



weekly
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**Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition:
why the ship won't sail**

- Kurdish angle
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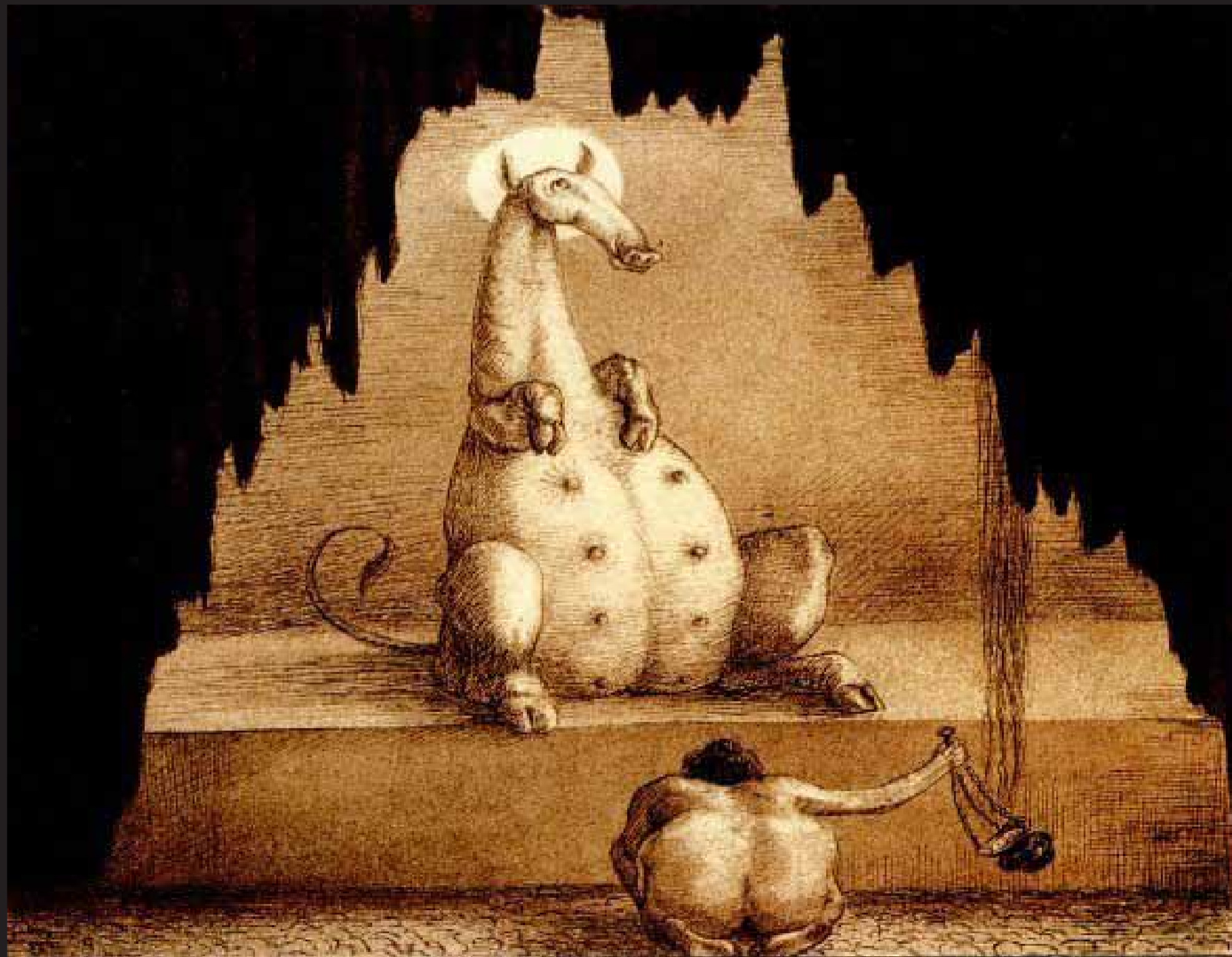
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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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Andrew Kliman on crisis, theory and politics



LETTERS



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

99% chance

The continual reiteration of the most reactionary ideas about rape by writers who should know better is depressing. Recent contributors to your letters page have openly stated that they are not particularly worried by rape allegations against Assange because he is an anti-imperialist and good looking. Laughable.

I had expected the readership of a serious left publication might trouble themselves to do a little bit of research on a subject before pronouncing their political opinion on it. We are instead treated to some classic rape apologetics (it wasn't real rape, she did/said/wore, she did not want to prosecute, she delayed reporting, etc) and encouraged to believe that feminism is a branch of imperialism. That Cherie Booth justified the Afghanistan war by reference to women's liberation is irrelevant; she also justified the Iraq war by reference to democracy. Guess what? She lied.

The comrades seem unclear on a number of points. It is instructive to examine the historic development of law on rape from its origin in the defence of patriarchal property rights over women's reproductive capacity. Law derived from the *Old testament* formed the basis of legislation until, in the 12th century, we find the following: "She must go at once and while the deed is newly done, with the hue and cry, to the neighbouring townships and there show the injury done her to men of good repute, the blood and her clothing stained with blood, and her torn garments."

These requirements were made because the woman was not considered to be defending her own physical safety or sexuality; she is responsible for the security of her father's or husband's property - guaranteed exclusive access to her vagina. Injury sustained in defence of this valuable commodity was collateral damage, necessary to demonstrate the truth of her allegation. It seems many on the left regard this as a reasonable expectation of a woman's reaction to 'real' rape. Perpetuating a mediaeval view of sexual violence

cannot possibly be progressive.

The writings of Sir Mathew Hale around 1700 set the tone for the next few centuries - the customary hand-wringing is immediately qualified by the assertion that women lie about being raped. "It is true rape is a most detestable crime, and therefore ought severely and impartially to be punished with death; but it must be remembered that it is an accusation easily to be made and hard to be proved, and harder to be defended by the party accused, though never so innocent." This provides the habitual refrain which is repeated to this day as a 'common sense' approach; as with most appeals to 'common sense', it is actually deeply reactionary because it relies on dominant ideology. And dominant ideology is the ideology of the ruling class. So who benefits from the constant reiteration of these ideas?

Recent developments in some countries, including Sweden and Britain, have seen the law changed to one which attempts to deal more realistically with a situation where one in four women are sexually abused, 80% by men known to them, where the average rapist has attacked six people and where less than 1% of rapes result in conviction.

I had imagined that a commitment to materialism, scientific method and so on might extend to an evidence-based approach, reliance on statistics, surveys, etc, in this case. I am therefore surprised to see the determined avoidance and ignorance of any such research by recent contributors to this paper which rely on a series of myths: for example, the idea that one instance of consent provides a 'season ticket' of continued consent to any sexual activity which may occur. It doesn't; women don't sign a contract when they agree to have sex with somebody. They are allowed to change their mind. The definition of rape is penetration without a reasonable belief of consent. To believe that a person has consented to something while asleep is clearly unreasonable. To believe consent to unprotected penetration has been given when the person has explicitly refused is not reasonable. Only in rape is the victim's behaviour under closer examination than the perpetrator's.

Anonymous surveys show that only around 10%-15% of sexual assaults are reported. Of those,

the home office believes around 3% are false allegations, including mistaken identity and mentally ill complainants. Of the others, around 10% are prosecuted. Of those prosecutions, around 60% are convicted. These figures are similar in Sweden. Do you believe that the women disclosing their experience of sexual violence who do not see their attacker convicted (about 99%) are all lying? We hear a great deal about the various reasons why the women in the Assange case are lying. The evidence for this relies on their behaviour before and after the incident - this will be familiar from the mediaeval law quoted above. Continuing a sexual or social relationship with a man is not evidence of his innocence or guilt. It could just as easily be argued that domestic violence has not happened because the victim still lives with the perpetrator.

In spite of the extensive project of misinformation on this case in particular and rape and sexual violence generally, it remains true that if I say the women are telling the truth I have a 99% chance of being right. I might be wrong. But it's fairly good odds.

Heather Downs
Medway

Exaggerated?

Chris Knight's 'Early human kinship was matrilineal' (September 20) is a great article. But perhaps it exaggerates the degree to which no-one on the left has sought to either defend or even inquire into the Engels/Morgan/Briffault theory.

In the 1970s, I read a massive and extraordinary book by US socialist Evelyn Reed, *Women's evolution*, which did just that in a very thorough way, a very updated way. You may still be able to get a copy from Pathfinder Press in New York, or it may even be available online through the Marxist Internet Archive.

Michael Karadjis
email

Game theory

I must admit that I had not paid much attention to anthropology in the past few years. I had sort of assumed that anthropologists were simply accumulating evidence proving that Lewis Morgan, Engels and Marx were right. I would never have thought the anthropologists had been frightened by anti-communism. It's as if Edwin Hubble had decided to ignore the evidence of the expansion of the universe because he thought it might prove something about dialectical materialism. The articles this month are, for me at least, very enlightening.

I wanted to comment on the transition from big-game mastodon hunting to domestication of cattle. If big game had been destroyed by over-hunting, then humans must have been forced to rely on smaller game, such as deer, buffalo and other ungulates. (Oddly enough, civilised 'hunters' today classify deer as big game.) Tens of thousands of years of this kind of hunting could easily have led to the occasional capture of young animals (along with the help of another small domesticated animal, the dog.) The smaller game would have been much easier to domesticate than the mastodon, which could explain why humans never domesticated elephants. This domestication led, according to my theory, to the development of cattle, the first form of capital and the beginning of the destruction of patriarchy. Anyway, just a theory.

Allan Harris
email

Keep it clean

Climate change is as natural as the planet. Neither it, nor we, nor anything on the planet would exist were it not

for climate change. You cannot 'stop' climate change any more than you can stop time because you happen to like a particular hour of the day which suits your mood and inclinations.

Neither can we stop climate change at the particular juncture we happen to find best suits us, like the girl in the three bears fairy story - a climate mix which is not too hot and not too cold, but just right. I'm not a flat-earther, but neither do I believe god made the planet just for us, and made it to always be at the maximum utility setting for our species. The planet has continually heated up and cooled down for reasons which are well known and nothing to do with our presence or absence from it. At various times, human beings have been driven from parts of the earth by perfectly natural changes in climate - especially ice ages and rising seas, volcanoes, glaciers, tidal waves, drought, etc.

Gabriel Levy says such arguments are irrelevant, since change is taking place at a faster pace than at any other time during human history ('Natural limits, sustainability and socialism', September 20). Well, given the length of time between major climate changes and the relatively brief period of widespread human habitation of the planet, that's not really saying a lot.

I am not arguing that human activity has not contributed to climate change. What I argue is that climate change goes with the planet. We didn't invent it. It is there with or without us. This is a 'natural' process. Human beings do not infest the planet; we are not an alien life force here. What we do is *part* of the natural process; this includes our contribution to global warming. That is not to say we planned this, or thought it through as some mistaken plan. The failure to consider our actions as a species is due to the social evolution of capitalism and it's utterly unplanned and destructive *modus operandi*. That is *not* a necessary part of human existence and is something we can do something about, but let's keep our feet on the ground: our very existence as a dominant and advanced species was bound to impact on our environment, as have all other species which became dominant. Ninety percent of all species which have ever existed are already extinct, the overwhelming majority of which were extinct before we crawled from the caves.

We need to keep debate in context and not be led off into some mystical, anthropomorphic nonsense. We can minimise our contribution to global warming, and we should, but if anyone thinks this will be anything but a temporary and marginal measure on the natural cycle of hot and cold planet, our orbit's ellipse around the sun, the variant temperature of the sun and a thousand and one non-human influences, they are delusional.

