporters to ensure the *Weekly Worker* comes out every week, and a shortfall for even one month can represent a big blow.

Thanks mainly to four hefty donations, exactly £300 came in this week. Regular donors MM and AM came up with their usual standing orders of £75 and £50 respectively, while there was a nice cheque for £50 from TL, who writes: "Congrats on an excellent issue - fascinating analysis on

everything from South Africa to Kurdistan!" NC gave the same amount using the PayPal facility on our website, but she was the only one of 11,208 online readers to get out their credit or debit card over the last seven days.

Those four comrades, plus a half dozen others who made more modest (but still essential) donations, helped take our total up to £777. That leaves us with another £723 to raise in little more than a week. Please do what you can to make sure we get it!

Robbie Rix

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

KURDISTAN

The HDK enigma

Esen Uslu continues his exploration of the Kurdish question by pointing to the ambiguities in the HDK’s ‘democratic autonomy’

After examining what the programmes of the legal Communist Party, the Freedom and Socialist Party (ÖDP) and the Workers’ Party of Kurdistan (PKK) have had to say about the Kurdish national question, it is time to take a look at the position of the newly formed People’s Democratic Congress (HDK). While the HDK is still in the making, it has its roots in the period when the ÖDP was formed in the mid-90s.

Many lesser organisations stayed out of the process leading to the formation of the ÖDP or split from it shortly after taking part in the initial fusion. While they have diverse opinions, they tend to agree that meaningful unity cannot exclude representatives of the Kurdish freedom movement. Many had taken part in the formation in 1990 of the legal People’s Labour Party (HEP), a precursor of the present-day Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), and worked within it until it was banned by the constitutional court in 1993.

In 1991, 22 HEP members were elected to parliament from the eastern and south-eastern provinces as part of the Social Democratic Populist Party (SHP) election list and in 1992 they formed their own independent group in the Grand National Assembly. However, when the intention of the constitutional court to close down the party became apparent, a ‘spare tyre’ - the Party of Democracy (DEP) - was formed.

That era ended with the expulsion of Kurdish members from parliament, and the banning of the DEP in 1994. Afterwards it was no longer a priority for the Kurdish freedom movement to work within a party of the Turkish left, whose aim was to contest parliamentary elections. The successive parties subsequently formed and banned focused on local elections in Kurdistan. Participating in general elections was not seen as a priority on the grounds of prohibitive thresholds.

In the 2007 general election, the Kurdish freedom movement, this time in the guise of the Democratic Society Party (DTP), joined with left organisations in nominating ‘independent’ candidates on a platform called Candidates of a Thousand Hopes. Enough were elected to ‘join’ the DTP and form a parliamentary group. During that time the idea of a more or less permanent umbrella party to organise joint action between the Kurdish freedom movement and the Turkish left, was considered. However, it did not come to fruition.

A platform called the Labour Democracy and Freedom Bloc was formed for the 2011 general election, resulting in the election of 36 MPs. And this time efforts to provide a permanent structure proceeded with more vigour. The HDK was the result of those efforts.

Programme

The HDK programme is quite a short document and the section entitled ‘Kurdish question: peace and democratic resolution’ sets out its stall on this central issue:

Our congress supports the right of every diverse identity to maintain itself, and accepts the basic principle that all of them have the right to exist within a law of equal and free citizenship. Our congress approaches the basic rights and liberties of the Kurdish population on the basis of that principle and defends and struggles for a peaceful, democratic solution of the Kurdish question, which has been condemned to irresolution since the establishment of the republic, on the basis of equal rights. It defends the right of forcibly displaced citizens to return to villages that were burnt down or demolished.

Our congress evaluates the resolution on democratic autonomy adapted by the Kurdish people as an important initiative towards the resolution of the Kurdish

question. It holds that democratic autonomy could play an important role in the democratisation of Turkey and the formation of a free and voluntary unity of peoples.

At first glance, the HDK programme as a whole does not appear connected to the demands set forth in the PKK programme. However, in reality, the HDK programme closely reflects the current immediate aims of the Kurdish freedom movement, especially its legal component, and those aims can be summarised in two words: ‘democratic autonomy’.