The worst thing about the climate debate and 'green zealots' is that they see human industrial endeavour as the enemy. This leads them into conflict with the demands of the third world for basic human progress, electricity, decent housing and high standards of water, sanitation, food, medicine and healthcare. These things are driven - like those in the west were - by heavy industry, coal, steel, power, goods and real demand, as well as artificial demand. In the west too, attempts to close down coal power confronts power workers, railway workers and miners, who have entirely different agendas from the well-heeled middle class environmentalists who come to blockade them and close them down.

If you're part of the climate camp, which has made coal public enemy number one, you're going to have some pain convincing the Spanish

miners, for example, fighting like fury for the retention of the coal industry, or Sardinian miners fighting for their mine, that you support them. Or if you had had that programme during the great miners' communities and union movement between 1983 and 1993. How could you support them if you agreed that coal mines should be closed down? The debate must be set in the context of political class struggle, control by the masses of the planet and of the whole agenda of human existence, wealth and power, as well as simply what fuels are burnt.

I would also take issue with the idea that coal-burning is the major factor influencing man-made global warming gases. Is coal-burning the major source of the global-warming gases? As far as we can see, methane is a far worse greenhouse gas than CO₂; it is one of the worst, if not *the* worst, source of greenhouse impacts. Miners do not produce this on any scale, although it is a by-product of coal mining, but mass and widespread global meat production does. Farming of mass herds of cattle, pigs, sheep, etc is at least on a par with coal-burning for the damage it does. How come? Billions of animals produce billions of cubic feet of methane from their backsides, as do multi-million tonnes of annually produced manure and silage.

Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, is the ongoing destruction of the earth's forests, mostly to make way for the animals and to make land to farm them. The destruction of the rain forests and areas of dense vegetation in ancient woods and tundra is producing a spiral of desertification and killing the lungs of the planet, taking away the ability of the earth to change the CO₂ into oxygen and maintain a balance of breathable air. The Brazilian authorities record destruction of the rain forest between August 2010 and July 2011 at 2,420 square miles, a size equivalent to the US state of Delaware, and this is only one part of the never-ending elimination of the earth's dense forests. The single most important factor in the whole 'global warming' process is this feature - destruction of forests, desertification, animal meat production. We have yet to see anything like the clamour directed at this as is directed at coal mining. Odd when you consider that replanting the woodlands and stopping the ongoing destruction could be achieved in a very brief period if the will was there.

Next is transport - private cars, planes; not simply their emissions, but also the road-building devastation which accompanies them. These too eat up the oxygen-producing vegetation of countryside and woodlands. Could this be addressed by a return to public transport, mass transit rail systems fuelled on clean power? The by-product of the clean-coal hydrogenisation process is hydrogen - an inert gas which can be used to fuel mass public transit systems without pollution. Again it requires only the will.

Finally, yes, there is coal - not so much coal production, but the unrestricted burning of coal up the chimneys of mass polluting power stations. We, as miners' unions, have fought against this waste of our labour and fuel for a century. Clean-coal power is possible. The development of these systems focus at present on carbon capture and storage (CCS) plants, but the government, for entirely political reasons, has chosen not to finance them and pulled the rug on every scheme we had. The exception is the Hatfield scheme, which is now duel coal/gas and CCS linked to oil extraction, without which the scheme would have folded.

The point I've made time and again

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is that coal will be burned worldwide. How it is burned is the most telling question on coal's impact on global warming. Seven million Chinese coal miners and hundreds of millions of Chinese who depend on their labour and extract are not going to stop their development or walk away from hundreds of years of fuel beneath their feet. I also disagree that coal is getting harder to extract - it isn't. As a matter of fact, it's becoming easier, as companies are given their head to extract coal in the most destructive open-cast quarries rather than through deep mines. Half of all coal in Britain is now open-casted.

Oil and gas are running out far faster than coal, both of which can be extracted from coal. There is no question that we should use the fuels available to us. They shouldn't be wasted; they should be used in the most environmentally friendly way possible, but they will be used. How they are used is linked to the question of class power as a whole, and that question will only be answered in conjunction with the proletarians who produce the fuel and consume the fuel. At some very distant point in the future many centuries ahead, perhaps with undersea mining techniques, coal will run out. Hopefully, we will have properly mastered solar energy - or that massive, untapped boiler in the centre of the earth with enough power capacity to fuel all our needs for eternity.

David Douglass
NUM

Surfeit

Gabriel Levy states that "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".

No, really, there is not. Far from there being a scarcity of land, there is a surfeit of it, since across the world - most pointedly in the United States and the European Union - government policy on farms has been to retire land from farming for at least the last 30 years. Those policies can and should be put into reverse to meet growing demand. Currently, only a 10th of the world's land is given over to arable farming. There has been a strong rise in yields per acre, and per farm labourer, for the last 50 years. The rise in fuel prices cited is similarly an effect not of natural limits, but of social limits, the shortfall being down to the rate oil is drilled relative to demand, not an exhaustion of oil reserves.

James Heartfield
London

Taxing

From a debt-averse and budgetary perspective, one could call the levying of a special tax on some combination of windfall profits, operating profits and financial assets a fiscally 'responsible' or 'conservative' socialism of sorts. Then another combination of cash proceeds and tax credits could be disbursed, in a compulsory purchase or eminent domain manner, to take the relevant ownership stakes into permanent public ownership.

This policy should be considered for the CPGB's *Draft programme*. At a crude level, it can be implemented by bourgeois states requiring renationalisation of, for example, natural monopolies that were privatised. For left unity purposes, those talking the talk about "whatever has been privatised, let it be renationalised" (to quote Chávez), acceptance or rejection of this pretty much defines the sincerity, or lack thereof, of what they're saying. A number of things have been privatised, and there may be a consensus to take them back into public hands.

However, the only other bourgeois

alternative is debt financing, and we all know what has happened time and again with debt financing agreements for nationalisations (interest payments better used for nationalised operations, social expenditures, etc).

Jacob Richter
email

Stupid friends

In November, 8,000 workers who do weekends and/or shifts at Birmingham city council are due to get a massive pay cut with the abolition of weekend money, shift pay and other allowances. Actually, this is a result of the disputed contract forced on us in November 2011 by the then Tory-Lib coalition. The 'Martini contract' is what Unison called it, as it brings in flexibility within grades, as well as in hours and workplaces.

For me, as a full-time, 'any five from seven' care assistant doing lates and earlies, as well as unsocial hours, it is a 24% pay cut. This is on top of more generalised attacks upon council workers led by national government/employers and specific attacks on the workforce via things like a new sickness policy that has led to a number of dismissals of sick workers and the hated 'performance development review' bollocks that leads to pay cuts if you don't clean enough shit - according to your line manager.

Some heroic workers have resisted this PDR (introduced after the imposition of a disputed contract in 2008), but the union bureaucrats have stamped on this - mainly alienating those workers attempting to resist the big business plans of our employers, the city council. The local union bureaucrats, who run the branch without any participation at all by the members, are like another layer of

management.

The second and main point is the desperate need for independent organisation of the working class: that means, of course, independent of the gaffers, but also of the bureaucracy of the workers' movement. How this is going to happen, and what kind of vehicle we'll need in order to move forward and advance demands for improvement of council services, as well as of our jobs, seems to be a real problem.

I was at the founding and some other conferences of the National Shop Stewards Network and heard directly about the 'split'/walkout: the fact that NSSN is like a front for the Socialist Party, who flooded that 'walkout' conference with enough comrades to form a clear majority, as well as their lick-spittle attitude towards the 'left' bureaucracy, means that establishing NSSN in Birmingham has been a non-starter - there have been at least two or three failed attempts.

The Grassroots Left is no better - there has been one 'Midlands GRL' meeting in Birmingham, but the whole thing seems to be controlled by the headers of the Campaign Against Euro-Federalism: ex-Marxists/Stalinists who see the British bourgeoisie as their mates in the struggle against Brussels. They and their stupid friends from groups like the International Socialist Group (or whatever they're called now) and Workers Power - they were part of that too and it boils down to a fundamental weakness *vis-à-vis* the capitalists and their agents in the workers' movement.

Since May 2012, Labour have resumed control of the city council and the closure programme continues, as does the impending massive pay cut.

Rajah Bagal
email

Fighting fund

Self-effacing

Comrade RG is at it again. That man is so modest and self-effacing that, whenever he pops a cheque for the fighting fund in the post, he doesn't even bother with a covering note. So I'm *assuming* the £50 he sent is for the fighting fund. But if past form is anything to go by ...

Seriously though, whether the cheque is accompanied by flowery prose, a few curt words or nothing at all, the main thing is that we keep receiving such generous contributions. And RG's was one of three cheques received over the last seven days - thanks also to KT (£20) and RT (£25).

September's fund was also boosted by a number of standing orders totalling £268, so thanks go out to SK, SP, DO and GD too. Then there were two gifts received via our online PayPal facility - from GR (£20) and DL (£5). But, because of a technical glitch, I can't tell you how many other internet readers we had last week. All I can say is that, if recent weeks are anything to go by, there were probably between 10,000 and 12,000 of you.

By the way, lots of subscribers have commented upon the unusual stamps affixed to the envelope carrying the *Weekly Worker*. Make the most of it, because we will shortly be going over to an online account with 'printed postage impressions'. Not so quirkily attractive, but a little bit cheaper.

For those who are interested, those decades-old stamps for peculiar denominations were

supplied to us at a discounted price. Originally they were special issues bought up in bulk in the hope that one day they would fetch a fortune as collectors' items. But, when there turned out to be no takers for them, they ended up being sold at a loss and auctioned off. Which is where we come in.

But Royal Mail's extortionate price rise this year was far greater than the discount we get on old stamps, so we have decided to go for the slight saving represented by officially printed labels.

Of course, overwhelmingly the *Weekly Worker* is read online, not in its printed form, so most of you won't know what I've been talking about - all this talk of old stamps! So just take it from me: we look at every way we can to save money, to ensure your paper is produced every week at the highest quality. But we wouldn't be able to survive without the £1,500 that we aim to raise every month through our fighting fund.

However, September's total stands at just £1,165 with only three days to go. So we need £365 by Monday at 12 noon. Please send your cheque or postal order first class as soon as you read this - or, better still, get out your credit card and transfer the cash via our website. Please make sure we reach that target.

Robbie Rix

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

ACTION

CPGB podcasts

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

London Communist Forum

Sunday September 30, 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 4, 'The general formula for capital'. Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesday October 2, 6.15pm: 'Werewolves, vampires and the moon'. 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.

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.

Defend London Met students

Friday September 28, 1pm: March to the home office from University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1. Let the international students stay.

Called by UCU, Unison and London Met Students Union: www.londonmetsu.org.uk.

Solidarity for Palestine

Friday September 28, 7pm: Activist fundraising meeting, D'Gaf, 11 Leytonstone Road, Stratford, London E15. £15 waged, £12 unwaged. Includes Palestinian-style meal. Tickets: 020 7700 6192.

Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.palestinecampaign.org.

EDL not welcome

Saturday September 29, 11am: Protest, assemble Gallery Square, in front of New Art Gallery, Walsall.

Organised by Unite Against Fascism: www.uaf.org.uk.

Five broken cameras

Saturday September 29, 8.15pm: Film showing, Filmhouse, Lothian Road, Edinburgh, EH3. Featuring a Palestinian village's fight for existence. Followed by Q&A.

Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.palestinecampaign.org.

For Labour democracy

Sunday September 30, 10.30am: Rally, Purity Bar, 36 Peter Street, Manchester M2. Entry £2.

Wednesday October 3, 6 pm: Campaign meeting. Purity Bar, 36 Peter Street, Manchester M2.

Organised by Campaign for Labour Party Democracy: www.clpd.org.uk.

Salford Against Cuts

Monday October 1, 7pm: Public meeting. Swinton Royal British Legion, Cheetham Road, Swinton.

Organised by Salford Against Cuts: www.facebook.com/salfordagaincuts.

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.