Since 2007 this new term started to appear in various ‘visit notes’ (that is, the near-verbatim transcripts of what imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan told his visiting solicitors, which were regularly published afterwards), as part of comrade Öcalan’s preparations for the PKK programme for ‘democratic confederalism’. It was not very clear in the beginning what ‘democratic autonomy’ entailed. But it became an important aspect of DTP work, especially while it was preparing for the convention of the Democratic Society Congress (DTK).

It became a guiding principle of the DTP, DTK and later the BDP, and various documents were prepared to expound the concept as a response to the 2009 ‘Kurdish overture’ of the AKP government. When it became apparent that the AKP’s eagerness for reform was ebbing, the DTK ‘declared’ democratic autonomy in July 2011. But in the midst of the wave of arrests and trials of prominent Kurdish activists the declaration failed to achieve much.

Although in the space of five years ‘democratic autonomy’ has been modified and extended, the concept itself is still to be clarified. For a while it was regarded as a component of the PKK’s ‘democratic confederalism’, which applies to all peoples of the region, but later it came to be used in support of a Kurdish federal or autonomous region/state. However, a gradual expounding of the ‘democratic autonomy’ concept as the main immediate aim of the Kurdish freedom movement is now discernible. It is the demand that would be put on the table in negotiations for a peaceful resolution of the Kurdish question following a mutually agreed ceasefire with the Turkish government.

Democratic autonomy

The July 2011 meeting of the DTK agreed the following:

[Democratic autonomy] requires a substantial reform of the political and administrative structure of Turkey in order to achieve democratisation.

Accepting that by changing only the state system problems cannot be resolved, it requires the empowerment of society. It is based on the philosophy that in order to develop methods to resolve problems the local should be empowered and the people should have a decision-making voice.

To include people in decision-making processes it defends democratic participation and accepts assemblies at all localities as its basis.

Instead of autonomy based on pure ‘ethnicity’ and ‘territory’, it defends a regional and local structure where cultural diversities can be freely expressed.

It proposes that every regional and autonomous unit develop its self-government under its own colours and symbols, while ‘the flag’ and ‘official language’ are applicable to the ‘nation of Turkey’.

Democratic autonomous administrations are organised through a ‘regional assembly’ and the persons taking part in it are defined

as ‘representatives to the regional government’.

A document was prepared by comrade Öcalan in 2009 to lay the basis of the so-called Oslo process - the secret negotiations conducted between the representatives of the PKK and the Turkish MIT intelligence service, representing the prime minister. The so-called ‘road map’, entitled ‘The problems of democratisation of Turkey, models of the solution in Kurdistan’, was kept secret by the state until March 2011. While the text did not contain any direct reference to ‘democratic autonomy’, the demands were clearly in line with other documents expounding the concept.

Kurdish freedom movement leaders have stated that democratic autonomy accepts as a first step the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, which was adopted by the Council of Europe in 1985. On the other hand, there are documents containing detailed references to an independent or autonomous federal state enjoying diplomatic relations with other peoples in the region.

Confusion

The HDK has not attempted to clarify the ambiguities of the ‘democratic autonomy’ project. I believe this failure reflects the sad state of Turkey’s left generally, since it fails to seriously address matters of controversy with a view to dispelling any confusion, which also exists in the disproportionately powerful Kurdish movement. The result is that the confusion is compounded.

In May this year, the HDK adopted a series of resolutions. One of them was entitled ‘The Kurdish question and a democratic solution’:

The impasse over the Kurdish question continues. A quite comprehensive agreement has been reached by the supreme command of the armed forces and the AKP on the basis of ‘security’ [a euphemism for the crushing of the PKK by the military]. This new view of the Kurdish question is being shaped by the prominence of security and total war. The AKP government reiterates at every opportunity that it will proceed with violence instead of taking steps towards democratisation and the resolution of the Kurdish question; it refuses the comprehensive demands of Kurdish people, such as equality, education in the mother tongue and recognition of a status such as democratic autonomy. The ongoing isolation imposed on Öcalan, the Kurdish popular leader, and the inhumane treatment of the detainees in the prisons are other signs of that view.