Bin Veolia for Palestine

Sunday October 7, 3pm: Anti-Veolia services meeting. Rooms 3-4, Birmingham Council House, Victoria Square, Birmingham, B3.

Speakers include Clare Short, Salma Yaqoob. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.palestinecampaign.org.

Down the drones

Monday October 8, 7pm: Talk, Margaret Fell room, Friends Meeting House, 173 Euston Road, London NW1. No more civilian casualties resulting from unmanned drones.

Organised by Drone Campaign Network: <http://dronecampaignnetwork.wordpress.com>.

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.

TUSC

Why the ship won't sail

Peter Manson reports on the misplaced efforts to talk up the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition

Just over 100 people attended the September 22 Trade Union and Socialist Coalition "conference" in London. As chair Dave Nellist remarked more than once, an estimated two-thirds of those in the room were members of the Socialist Party in England and Wales and I have no reason to argue with him. Four comrades from the Socialist Workers Party spoke either from the platform or the floor and it is likely that they were the only SWP members present. The only other political group represented seemed to be Socialist Resistance, and there were four officially designated "delegates" from the RMT union.

The lecture room at Birbeck College in London has a capacity of over 200 people, so presumably SPEW had not been able to mobilise quite as many people as it would have liked. Of course, there was a fine balancing act to be performed between giving the impression that Tusc is a vibrant, well supported body and ensuring that non-affiliated comrades are not swamped by SPEW. In the event only 30 or so non-SPEW members turned up - quite a disappointment for a body that claims to be a step towards a mass working class party.

However, to stress the key influence that Tusc is allegedly exerting, comrade Nellist reported in his opening remarks that not only the mover and seconder of the successful general strike motion at the TUC, but also the first speaker in support, were members of the Tusc steering committee: namely, Steve Gillan of the Prison Officers Association, Bob Crow of the RMT transport union and John McNally of the Public and Commercial Services Union. A pity that hardly anyone else at the TUC had even heard of Tusc, mind you.

Later on, Hannah Sell, SPEW deputy general secretary, reminded comrades that the original Labour Representation Committee leading to the formation of the Labour Party in 1900 had "about the same number" at its first meeting as were present in the room (although she did have the decency to admit that, unlike Tusc, those at the LRC gathering represented half a million workers).

Delusions aside, Tusc's biggest trump card is undoubtedly the RMT, which voted to continue to back the coalition at its 2012 annual general meeting, asserting that Tusc provides the "nucleus" of a "new political force that advances the ideas of trade unionism and socialism". But, although the AGM motion also agreed to "encourage RMT members to participate in the 2012 Tusc conference", none did so apart from the four delegates, as far as I could tell.

Addressing the meeting, RMT president Alex Gordon pointed out that railworkers' unions have always been central to moves towards working class political representation, including within the LRC. He said that the RMT is a "socialist union" committed in its constitution to the replacement of capitalism by a socialist system. While Tusc aims for a new mass working class party, it must "remain a federalist coalition, not a political party, at this stage". Short-term prospects for the formation of such a party were not good, said comrade Gordon: with Labour in opposition, that party is likely to benefit from the backlash against the government. But if after the next general election there should be a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition, Tusc's current work in preparing the ground would turn out to be "invaluable".

In reality, of course, it is another Con-Dem coalition that is much more likely to be on the cards - the Tories and Lib Dems are already drawing up plans for joint programmatic documents and a second term for the coalition. But this prospect of a coalition with Labour was also held up by SPEW comrades to back up their claim that Labour is now an out-and-out bourgeois party.

Comrade Gordon ended his platform speech in the first session - entitled 'Building working class political representation against the austerity consensus' - by warning that the RMT would not stay as the only union officially supporting Tusc "forever and a day". Comrades must "step up to the plate" and win similar support within their own unions. If not, "this ship won't sail".

Labour 'finished'

Tusc is founded on at least three misconceptions. First, the Labour Party is no longer any kind of working class body and cannot possibly be shifted to the left, let alone transformed into any kind of vehicle for working class advance. Secondly, what is therefore required is a Labour Party mark two, set up and founded by the unions, just like the original. Thirdly, the formation of such a Labourite party, not one based on Marxism, is the key task for all socialists.

On the first point, Rob Griffiths of the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain - also a platform speaker in the first session - suggested that maybe "you are unanimous here" that it is impossible to "reclaim" the Labour Party. Leaving aside the implication of the term "reclaim" - was the Labour Party ever really ours? - he was near enough right in his assessment.

For example, former Liverpool Militant councillor Tony Mulhearn declared: "There's no need to persuade anyone in this room that we need an alternative to the Labour Party." Hannah Sell, while conceding that it was better to fight to transform Labour than "hand over the money and say nothing", stated categorically that there was "no hope of success". Councillor Pete Smith of the Walsall-based Democratic Labour Party, who admitted that the DLP is "floundering" and "shrinking", said that he once "naively" believed that Labour could be a vehicle for socialism, but now he knew that it was "finished".

For his part, comrade

McNally, another SPEW member, said it represented a "bankrupt policy" to continue working within Labour - the "corporations and the ruling class will never hand back the Labour Party", he added rather absurdly. It is true that Labour acts in the *interest* of the "corporations and the ruling class" - it always has. But is it directly controlled by them? Is it theirs to "hand back"? Of course not. The unions have historically acquiesced - sometimes grudgingly - to rightwing inroads. They *voted* for Blairism and for the removal of any trace of democratic accountability by conference and so on.

But why is it considered impossible to re-establish previous democratic practices and even go further? Surely the key lies in those very unions whose bureaucratic leaders actually *prefer* a rightwing Labour Party, which they believe has a much greater chance of being elected and whose 'moderate' pro-capitalist policies for them represent an advance over the overtly anti-union agenda of the Tories. The irony is that SPEW calls on the unions to set up an alternative Labour Party and expects them to behave differently next time around.

By contrast to SPEW's simplistic 'Labour is finished' line, Rob Griffiths's arguments represented the height of sophistication. He put forward his standard proposition: Britain needs a "party of labour", a "federal party" to which left groups could affiliate - he named the CPB, SWP and SPEW. However, such a party "won't be built by any existing group or coalition of groups - even if they are supported by a union or two". It would have to include "most of the largest unions".

The "most direct route" to this party would come through "reclaiming Labour", although the "Communist Party is not full of optimism" about the prospects of doing so. But, while we can "express our reservations", he said, the key question is how to react to those who are attempting to "reclaim" Labour despite our doubts. There is, after all, "no sign" of any widespread support in the unions for breaking with Miliband's party. However, comrade Griffiths approvingly quoted Unite general secretary Len McCluskey, who has said that if there are "no significant gains"

within the party by the time of the next general election, then we ought to consider whether it was now a case of "re-establish" rather than "reclaim".

In response to this, Clive Heemskerck of SPEW pointed out correctly that it would not be surprising if McCluskey were to 'reassess' his position the other side of a general election. Perhaps there are signs of movement and we should give Labour another five years? But both sides of the argument are missing the central point: even if it really were impossible to win working class control over Labour, and even if the union bureaucracies really were to decide to break the link, the pressing need is for the rank and file to win control of their unions, to make the bureaucrats fight for our interests.

Electoral front

Unlike SPEW, the SWP sees Tusc as an electoral front of convenience pure and simple. SWP national secretary Charlie Kimber said that he did not think all the left groups in the room would "reach agreement by 5 o'clock", but we "can unite to stand in elections" and it was good to see the RMT backing the left in this.

This provoked a response from comrade Sell, who said it was not a question of the unions backing the left. No, she said, what was happening was that, on the contrary, Tusc was about "giving a voice to the unions". Hmm. Despite comrade Kimber's talk about the need to "build a credible alternative", the SWP is more realistic than to believe that an alternative 'mass workers' party' can be brought into being by Tusc. Nevertheless, while it is clearly more sanguine about Tusc's role, the SWP shares SPEW's hope of seeing the creation of a mass Labourite formation within which to operate and recruit. And - again like SPEW, of course - it does not believe it is possible or even desirable for those who say they are Marxists to come together in a single Marxist party.

This different view of Tusc's prospects results in diametrically opposite approaches to the 2013 local elections. Unlike SPEW and some non-aligned Tusc comrades, who are hoping for hundreds of Tusc candidates next year (a figure of 385 was mentioned in order to qualify for an election broadcast), comrade Kimber thought we should "focus on those areas where we can get good results or even win".

Dave Nellist, by contrast, gave us the example of the Green Party, where "one in three members put themselves forward as candidates - that's what we have to aim for".

Comrade Nellist said that Tusc believed in "inclusivity" - the steering committee has only ever turned down two people wishing to stand under the Tusc umbrella (and only because their application had been received too late to investigate possible local opposition to it, he said). This is untrue. In January 2010 the CPGB offered to stand its own Tusc general election candidates, but we were told that this was impossible because we lacked "social weight" (unlike SPEW obviously). Later on during the meeting Clive Heemskerck of SPEW repeated the statement that



Toytown Labourism

was supposed to apply in 2010 - any group may contest under the Tusc name, with the right to put forward its own policies before the electorate, provided it agrees to stand on the Tusc platform.

But there is an obvious problem with all this. What is the point of standing hundreds of candidates in elections under the Tusc name, only for that name to disappear from sight immediately afterwards? Even if we assume that it is possible for a Labour Party mark two to arise through Tusc's efforts, how could it happen if the coalition only resurfaces come election time?

Comrades from the Tusc Independent Socialist Network (ISN) were not slow to point this out. Nick Wrack suggested that, for example, there could be a specifically Tusc leaflet drawn up for the TUC's big demonstration on October 20 - there should be "permanent activity" under the name of the organisation standing in elections, not just its components. Will McMahon encouraged us to imagine a hall filled with "10 times more people", all clamouring for a replacement Labour Party. To that end Tusc should be campaigning to "set up branches across the country", to make it "real and national". If Tusc set its sights on becoming a party, it could "transform British left politics". We need the working class to "come in and take this network over".

As a concession to such comrades, comrade Sell said that "Tusc must be part of all struggles". Another SPEW comrade said that we must "raise boldly the policies of Tusc between elections". Comrade Sell also made her usual complaint about the lack of media coverage. That is why next year it would be essential to get "enough local election candidates to get a broadcast", she said.

Earlier comrade Griffiths took up an unintentionally amusing left pose, when he pretended to be concerned about SPEW and the SWP "putting too many resources into elections". While it was "valuable", he said, that groups like Tusc and the CPB did contest elections, the latter, which has often been accused of supporting a "so-called parliamentary road to socialism", gave much greater priority to "extra-parliamentary activity".

Frustration

The final session, on Tusc's structure, saw a good deal of frustration on display from the non-SPEW minority. First there was Alan Thornett of Socialist Resistance, who said that SR had been "trying to join for two years". What he meant by this was that the SWP, SPEW, ISN and RMT are automatically represented on the steering committee, where all the decisions are taken, and SR wants a bit of the action too.

When he tried to raise a point of order, he was told by comrade Nellist: "Under what constitution? This isn't a conference." No, he was right - it was not a conference (the nearest thing to a vote came when Dave asked us if we agreed that good wishes should be sent from the gathering to a comrade who was ill). But that had not stopped the Tusc steering committee advertising the event as "Tusc conference 2012". In fact "Tusc conference" was printed on the cards handed out to all attendees.

Comrade Thornett wanted his proposal that SR should be represented on the steering committee put to an "indicative vote". But comrade Nellist had another argument against that one. Since, as he repeatedly stressed, SPEW comrades accounted for around two-thirds of the 104 officially registered participants, people would only say that it was all a fix if votes were allowed, as every decision would surely go the way SPEW wanted. Better not to have any votes then, so the 'fix' could take place behind the

scenes!

He also pointed out that the opinion of the RMT, which had sent four delegates, would count for nothing if decisions were to be taken by the votes of 100 individuals. This point was emphasised by one of those RMT comrades, who said: "I'm a delegate, but anyone can pay their £5 and walk in the door. We do want votes, but we're not ready for that yet."

Although according to Clive Heemskerk Tusc enjoys the "best trade union support" compared to previous left fronts, he said "we need a greater level of trade union ownership". But closely connected to this aim was, of course, the need to restrict democracy. Comrade Heemskerk pointed out that 'one member, one vote' was "used by the Labour Party to diminish union influence". In order to avoid that what was needed was a "federal, consensus approach" - definitely not 'one member, one vote'. Mark Thomas of the SWP agreed that a "consensus approach" was necessary. Yes, he recognised that this often involved compromise and even a "veto", but at this stage "it has to be".

In response Dave Church of the DLP declared that he was so frustrated that he was on the verge of abandoning Tusc. He had been hoping to belong to a national party ever since he was excluded from Labour 16 years ago, but he always hears the same response: it is too soon to set up a party. He continued: "I pay £25 a month to Tusc, but I get no vote." Yes, he continued, we can stand as a candidate on the Tusc platform, but we had no part in drawing it up, and the steering committee can change the platform at any time. But at least Tusc meets - unlike that other SPEW front, the Campaign for a New Workers' Party, which comrade Church had heard has been "put on the back burner".

In the CNWP comrades like himself were finally given what they had been demanding from the beginning: an individual membership structure - only for the CNWP to be wound down immediately after. And now they are back to square one with Tusc. Comrade Church did not specify the amount of his monthly standing order to the CNWP, but the money is being put to good use: comrade Nellist announced that, in accordance with the 'pooled fare' system, comrades spending more than £10 on travel would have their journey subsidised thanks to a CNWP donation.

Comrade Thornett said that the vote was "the nub of the issue". But he did not appear to be referring to the right of the whole membership to vote. He said: "The SP, SWP and ISN are all on the steering committee with a vote, but now the ladder's been pulled up." SR had "applied and reapplied to join", but the reason given for the rejection was that allowing more groups onto the steering committee would "dilute trade union influence". He thought that nobody would join Tusc unless it had a membership structure - a sentiment echoed by comrade Church.

Nick Wrack was largely in agreement with the steering committee approach, however. He thought that Tusc was an "absolutely fantastic step forward", but you "have to acknowledge" the RMT point of view if it says, "This is as far as we're prepared to go". Nevertheless, he, like other ISN comrades, wanted SR accepted as an affiliate "and other organisations considered". He thought that "at some stage" there would have to be a discussion on membership - "thousands would join if we opened our door".

But Dave Griffiths of SPEW did not want more affiliates on the steering committee. It would be "wrong" if the RMT sends two delegates and a new affiliate with "a few dozen members"

can do so too. And how big is SR? Don't forget, if it were allowed on board, it would set a precedent for other small groups. In similar vein, comrade Heemskerk repeated the words of an unnamed trade unionist on the steering committee: "Who are Socialist Resistance anyway?" Although, if it was any comfort to SR, comrade Nellist assured the meeting that comrade Thornett *et al* will be invited to put their case before a future meeting of the steering committee.

However, comrade Thomas of the SWP was not very interested in any of this controversy. "Of course," he said, "internal structures can play a role, but an electoral breakthrough is the most important." For his part, Pete McLaren, like comrade Wrack, was playing the conciliator: the main thing was to build Tusc today and we can consider "bottom-up democracy" later.

Worst aspects

It is clear that the SPEW comrades have argued themselves into a corner. Having persuaded themselves that Labour is dead as a site for struggle, they imagine that they can play a key role in creating a replacement.

Yet their version two, even in its current minuscule form, is already taking on the worst aspects of version one. Everything must depend on the union bureaucracy - in this case the left bureaucracy, in the shape of the RMT - and so annoying little practices like taking democratic decisions will just have to be put on hold until such a time as the bureaucracy can be guaranteed to get its way thanks to the block vote.

But not even Bob Crow and the RMT seriously think they will get a Labour Party mark two through something like Tusc. If the left union bureaucrats really were set on establishing a new political party, they would do it for themselves. And they would put in place measures to make sure the left groups were marginalised - if those groups were tolerated at all (witness Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party).

However, none of the unions are about to embark upon such a venture. And why should they do so, when they have a much easier option, should they be inclined to take it up - working together to force the Labour leadership to answer to their paymasters? No doubt if they mounted a real battle inside Labour, they would be met by all kinds of resistance, opposition and dirty tricks - and eventually there would be a split. But it is plain foolish to argue that such a battle would be hopeless, or that there are no remaining avenues within which to fight it.

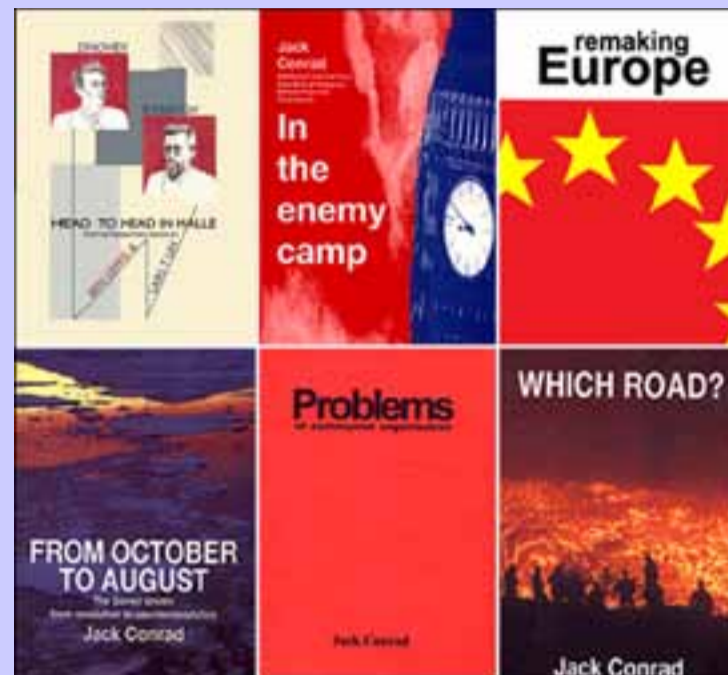
But that battle will not even begin unless a struggle is first undertaken within the unions themselves. The aim must be to transform them into democratic, fighting bodies accountable to their members. Once we make headway in that struggle, there will be real prospects of achieving what has not yet been won in Britain - a federal party of the working class from which the overt pro-capitalist elements are excluded.

Does that mean that the main task of the far left is to create such a party? Of course not. Our first task is to organise *ourselves*. It is all very well forming an electoral alliance, but why not come together more permanently on the basis of our own professed politics - the politics of Marxism? Instead of pretending that we can conjure up a mass Labourite formation, SWP, SPEW, ISN, SR and the rest ought to set themselves the much more realistic aim of creating a single Marxist party.

Now that is something we could do that would really make a difference ●

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INTERVIEW

Crisis, theory and politics

Nick Rogers interviews¹ **Andrew Kliman**, New York-based Marxist economist and author of *The failure of capitalist production*

It is four years since the financial crash of September 2008 and five years since the beginning of the credit crunch. Are you surprised at how long the economic crisis has lasted? Do you foresee it coming to an end any time soon?

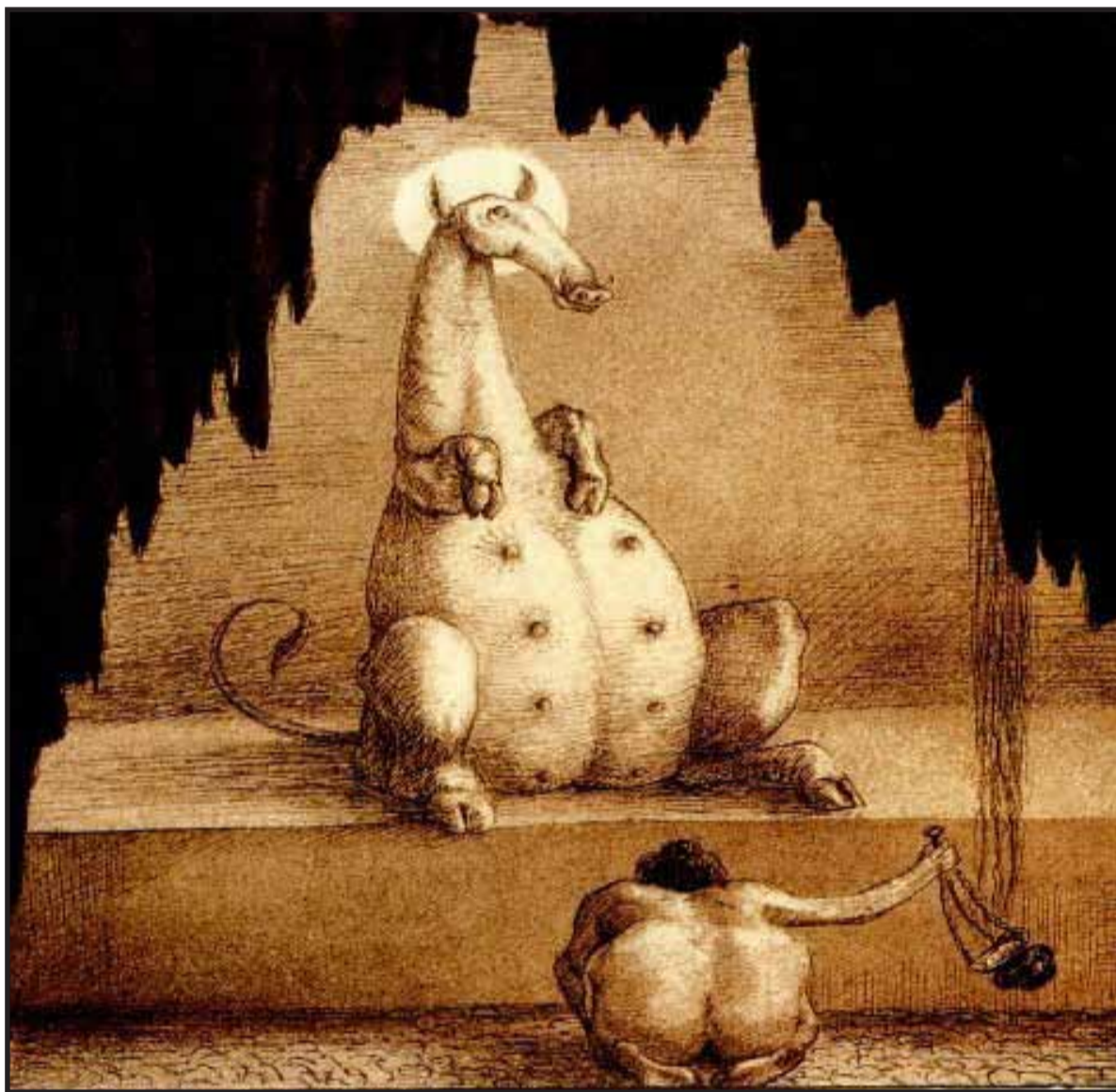
I'm not surprised. It's been apparent since the financial markets went into a panic in September 2008 that the Great Recession wouldn't be your usual business-cycle downturn. Once capitalists become gripped with such fear, you have a qualitatively different situation. They look harder at the underlying conditions that affect the future, and they base their actions on these conditions much more than before. There are serious underlying economic problems that haven't been resolved. They will hinder a sharp rebound as long as they persist. Above all, there's a huge debt problem - debts of peripheral euro zone governments, home-mortgage debt, debt that banks need to be repaid in order to remain solvent, etc.