Considering these developments, the first general meeting of the HDK directs the general assembly to pursue campaigns and actions demanding the termination of fighting and the implementation of mechanisms for a democratic resolution, aiming for the resumption of direct or indirect negotiations.

In this way the HDK plays down the problems faced by the movement - and right in the middle of an intensified military campaign. During the summer hundreds of guerrillas and military personnel, as well as civilians, were killed, and the attacks have been stepped up before the quickly approaching winter lull.

The HDK tries to make people believe that campaigns and activities aimed at stopping the fighting and creating an atmosphere of negotiations have a chance, knowing full well that the previous secret negotiations and ceasefires came to nothing. The HDK general meeting refused to even consider alternative proposals ●

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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**Police lying is
ingrained and
institutional**

Handling the truth

Establishment *mea culpas* over Hillsborough have shocked many - but there are more skeletons in the closet, writes **Paul Demarty**

Last week saw more references to 'the truth' than an *X-files* marathon - the occasion being the publication of the Hillsborough Independent Panel's report.

Twenty-three years after the disaster, which saw 96 Liverpool fans die at Sheffield Wednesday's Hillsborough stadium, a serious and thorough examination of what actually happened has been published - and it proved to be sensational. The official imprimatur was put on an account already widely believed: on April 15 1989, a staggering display of police incompetence resulted in horrific loss of life; and by April 16, a cynical and malicious cover-up was already set in train.

The most infamous result was *The Sun* front page, which saw it all but banished from Merseyside in the following years, and gave us last week's catchphrase: "*The truth*", ran the headline, above a bulleted list of outright lies, planted by police. *The Sun* was symbolic - the more disturbing side of the story was the systematic doctoring of witness statements in order to show the police in a more favourable light: 164 statements from individual officers were altered; 116 of the alterations directly covered up police incompetence. Re-examination of the medical evidence suggested that nearly half of the deaths could have been prevented, had the police not been obstructive and the ambulance service indifferent.

The air was filled with apologies. *The Sun* issued another front page - "*The real truth*" - which explicitly repudiated its previous one. Editor Dominic Mohan and then-editor Kelvin MacKenzie were fulsome in their apologies, as were various brass from South Yorkshire police. David Cameron, reporting the findings to parliament, did so unsparingly - to theatrical gasps of shock from the benches.

When such a cross-section of the great, the good and *The Sun* line up to prostrate themselves, one cannot suppress a twinge of suspicion as to their motives. In the case of *The Sun*, the hypocrisy displayed last week is astounding. Its *particular* account of events in that notorious issue has been proven, again and again, to be false over the last two decades. Indeed, even at the time, no other paper ran with it (apart, in a diluted form, from the *Daily Express* - which did not even carry the recent report on its front page, yet another scare story about thieving migrants being deemed too important).

Yet *The Sun* has *only* retracted parts of its story as and when the cynical imperatives of business have supervened. When the Scouse striker Wayne Rooney was secured to serialise his autobiography, some kind of public contrition was politically necessary, and so was mysteriously forthcoming in an editorial. Such is the value system of the tabloid press:

Rooney matters - Liverpool does not.

MacKenzie, in particular, has an odious record on this point. He apologised in 1993, blaming Irvine Patnick, then Tory MP for Sheffield Hallam, for misleading him. In 2006, he *repudiated* the apology, claiming Rupert Murdoch had ordered him to make it. Now that it is his word against the prime minister, the courts and the greatest share of public opinion, the line has changed once again - and again the blame is offloaded onto Patnick and the police, who misled the poor, naive MacKenzie into running the story. Pull the other one, Kelvin.

Police lies

The police, likewise, have waited until they are caught bang to rights to start apologising. Now that the possibility of denying culpability for the calamity has utterly evaporated, certain reputations are in tatters - but if you have nothing to lose, words are cheap. Some heads will probably roll - given all that has come out, the original inquest verdict of accidental death is simply unsustainable, and at some point will have to be revised. That in turn will demand prosecutions.