So what we have is a major debt crisis. I don't think it's very likely that we'll have a sustained boom unless and until the debt problem and the deeper, underlying problem - the profitability problem - are resolved. We may have a long period of very weak growth, as Japan has had ever since bubbles in its real-estate and stock markets burst at the start of the 1990s, or we may have something worse. Given the magnitude of the bust in the US construction industry and the magnitude of the recession in general, it would have taken a long time for production and employment to return to pre-recession levels in any case. It's likely that the persistent debt problems and pessimism about the future have slowed down the recovery, and that they'll continue to do so. Real gross domestic product in the UK and most other major European countries is still lower than before the recession. And even in countries where that's not the case, like the US and Germany, GDP growth is still quite slow.

How significant do you think it is that the crisis has coincided with a boom in the prices of lots of raw materials sustained, according to conventional economic wisdom, by high economic growth in China and other parts of Asia? Are we witnessing divergent trends in the global economy that will play out over the long-term?

There are always pockets of stagnation in the midst of expansion, or pockets of expansion in the midst of stagnation. By itself, such divergence doesn't negate the fact that the economic crisis is system-wide. System-wide problems typically have uneven effects. During a recession, for instance, only the most vulnerable businesses go bankrupt. Some are hardly affected. Yet the recession is still a systemic problem. So the real question is whether the crisis is indeed system-wide. I think it definitely is.

In the decades preceding the crisis, economic growth was very rapid in China and India, but not in most of the rest of Asia or elsewhere. And the effects of the global recession on China were substantial. Between 2007 and 2009, the GDP growth rate fell by about as much in China as it did in the US and France. Recently, the continuing economic malaise has led to the renewed slowdown of China's



Don't worship capital in any of its manifestations

economy. In addition, there are persistent rumours that the country's real-estate boom is a bubble about to burst. What will happen over the long term, insofar as divergent trends are concerned, depends a lot on whether those rumours, and speculation that China has now shifted into a long-run phase of slower growth, prove to be correct. It's hard to know.

But the more important points, I think, are, first, that the whole capitalist class is in this crisis together; weak economic conditions affect them all. So do pessimism and uncertainty about the future. And, second, when pessimism and uncertainty reign, investors seek out safe havens and stability. The world's safe haven is definitely not China: it's the US. We saw this in 2008, after Lehman Brothers collapsed. The US financial system was in shambles, and you received almost no interest or even negative interest on US treasury bills, but investors the world over were scrambling to lend to the US treasury because it was the only real way to keep their money safe.

I expect that, for some time to come, the US will continue to be the main country that provides whatever stability and safety that can be provided. That's because its ability to provide them has everything to do with its unrivalled military might, even when that might remains latent. I think this limits the extent to which the balance of economic power can shift. Also, inter-capitalist rivalries in the US aren't as sharp as they are in Europe, where they take on a national form.

Your recent book, *The failure of capitalist production*,² argues that the fundamental cause of the current crisis was

a failure to restore profitability after the recessionary years of 1974-81. What are the main features of your thesis?

The Great Recession was waiting to happen. There were unresolved problems in the system of capitalist production that had been building up over a third of a century. As you note, I argue that US corporations' rate of profit fell and never recovered in a sustained manner. This led to persistently sluggish investment, which in turn led to weaker growth of output and income. And weak income growth led to rising debt burdens - the same dollar amount of debt is a bigger burden when income growth is slower. In addition, governments, especially the US government, tried to solve this complex of problems, or at least paper them over, with policies that made the debt build-up even bigger.

I also argue that changes in economic policy help explain why, on the one hand, this complex of problems didn't result in another Great Depression, and why, on the other hand, there has been relative stagnation for such a long time - much longer than that decade-long depression. For obvious reasons, and because it triggered a significant radicalisation of working people, policymakers have tried to avoid another depression. So they've consistently steered clear of *laissez-faire* policies. They intervene with policies that throw debt at the problems and 'kick the can down the road'. So we don't get a slump that's anything like the depression. But we also don't get a new boom like the one that followed the depression and World War II. The debt build-up prevents a recurrence of the massive destruction of capital value that occurred then - bankruptcies, falling asset prices, and

so on. But the destruction of capital value helped to restore the system's profitability, by allowing new owners to take over companies cheaply and without having to assume the old owners' debts. We haven't had that, so the fall in profitability has persisted.

Policymakers in different countries have responded to the economic crisis in significantly different ways, but the US government's response has been almost unbelievably activist, or 'Keynesian' if you will. In the four years since Lehman Brothers collapsed, the treasury's total debt has shot up by \$6.4 trillion - an increase of almost two-thirds. Once again, they've been papering over bad debt with more debt, but this time on an unprecedented scale.

The devaluation of capital plays a big role in your understanding of the economic history of the last 80 years and more. When I reviewed³ *The failure of capitalist production* I questioned whether the capital devaluation that undoubtedly took place in the 1930s was a strong enough explanation by itself of the vigour and length of the post-war economic boom. My reservations were that (a) the volume of investments made with the devalued capital inputs at the beginning of the upturn could not by themselves have sustained profit rates for 20 years or more; and (b) the effect of World War II was to cause shortages of investment goods and so counteract the devaluation that occurred in the slump. How do you respond?

I agree that the destruction of capital value wasn't the only cause of the post-war boom. I don't even think it was the only cause of the spike in the rate of profit. I stressed the role played by the destruction of capital value because I think it is too often disregarded and because I think it's an important part of the story - but not the only part. I was arguing against accounts of the post-war boom that try to explain it solely in terms of demand. I don't think they succeed.

In the US case - I really don't know about other countries because the rate-of-profit data for them aren't very good - the post-war boom lasted much longer than the high rate of profit did. Corporations' rate of profit began to decline from the mid-1950s onward. So we don't have to account for 20 years or more of high rates of profit, but only about 10 years. US GDP growth remained strong for a long time thereafter, but that's largely because productive investment didn't immediately slow down in response to the fall in profitability.

I doubt that even a 10-year-long spike in the rate of profit can be explained in terms of the devaluation of capital inputs: ie, falling prices of means of production. However, as I indicated above, I mean something much broader when I refer to the destruction of capital value. I use the term 'destruction of capital' in the way Marx used it. He meant not only destruction of the value of means of production, but also destruction of financial wealth by means of bankruptcies, bank failures, falling prices of stocks and bonds, etc. I think the financial side of the destruction was probably the more important side in helping to restore the rate of profit, though it's hard to measure, partly because of insufficient data.

But, insofar as means of production are concerned, the destruction of capital value wasn't only a matter of falling prices. US corporations' *physical* stock of fixed capital fell during the depression and didn't rebound thereafter, even during the war. It was smaller at the end of 1945 than at the end of 1929. But right after the war ended, corporations were producing roughly twice as much output, in physical (inflation-adjusted) terms, as they did right before the depression. This means that physical capital investment per unit of output fell by about one-half. This helped raise the rate of profit tremendously.

Your measurement of profit rates in the US economy since 1981 diverges dramatically from that of many other Marxist economists. Can you explain how that comes to be?

It's not a measurement issue. It's a conceptual issue - what is a rate of profit? And it's an ethical issue - why do they call their measures 'rates of profit' when they're not rates of return on investment, even though the public thinks that the Marxist economists are indeed referring to rates of return on investment when they claim that the 'rate of profit' rose?

What they compute is today's profit as a percentage of the amount of money that would be needed today to replace all of their fixed capital assets at once. That might be a useful measure of something, but no-one has ever successfully explained what it's useful for, other than that it would be the expected rate of profit of a capitalist who was so oblivious that he failed to realise that future changes in prices will affect profits.

And their measure certainly isn't a rate of profit. A rate of profit is a rate of return on investment - today's profit as a percentage of the amount of money that was actually invested in order to acquire the capital assets (minus depreciation). That's what I compute.

We're talking about two entirely different things, not two different measures of the same thing. So it's not surprising that what they call the 'rate of profit' rose, even though US corporations' rate of return on investment fell.

In The failure of capitalist production you explain why you are not able to measure the exact rate of profit that Marx discussed. In effect you are measuring rates of return on fixed capital - leaving out of your calculations circulating constant capital and variable capital. Do you think the trends in the profit rate you uncover might be different if you were able to incorporate circulating capital into your measurements?

I found that when we use an inclusive definition of profit rather like what Marx meant by surplus value, US corporations' rate of profit trended downward sharply from the early 1980s until the crisis. Including circulating constant and variable capital couldn't possibly reverse such a sharp decline. The capital advanced in order to buy raw materials and hire workers is far too small to have such an effect. Only a small amount of the money that's spent to buy raw materials and hire workers is a fresh advance of capital; the rest represents multiple 'turnovers' of the same advances.

On the other hand, measures of the rate of profit based on before-tax and after-tax profits were basically trendless between the early 1980s and 2007, so it's conceivable that inclusion of circulating constant and variable capital could make them trend modestly upward or downward. That really wouldn't affect my account of the underlying causes of the Great Recession, which doesn't have much to do with trends in the rate of profit in this technical sense of 'trend'. My account relies much more on the fact that all of the rates of profit remained low.

Turning to a very technical issue, Arthur Bough raised a question about the measurement of the rate of profit in response to my review of your book. He quoted a famous passage from volume 3 of Capital about an upward revaluation of constant capital - cotton as a result of a bad harvest - and its effect on the value of previously accumulated stocks. Arthur Bough asked what happens if the capitalist producing (say yarn) spent 1,000 on cotton (prior to the rise in its value to 2,000), and 1,000 on workers' wages, given a rate of surplus value of 100%. Would the value of the output commodities (the yarn) incorporate a value of 1,000 or 2,000 for the constant capital (the raw cotton)? I made a case that if all the capitalists had bought their cotton inputs prior to the price rise, it would be the historical cost - ie, the 1,000 - that would transfer to the output value (and that competition would prevent the capitalists from cashing in a capital gain). Now, I know you are an advocate of pre-production reproduction costs - the costs of inputs at the time they entered the production process. What would be your take on the above scenario, assuming the rise in the price of cotton took

place before the production process began?

If the capitalist bought means of production for 1,000, but they're worth 2,000 when they enter into production, this means that a capital gain of 1,000 accrues to the capitalist - before production begins. The means of production are worth 2,000 at the start of production, whether or not they're used in production, so it's clear that no additional surplus value arises between the start of production and the sale of the products as a result of the increase in their value. The capitalist sells the products for 4,000, but pays workers only 1,000, and the used-up means of production are worth 2,000, so the surplus value is 4,000-1,000-2,000=1,000. Equivalently, at the start of production, the capitalist had means of production worth 2,000 and 1,000 in money to pay wages, while he has 4,000 in money after selling the products. So the surplus value is 1,000.

I think you were trying to reconcile real-world phenomena with Marx's claim that surplus value arises only in production, by means of extraction of surplus labour. Since you construed capital gains as additional surplus value, and you didn't want to say that additional surplus value arose outside production, you ignored Marx's numerous statements that what determines the value of a commodity, including a means of production, isn't the amount of labour it actually took to produce it, but the amount of labour needed to reproduce it now.

I think your interpretive method was exactly right - making the text make sense - but the problem is that passages which state that commodities' values are determined by the amounts of labour needed to reproduce them are also parts of the text. So what we have to reconcile are real-world phenomena, Marx's claim that surplus value arises only in production, and these passages. This can be done, and I think it can only be done, by distinguishing between capital gains and surplus value. And we also have to distinguish between capital gains and increases in value that arise in exchange. Note that the capital gain in this example didn't arise in exchange. The value of the means of production increased, even though they weren't exchanged.

But don't you measure the rate of profit using historical costs? In that case, how do you account for the capital gains without ending up measuring a rate of profit of 1,000 surplus value plus 1,000 capital gains over 1,000 constant capital (the historical cost) plus 1,000 variable capital - ie, 2,000/2,000, a rate of profit of 100%?

Yes, I measure the rate of profit using the historical cost of the fixed capital, because a rate of profit is a rate of return on investment, and the money that's been invested in the fixed capital is its original, or historical, cost. How commodities' values are determined and how capitalists assess the rate at which their capital expands are just different matters. To update a comment of Marx's, if a capitalist has a penchant for computer keyboards made of gold instead of plastic, the extra money he spends for them doesn't increase the value of his firm's products. But it does lower his rate of profit.