It is this fact which puts the real nature of these people on display. Scratch the surface of a penitent Yorkshire chief constable, and watch him blame his lawyers for the appalling cover-up. Watch the lawyers blame the police. It is like the headiest days of the phone-hacking scandal all over again - this time, however, it is not unscrupulous journalism, but an appalling and avoidable human tragedy at the centre of it.

More generally, it has to be said that police incompetence did not end with the disaster itself. This was a botched cover-up from the very beginning. By the time hundreds of witness statements are being tampered with, the thing is already

out of control. The police have been



Twenty-three years too late

nailed on Hillsborough under the same conditions that obtain when they are nailed on anything: *they could not possibly have been allowed to get away with it*. No carpet is large enough for 96 corpses and 164 perversions of the course of justice to be brushed under it.

Compare Ian Tomlinson, the unlucky passer-by shoved to what proved to be his death by PC Simon Harwood at G20 protests in 2009. Harwood has been given the sack (he gets to keep his pension). Never mind that any plausible interpretation of the word 'manslaughter' has to include what he did; never mind, more importantly, that it was senior Met officers who *chose* to police the protests in such a way that, one day or another, a fatal accident was inevitable.

For that matter, compare Jean Charles de Menezes, shot dead by armed police in Stockwell tube station, and the torrent of abject lies about his 'suspicious' behaviour that followed the incident (his crime -

looking a bit Asian). Or Mohammed Abdul Kahar, infamously shot during a police raid in 2006 on bogus anti-terrorism 'evidence' (after which he was smeared as a paedophile by *The Sun*).

Hillsborough is remarkable mainly because it gives us an insight into the sort of cynical back-covering exercises that the police routinely get away with, with the direct collusion of the press. No doubt some of the techniques of deception are more sophisticated today than in 1989; apart from that, the idea (floating around widely) that Hillsborough happened in a very different past is utterly risible.

Governing football

Cameron and the Tories might be seen to get out of all this clean. It is worth noting, however, that, according to the report, the Thatcher government was more interested in marshalling Hillsborough as supporting evidence for its plans in relation to football than probing too deeply into the events themselves.

Some background is necessary here: as the 1980s drew on, concerns grew in the establishment about the culture surrounding football. Violence among fans gained an increased media profile; fans started to be viewed as a semi-lumpen mob, to whom the correct attitude was one of deep suspicion. It was this attitude that put the steel cages around terraces, against which the Hillsborough victims were crushed; and also that formed the approach of the police on the fateful day. (Inasmuch as violence among working class fans was a real phenomenon, it surely stems from the devastating class offensive against them in that decade, which left many communities in ruins.)

The slandering of Liverpool fans as drunken, thieving yobs in *The Sun* was the logical outcome; but so was the

progressive reshaping of football as a cultural institution that has taken place in the last 20 years. The terraces have been supplanted by all-seater stadia; the First Division gave way to the Premiership, and working class fans find themselves more and more unable to afford the absurd ticket prices in the top flight.

Football has been gentrified; and the residual mass plebeian culture attached to it is a source of embarrassment to its authorities. Now that the middle classes (Roy Keane's prawn sandwich brigade) and the moneyed elite turn up in significant enough numbers, stadia have been made safe for human use; but what goes on inside them is ever more micro-managed.

A sane society would never have allowed football grounds to become so decrepit; or herded fans like cattle into cages, and obstructed their exit when things started to go wrong; or expected a riot rather than a desperate attempt to save lives on the part of fans. Equally, a sane society would not be so ready to believe the repugnant fabrications of South Yorkshire police and *The Sun*, that working class people were more concerned to rob than defend each other; or - today - see in boisterous and sometimes tasteless terrace banter a bubbling cauldron of violent hatred.

David Cameron, however, stands in defence of an *insane* society, in which those below necessarily appear as a threat - real or potential - to be managed, bullied and (in this case) left to die in mangled heaps. The icon for all today's Tories, Margaret Thatcher, vigorously pursued the destruction of working class communities, the context for the disaster. An inheritor to Thatcherism as slick as Cameron has no more right to voice the outrage of the Hillsborough families than Kelvin MacKenzie ●

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