In any case, you raise an important issue. I think the 100% rate of profit you just computed - the total return as a percentage of the amount of money invested - is a legitimate rate of profit, and it's the relevant one in some contexts. In other contexts, we might want to focus just on profits from current production as a percentage of the amount of money invested. At the level of the world economy, profits from current production are the same

thing as surplus value.

In practice we really don't have a choice. Governments' national accounts, which are our only source of information on economy-wide profit, count only profits from current production; capital gains and losses, write-downs of assets, unpayable debt and loan-loss set-asides are disregarded. This isn't actually a defect, but one needs to refrain from interpreting this rate of profit as the total return on the money invested. For instance, it declined during the Great Recession, but, since it doesn't reflect any of the financial losses I just mentioned, it didn't decline by as much as one would expect if one didn't know what it excludes. So you have to refrain from using it as the sole gauge of how well corporations have been doing recently.

Readers of the Weekly Worker are familiar with some of the ideas of Moshé Machover, including those on political economy. Moshé collaborated with Emmanuel Farjoun in writing the 1983 book Laws of chaos, which claims to "dissolve" the 'transformation problem'. I notice that you make a number of favourable references to this book in your writings. How do you evaluate the contribution of Laws of chaos?

I think it was an important book, but I also think the attempt to "dissolve" the alleged 'transformation problem' evades the important theoretical issues at stake. And there are other problems with *Laws of chaos*, especially the fact that it also accepted critics' allegation that Marx's law of the tendential fall in the rate of profit is logically invalid.

What was good about *Laws of chaos* was that it forcefully challenged what was and still is a standard assumption in Sraffian and mainstream Marxian economics: namely the notion that all firms and all industries receive the same rate of profit. Farjoun and Machover showed that this is not a harmless approximation; one simply can't deduce conclusions about real-world capitalism from models that make this assumption.

I think they made the case quite convincingly. But the point was subsumed under the project of evading the alleged 'transformation problem'. The 'problem' is a supposed logical inconsistency in Marx's value theory that makes it untenable. Marx argued that workers' labour is what creates all new value and that their surplus labour is the sole source of profit. And in his account of the 'transformation', or conversion, of values into prices of production, he showed that this law holds true at the economy-wide level, even though the prices and profits that particular industries receive differ from the values of their products and the surplus values they produce. If there's a logical inconsistency in this account, as was long alleged, Marx's value theory and much else - everything else in *Capital* that is based on the value theory, including the all-important law of the tendential fall in the rate of profit - goes out the window. It must all be rejected or corrected.

The way to dispose of the allegation of inconsistency is to show that the alleged logical error doesn't exist. That's what the temporal single-system interpretation (TSSI) of Marx's value theory, which you discussed in your review of my book, does. The TSSI shows that the logical error isn't in Marx's own text; it was created by particular interpretations of that text and it just vanishes when Marx is interpreted as the TSSI interprets him. But *Laws of chaos* took a different tack. It conceded that the logical error does exist in the case in which firms in all industries receive the same rate of profit, but argued that this is unimportant, since the equal-rate-

of-profit assumption is completely unrealistic.

There are two main problems with this argument. One is that this assumption wasn't smuggled in by critics who tried to prove that Marx's value theory is logically untenable. It is what Marx himself assumed in his account of the 'transformation'. Even more importantly, what sense can we make of a theory which says that labour creates all new value and that surplus labour is the sole source of profit - but only because rates of profit aren't equal?! If labour and surplus labour are the sole sources, how could a different distribution of the profit among industries - one that results in an equal rate of profit - change that fact? It doesn't make sense.

I am interested in how an economic school such as that formed by those Marxist economists who hold to the TSSI works. In Reclaiming Marx's 'Capital' you explain something of the history of the TSSI, going back to a few scattered papers in the 1980s. To what extent do you coordinate your research efforts, participation in conferences and so on or even just share your ideas with other adherents of the TSSI?

I've worked rather closely on some things with a few other people such as Alan Freeman and Nick Potts. But, unfortunately, the 'school' in question hasn't ever really functioned as such, despite concerted efforts to change this. The TSSI was almost unknown for decades. In recent years, it's gained a lot of adherents, but few of them work in academic jobs that give them time to do research, and some who do have such jobs don't do research along these lines. A lot of people are happy to learn that Marx's theory isn't guilty of the logical errors with which it's long been charged, and then they move on.

This is related to what I call the 'every man his own Marxist' problem. The myth that Marx's theory was logically inconsistent helped to create this problem; the alleged inconsistencies were a licence to 'correct' Marx in this way, that way, whatever way one wants. But unfortunately, the 'every man his own Marxist' vice also affects the 'school' in question. It has to do with the intellectual culture of our times, and especially with the fact that there's no funding of, or benefits from, TSSI-related research. I suspect that the thousands of scientists who work together at Cern, the European Organisation for Nuclear Research, and the intellectuals who work together in all of the think-tanks would be off doing their own things if there were no financial incentives to induce them to act in a cooperative manner.

The solution is what I call 'intellectual autonomous zones' that obtain resources from groups and people outside of academia and use them for collaborative research. Something like this existed in the pre-World War I German Social Democratic Party. Of course, it was no panacea; the party capitulated to the imperialist war. But my point is simply that intellectual autonomous zones are a real possibility, if there are resources to sustain them.

You are a Marxist humanist. Can you tell us something about your political history? How does your political perspective inform your scholarly work on political economy?

I'm part of the 1960s generation of radicals, even though I'm about 10 years younger than most of them. I was a radical in high school in the early 1970s. The anti-Vietnam war, black and women's liberation movements, and the new left, were major influences on me. But they were

fraught with contradictions, which caused them to collapse or regress, and this also had a profound effect on me. Hegel said that contradiction is the root of all movement. That's absolutely true of those of us who can't tolerate contradictions and do what we must in order to try to resolve them. This is what kept me moving, so to speak, when some of the left was giving up and others remained satisfied with self-contradictory sets of ideas that had failed and blamed the failures on the external enemy - the power of capitalism, imperialism and so on.

Eventually, in the early and mid-1980s, I studied *Capital*, and then discovered Marxist-Humanism. I've been an active Marxist-Humanist ever since. The organisation created by Raya Dunayevskaya, who founded the philosophy of Marxist-Humanism, stagnated after her death, retrogressed, and ultimately came apart a few years ago. Since 2009, I've been working with a new organisation, Marxist-Humanist Initiative. Drawing on Dunayevskaya's idea that Marx's philosophy of revolution is crucial to the success of the revolutionary project, and especially her idea that the *organisation* of thought is essential, Marxist-Humanist Initiative is trying to rebuild an organisation that can continue to develop Marx's Marxism and Marxist-humanism, and make them concrete for our time.

The works of Marx and Dunayevskaya totally transformed my understanding of the world and how it can be changed. So much of my understanding of Marx is influenced by Dunayevskaya's interpretation that I can't separate them. So let me just say that one key thing I learned from both of them is that capitalists aren't to blame: they're just functionaries for the system, personifications of capital. And another key thing I learned from Dunayevskaya is the importance of internal contradiction, especially internal contradictions within the left. Once you start thinking this way, you no longer regard the opponent's might as an adequate explanation of our own failures and you stop thinking that replacing the opponent with a different set of personifications of capital is any kind of solution.

These and many other ideas of theirs inform all of my work and they are what motivate all of it. In some cases, such as the last chapter of *The failure of capitalist production*, I think this comes out clearly in the content of what I say. In other cases, such as my effort to set the record straight regarding the alleged inconsistencies in Marx's value theory, what reflects my philosophy and politics is this effort itself. But I can see how it might be hard at times to see the relationship between my work and theirs. On the one hand, I don't spend a lot of time repeating what they said. They said it well enough the first time, and I can't stand appeals to authority - I think that popularisations of Marx's works have been downright detrimental. And I certainly don't package my own views as theirs in the way that Marxist intellectuals often do to Marx. On the other hand, I'm not a good enough thinker to further develop their work in the foundational sense in which they developed it. So I do what I'm capable of doing, and avoid doing what I consider useless or harmful ●

Notes

1. The interview was conducted by email.
2. A Kliman *The failure of capitalist production: underlying causes of the Great Recession* London 2012.
3. N Rogers, 'Value, profit and crisis' *Weekly Worker* July 5 2012.
4. E Farjoun and M Machover *Laws of chaos: a probabilistic approach to political economy* London 1983.
5. A Kliman *Reclaiming Marx's 'Capital': a refutation of the myth of inconsistency* Lanham MD, 2007.

KURDISTAN

Nationalism from another angle

Esen Uslu completes his review of the Turkish left's attitude to the Kurdish question by considering two leftwing thinkers

When those sections of the Turkish left that are willing to work with the Kurdish freedom movement started to take part in the initial attempts to form an umbrella organisation, there was not much discussion on theoretical or programmatic issues. The practical aspects seemed to be the priority. With 'urgent organisational matters' at stake, there was a tendency for any attempt to bring up programmatic issues to be seen as divisive, or an idiosyncrasy of particular individuals. However, the initial optimism soon dissipated and was replaced by stupor and disintegration.

Then, when the HDK (People's Democratic Congress) was being formed, a new emphasis was placed on programme as a necessity of circumstance. Once more, when comrades attempted to make an input into the discussions, the democratic congress was not prepared to listen to 'isolated individuals' or pay much attention to those attempting a fresh but unaccustomed approach.

But a programmatic proposal on the national question has now been put forward and, even though it is not discussed much today, I believe it will form the basis of discussions in the near future. This proposal has been made by comrade Demir Küçükaydın, who is not widely known among European comrades (although he is more familiar to those involved with the groups formed around Ernest Mandel, and especially within immigrant movements in Germany).

He was active in the student movement of the late 1960s and, despite undergoing guerrilla training at one of the Palestinian camps, on his return to Turkey he distanced himself from the armed struggle and gravitated towards organising a new generation of cadres in a proletarian party. He undertook trade union work and was involved in various major construction site struggles.

Enigma

The tardy and ultimately unsuccessful drive to reorganise a proletarian party before the military intervention of 1971 was centred on Dr Hikmet Kıvılcımlı.

Dr Kıvılcımlı was an enigma of the communist movement. He was one of the intellectual heavyweights of the party, but his ideas were not in line with the prevailing pro-Soviet thinking. So for most of the left he was a voice in the wilderness. He spent more than 20 years in jail following various cases brought against the Communist Party of Turkey (TKP) during the 20s and 30s. During the late 50s he formed the Country Party (VP), taking advantage of the legal opportunities available at the time, but ended up in jail once more. During the 60s he was not welcomed into the Workers Party of Turkey (TİP) because of his previous convictions, but started writing in various left newspapers, and publishing books and a short-lived newspaper, *Sosyalist* (Socialist). For the younger generation he became one of the few comrades who represented a link with the past.

However, his insistence on the need for an old-style party, basing itself on an ideological discipline centred on programme, and an organisational discipline when it came to work among the working class and peasant movement, fell on deaf ears among the younger generation. The guerrilla movements were *de rigueur* in the late



Abdullah Öcalan: democracy

60s among the revolutionary sections of the youth movement and for most of them long years of patient work in low-level working class struggle seemed unfathomable. The centrist and opportunist right wing of the youth movement still had an ear for Soviet music and was not ready to tune into voices from the wilderness.

Dr Kıvılcımlı was also renowned for his work on the history of ancient societies and civilisations, and his ideas on the subject were out of step with the solidified opinion held by the Marxism of the day. Contrary to the idea of a simplistic progression (savagery-barbarism-slavery-feudal society-capitalism), he pointed out that 'barbarian' and civilised societies co-existed, and the dynamic of their interaction has played an important role in history. He was able to publish a summary of his work on the subject, the *Thesis on history* in the late 60s. Further fragments of his theses were posthumously published by groups claiming to pursue his line during the 70s.

His proposals to the central committee of the TKP in the mid-30s were also published in full during the military regime by the exile press in Europe. He entitled his proposal *Yol* ('the path') and presented it for discussion at a congress which was unfortunately aborted. The proposals contained seven chapters. The sixth chapter, relating to the Kurdish question, was entitled 'The reserve force: nationality (east)' and contained unorthodox proposals such as this one:

There are two tasks before the TKP: (1) to establish strong links with the oppressed Kurdish people; (2) to assist fraternally in the formation of a Kurdish Communist Party ... Where do we start? Considering the specifics of present-day Kurdistan with a view to nurturing communist thought and creating a communist organisation there, we are bound to commence work from two starting points: (1) training cadres; (2) the partisan movement.¹

These theses were never discussed in public or in the underground, since shortly afterwards the Comintern's infamous 'decentralisation order' liquidated the party and its press, and Dr Kıvılcımlı yet again ended up in jail, once more to be forgotten.

From the wilderness

After Dr Kıvılcımlı's release by the military regime and death in exile in 1971, comrade Küçükaydın was part of a group attempting to reorganise the Communist Party on the ideological platform inherited from Dr Kıvılcımlı. He became the editor of the *Kıvılcım* (Spark) newspaper, which appeared for a brief period from 1973-74. But it was soon banned, comrade Küçükaydın was sentenced to a lengthy prison sentence and the group was dissolved shortly afterwards as part of the move to organise a legal left

party to take part in the elections and emerging parliamentary democracy. That effort ended in the creation of the Socialist Workers Party of Turkey (TSIP), which many who followed the line of Dr Kıvılcımlı joined.

After a short while the fault lines separating the groups that formed the TSIP became apparent, and supporters of the Kıvılcımlı line were either expelled or resigned, switching to the new VP. Comrade Küçükaydın became one of the most prominent theoretical writers in that party's press. He spent almost all of the 70s and part of the 80s in jail, but he continued his studies on many theoretical problems of Marxism. He came to evaluate Trotskyism in a new light, free of Soviet dogma.

When he was released from prison in the late 80s he escaped to Europe and worked with Mandel, where he studied post-war Marxism and worked with comrades from other migrant communities. He proceeded to develop his theses, which were published on the internet in the 90s - some of them appeared in book form in Turkey during the second half of first decade of this century. At present he is based in Hamburg, and travels regularly to Turkey to take part in various discussions.

He established strong links with the Kurdish freedom movement and wrote a regular column for its daily newspaper. In the discussions within that movement following the capture of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan, he steadfastly supported comrade Öcalan's line. Comrade Küçükaydın particularly valued his attempts to understand the history of the region and its dynamics, which had more than a hint of Dr Kıvılcımlı's opinions. He also exposed the shortcomings of the Kurdish freedom movement in failing to understand the line supported by Öcalan, which defends democracy for the whole region as the primary aim. He criticised those sections of the Kurdish freedom movement that were quite prepared to accept compromises with the nationalists - who had nothing but the formation of an independent Kurdish state in mind.

As readers will appreciate, comrade Küçükaydın's track record - declining to take part in guerrilla action; organising that most obscure part of the trade union movement in Turkey, construction workers, who were often half-peasants; working in far-flung corners of the country with strongly anarchist trends; being a well-known follower of Dr Kıvılcımlı; opposing the formation of the TSIP and supporting the VP; being a turncoat who became a Trotskyite in his later life; writing regular columns in the Kurdish press supporting the PKK and Öcalan's line - did not make him a popular figure, to say the least, among the Turkish left.

His 'street credentials' are those of an individual operating on the margins, who is divisive and obsessed by his own self-centred ideas. So, now that the crucial issue of programme has once more come to the fore, there are not many prepared to listen to what he is saying. In my estimation that is a grave error.

What is nation?

Comrade Küçükaydın has published some of his theses in a book entitled *Defending and developing Marxism* - volume 1, *A Marxist critique of Marxism: the theory of superstructure, religion and nation*, but to date there is no English translation. However, I

have translated his thoughts on that quintessential problem of the Turkish left, the Kurdish question:

If we are to understand developments in the world, and not miss our way in the quagmire of events, first of all we should adopt a programme and take up a stance *against nations* (note: I am not saying *against nationalists*, but I am saying *against nations*; and I am not using the term 'internationalist' either, since internationalism is another nationalism.)

If we are to understand developments in Turkey, and not miss our way in the quagmire of the events, first of all we should adopt a programme and take up a stance supporting democratic nationalism and the democratic nation against reactionary nationalism and the reactionary nation.

But what is the difference between a democratic nation and a reactionary nation? A democratic nation (and consequently democratic nationalism) refuses to define a nation by any language, religion, ethnicity, ancestry, clan, race, culture, etc ... A reactionary nation (and consequently reactionary nationalism) is a nation (and nationalism) that defines a nation as being Kurdish, Turkish, Arab, Muslim, Christian, etc.

Reactionary nationalism defends the 'right to self-determination of nations'. Democratic nationalism does not defend the right to define a nation by language, religion, ancestry or clan; on the contrary, it struggles against such a definition. However, democratic nationalism supports even the right of any village to separate if it is in a democratic nation, which is real 'democratic autonomy'.

According to reactionary nationalism, a nation that suppresses another nation cannot be free. According to democratic nationalism, a nation *can* be free if it suppresses nations and nationalisms that define a nation by language, religion, ancestry, clan, race or culture.

Reactionary nationalism talks about the 'Kurdish question'; however, democratic nationalism talks about the 'Turkish question'.

Reactionary nationalism does not regard the central problem in defining a nation as being Turkish, but in not defining it as being Kurdish. Democratic nationalism regards defining a nation as being Turkish as the problem.

Whoever does not have a stance and programme based on such democratic nationalism, whatever good intentions he or she may have, cannot but be placed among the reserve army of ruling forces, twist and lurch in the wake of events, and end up defending a spineless policy.²

As I am sure comrades will agree, some of these unfamiliar ideas require further study.

Notes

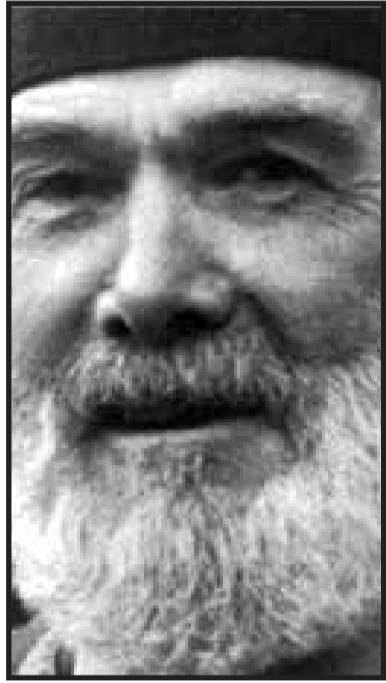
1. In the parlance of the 30s the term "partisan movement" was employed as we would use "guerrilla movement" today.
2. D Küçükaydın, 'The political meaning of Kılıçdaroğlu-Erdogan meeting and declaration of Leyla Zana', June 17 2012: <http://demirden-kapilar.blogspot.co.uk/2012/06/kilicdaroglu-ve-erdogan-bulusmas-ve-leyla.html>.

REVIEW

New chapter in human liberation

Revolutionary History Vol 16, No4: Ian Birchall (guest editor) European revolutionaries and Algerian independence 1954-1962

This year marks the 50th anniversary of Algerian independence. *Revolutionary History* has published a collection of essays and documents about “the largely unknown story of French anarchists and Trotskyists” who supported the successful fight against French colonialism. The editorial states that a “colonial war spearheaded by a ‘socialist politician’, a national liberation movement strongly influenced by Islam; repression and torture on one side, terror tactics on the other” has echoes in the world today. It is hoped, continues the editorial, that accounts of those who sided with the Algerian people can “educate and inspire a new generation of anti-imperialists”.



Messali Hadj: founder

But what can be learnt? Does the Arab spring mark the “return of the Arab revolution” that shaped the Algerian struggle? Last year Alex Callinicos saw potential in the Arab world for (as Trotsky asserted) “the democratic revolution [that] grows over directly into the socialist revolution and thereby becomes a permanent revolution”. The Socialist Workers Party leader denied any repetition of the past, when the Arab revolution led to bureaucratic and authoritarian states. He hoped that independent working class politics could develop from democratic movements, above all in Egypt.¹

Although Algeria has seen some unrest - over democratic rights, unemployment and food prices - *le pouvoir*, the army-state, remains. Its limited democracy, and the position of president Bouteflika, has been barely affected. Syria’s uprising is marked by sectarian warfare, in which repression and torture are not the monopoly of imperialists. The Islamists in power from the Maghreb to the Mashriq are unlikely to inspire many socialists, for all their ‘anti-imperialism’. At present, while struggles for social rights exist, mass protest is dominated by religious outrage at *The innocence of Muslims*.

The revolution

European revolutionaries publishes extensive extracts from Sylvain Pattieu’s *The comrades of the brothers*. This is the “first full history of the role of Trotskyists and anarchists in solidarity with the Algerian liberation struggle”. The Trotskyist Fourth International had in 1948 defended the “struggle for freedom from imperialism by the colonial peoples, even in cases where this struggle is led by nationalist and bourgeois-democratic elements” (p19). This was the benchmark for their anti-colonialism.

As a colony Algeria had specific features. Ten percent of the population (around a million people) were full French citizens. These *Pieds-noirs* ran nearly all the industry and commerce, and cultivated the best land. Other Algerians were ‘subjects’ of France, and, despite post-war reforms, could not take French citizenship without renouncing their Islamic civil status. Few did so. As editor Ian Birchall notes, they were in an inferior position under the *Code de l’indigéant* (native code). The *colons* were determined not to leave. The French army shared their wish. It had in 1954 lost at Dien Bien Phu in Vietnam to general Giap’s Viet Minh forces and it resolved not to concede another defeat.

Despite these obstacles the FLN’s armed wing, the Armée de Libération Nationale, launched an uprising in 1954. On Halloween bombs went off and there were attacks on police stations and farms. A dozen people

were killed. But soon guerrillas began to operate in mountainous regions and the attacks grew. The French state began a vicious response. This had escalated by 1956 to the extent that the Socialist prime minister, Guy Mollet, who claimed to embrace Marxism as well as anti-communism and pro-Americanism, passed special powers to repress the insurrection.

The historian, Pierre Vidal-Naquet, described opponents of the French state’s ferocious response as “Dreyfusards, Bolsheviks and third worldists”. But there were those who defended human rights against the French military’s use of torture. Others were attracted to solidarity with the anti-colonial uprisings as an alternative to an apparently stagnant European left.² The French Trotskyists became committed to the cause of independence as part of the ‘world revolution’. New, non-Stalinist, Marxist leaderships, they thought, would emerge from anti-colonial fighting. This contrasted with the view of the Parti Communiste Français (PCF), which promoted ‘peace’ and believed that some degree of ‘common interest’ existed between the Algerian nation and France.

Split during the early 1950s, French Trotskyism took different views over which wing of the Algerian nationalist movement they should support.

In 1926 Messali Hadj (1898-1974) founded the first Algerian anti-colonial movement, the Étoile Nord-Africaine, in Metropolitan France. He was then a member of the PCF. By the end of World War II, when the independence movement began to take hold in Algeria itself, Hadj had evolved away from communism. His anti-colonialism went with a democratic and social interpretation of Algeria’s Arab and Islamic identity. He spent 22 years of his life in French prisons or under house arrest. One wing of French Trotskyism, the ‘Lambertist’ Parti Communiste Internationaliste (PCI) had enjoyed long contacts with Hadj. They claimed his Mouvement National Algérien (MNA) was an “authentic proletarian organisation” and potentially socialist.

The ‘class struggle’ anarchist Fédération Communiste Libertaire (FCL) also argued that national liberation was a necessary and progressive, though transitory, stage. The FCL differed from the - much larger - Fédération Anarchiste (FA), which distrusted nationalism (and militarism). While denouncing colonial repression, the FA refused to back any

actual liberation movement. Pattieu notes the FCL’s links with an Algerian group, the Mouvement Libératoire Nord-Africain (MLN), though not its tiny size and its largely European membership. The FCL worked with the MNA and suffered severe French state repression.

Michel Raptis (‘Pablo’), one of the most active Trotskyists who rallied to the Algerian cause, threw himself into supporting a “national anti-imperialist united front rallying all classes”, the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN). The position of the ‘Pierre Frank’ wing of French Trotskyism, the PCI, was, Pattieu says, not to cut themselves off completely from the MLN. But the FLN was soon the main interlocutor.

European revolutionaries recounts the nuts and bolts of the solidarity work these French leftwingers carried out. They printed false papers, and FLN literature, carried suitcases of cash - the origin of the expression “*les porteurs de valise*” - and helped supply information. As the French army mobilised hundreds of thousands the Jeune Résistance network encouraged refusal to do military service and for others to desert. The independent left Jeanson network and the network run by the Egyptian communist militant, Henri Curiel, closely helped the FLN. They were dismantled in 1960 and Curiel spent time in jail. Pablo, and his comrade, Salomon Santan, were arrested in 1960 while setting up a workshop to print forged money for the FLN. They were sentenced to 18 months in prison.

What all these positions had in common was the principle that it was the duty of revolutionaries to assist indigenous anti-colonialist movements. Unlike in metropolitan France, Algerian communism was marginal and swiftly repressed during the conflict. Organised Trotskyism did not exist. The FLN and MNA, willing to attract this backing, would, Pattieu observes, adopt “Marxist language to win support from the French left, but took good care that French leftists should not influence their cadres” (p89).

Today we see most Trotskyist groups attempt to create their ‘own’ sections in every country they can. With the massive ‘globalised’ increase in international exchanges of all types, it would be artificial to fence off each nation. But ‘branches’ of a western left have yet to make much headway in north Africa and elsewhere.

Internecine wars

In the fight for national liberation over 300,000 Algerians and 25,000 French military died. Between 1954 and 1960 two million people were in bleak ‘resettlement’ camps and 300,000 were refugees in Tunisia and Morocco. The brutality of the police in France and the army in Algeria appeared to overwhelm the resistance. Pontecorvo’s film *The battle of Algiers* (1966) depicts an FLN bombing campaign that was met in 1957 by systematic repression, killing and torture. The *Pieds-noirs* joined in anti-north African *rationnades* (pogroms). But in *A dying colonialism* (London 1959) the Martinique FLN supporter, Frantz Fanon, said that the “Algerians already consider themselves sovereign”. He predicted that they would win.

But violence did not only come from the French. The FLN announced that, since it was a ‘front’, parties could not join it - only individuals. The MLN was hostile. The FLN accused Hadj of knowing nothing about the reality in Algeria. He was said to be paternalist

and reluctant to let loose a movement on the ground that would escape his control. To impose the ‘front’ it was decided to wipe out the MLN ‘traitors’.

Conflict rapidly reached intolerable levels. There was a full-scale war in France and Algeria. Fictionalised in Racid Bouchareb’s film *Hors la loi* (2010), this meant the FLN rooting out a whole layer of activists. *European revolutionaries* estimates that more than 4,000 people were killed in mainland France and 6,000 in Algeria. The FLN committed a brutal massacre of 300 MNA-supporting villagers in the Mélouza region in 1957. Less mentioned is the internal repression inside the FLN. The fate of Abane Ramdane, the author of the most political FLN document, the Soumman Declaration (1956) - which rejected claims that this was a “religious war” - is one of the best known. He was strangled in Morocco in 1958.

Some on the French left knew of these practices and kept silent. In *Le lièvre de Patagonie* (2009) Claude Lanzmann, who liaised between the FLN, Frantz Fanon and Jean-Paul Sartre, talks of being made aware of their brutal treatment of dissenters and suspected French agents.³ This tendency to deny all criticism of liberation or anti-imperialist movements is not dead today.

Ian Birchall notes that the central argument on the pro-FLN left was that “it was the FLN which was the main leader and organiser of the struggle against French rule, and which successfully carried out the struggle for independence” (p165). But he also cites with some approval the observations of the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group, which stated that the FLN might be the womb for the birth of a “new class”. The militarisation of the independence struggle gave power to the army, which has had lasting effects on the development of the Algerian state.

It is unlikely that anybody would claim that the war of independence justified the Trotskyists’ hopes. Michel Raptis asserted that the Arab revolution “forms part of the proletarian revolution, by which the end of the capitalist regime will be completed and the new socialist social order will begin”.⁴ Pablo’s own expectations were dashed, when Ben Bella, first leader of the Algerian state and a sympathiser with many socialist aspirations, was unceremoniously ousted in 1965 and replaced by a military man, Boumédiène.

The libertarian Marxist, Daniel Guérin, who had close ties to the Algerian struggle, had by the time of independence come to the conclusion that the FLN’s leaders were “Jacobins and authoritarians”. He added: “... the single party is a swindle.” In *Quand l’Algérie s’insurgait* (1979) he stated that Algeria had fallen into “a new feudalism - bourgeois, military and bureaucratic”. The FLN had been dominated by a “narrow-minded nationalism with little social reforming substance”.⁵

The brief experiments in workers’ self-management, largely in enterprises and on land left by the departing French (which Michel Raptis encouraged), or the longer period of state socialist third worldism have long passed. The 1965 constitution, which emphasised Islam and the Arab identity of the independent nation, and the army that became the pillar of the state after the 1965 coup, have proved enduring influences. Arabisation, and the 1970s promotion of Islam against the home-grown Algerian leftism that finally arrived, were the soil in which

Islamism flourished in the 1980s.

The left’s view of Islam as a simple cultural marker, that did not pose political problems, has proved false. Inflected in the country in a reactionary and exclusive way, with Arabism it became an alternative to the FLN party-state. The 1990s civil war, which left over 200,000 dead, followed the cancellation of elections in 1992 that the Islamist Front Islamique du Salut was expected to win.

In 1989 a - tightly controlled - multi-party system was brought in. Ironically it is the Parti de Travailleurs (PT), the largest Marxist force in Algeria, which lays claim to the heritage of Messali Hadj and his call for a constituent assembly. Louisa Hanoune led 20 PT deputies into the parliament following elections this year. The PT forms part of the Lambertist Entente Internationale des Travailleurs.

Revolutionary History is to be congratulated for producing *European revolutionaries*. It gives a lot to think about. There is plenty of interesting material not covered in this review, such as JJ Plant’s account of the British Labour MP, John Baird, who backed the Algerians, Ian Birchall’s biographical guide, pieces on the war from far-left groups such as the forerunner of Lutte Ouvrière, and Manus McGrogan on the influence of the war on the left that developed in 1968.

Are there useful lessons to be learnt from the Algerian revolution? Some thought that it would lead to socialism. Sylvain Pattieu says that the FLN adopted Marxist “overtones” to win valuable practical backing from the French left - which had its own need to believe. It would suppress criticisms in the hope that the war of national liberation would ‘grow over’ into a socialist revolution. Even though it chose the ‘winner’, the pro-FLN Fourth International gained little from their work with Ben Bella. The Boumédiène coup expelled or imprisoned leftwingers. The Fourth International criticised the influence of Pablo in overestimating the FLN and the new state’s socialist, or ‘anti-capitalist’, character. By 1969 it also referred to a failure to “form a nucleus of a future Algerian revolutionary party”.⁶ This appears to be a warning in relation to future Trotskyist activity.

As for Callinicos, his wish to see the Arab spring develop along lines favourable to the socialist left has disintegrated rapidly. His small ‘nucleus’ in Egypt remains politically irrelevant. But it exists.

Perhaps the last word on Algeria should go to Daniel Guérin. Was it worth supporting the revolution? Writing in *Ci-gît le colonialisme* (1973) Guérin said: “The Algerian revolution, despite all its blunders and its limits, if only in proving the military impotency of a great colonial power and the inexhaustible bravery of the humblest of the colonised, has written a new chapter in the history of human liberation”⁷.

Andrew Coates

Notes

1. A Callinicos, ‘The return of the Arab revolution’ *International Socialism* No130, April 2011.
2. See D Macey *Frantz Fanon: a life* p347, London 2000.
3. C Lanzmann *Le lièvre de Patagonie* Paris 2009, pp498-501.
4. M Raptis *The Arab revolution* Amsterdam 1959.
5. See D Porter *Eyes to the south: French anarchists and Algeria* Oakland 2011, p108.
6. J Hansen, ‘The Algerian revolution from 1962 to 1969’ in SWP (US) *The workers and farmers government* 1974.
7. D Porter *Eyes to the south: French anarchists and Algeria* Oakland 2011, p146.

NETHERLANDS



Emile Roemer: no real answers

Overcoming a false dichotomy

Where does the general election leave the Netherlands? Piet Potlood looks at the contending forces and points to the weakness of the left

Following the Dutch general election of Wednesday September 12 the Dutch political landscape has changed dramatically. The previous coalition, between the VVD 'Liberals' and Christian Democrats, with the support of Geert Wilders' far-right Party for Freedom, fell in April, making these elections necessary. So what has changed?

To understand the intricacies of Dutch politics one must first understand something about its context. As far as I can see, the last time there was any substantial comment on Dutch politics in the *Weekly Worker* was back in 2002,¹ so it is probably a good idea to start with a refresher.

First one must understand that the Netherlands is one of the few places on the planet where there is a more or less pure form of proportional representation. There are 150 seats in parliament (more commonly referred to as the Second Chamber) and the whole country is, to speak in British terms, one constituency. If a party gains the total votes cast divided by

150, they get one seat. This time there were 9,424,235 people who voted, so 62,829 represented the threshold for election.

That said, there are always those who want to limit the ability of small parties to get into parliament. The most recent example is of employers' representative Bernard Wientjes, who proposed that there should be a minimum requirement of five times the threshold and a minimum of five seats for any party.² For its part, the outgoing cabinet proposed to reduce the number of seats from 150 to 100.

Anyway, MPs representing 11 parties were elected to parliament this time and these are the most important:

- VVD: The 'Liberals' (although by British standards they are more like Conservatives) were the biggest party in the previous election, but this time increased their tally to 41 seats, their best election result. In the previous administration, Mark Rutte was the first ever VVD prime minister.

- CDA: The Christian Democrats, the traditional party of power, was able to rule practically alone until the 1970s,

but has more recently seen its support decrease. In 2010, its representation shrunk from 41 to 21 seats, but this time around it emerged with a staggeringly low figure of 13. This represents a longer-term realignment within Dutch politics.

- PvdA: The Labour Party differs from the party with the same name in Britain in that it has never had a formal link to the trade unions, financial or otherwise - although there have, of course, been quite a few personal ties between the two. In particular Wim Kok, prime minister from 1994 to 2002, was the former leader of the Dutch trade union federation, the FNV. This time, the party's MPs increased from 30 to 38.

- SP: The Socialist Party is a larger leftwing party, with about 44,000 members - only the PvdA and CDA are bigger.³ It is interesting in that it has a rather large activist base that emphasises being seen out on the street. In the past the SP, which started out as a Maoist grouplet in 1972, has organised local services like free healthcare (obviously on a very

limited scale). More recently, it has often been central in the organising of big demonstrations, but in the last few years the stress has been on elections, both locally and nationally, and being 'seen on the streets' is now regarded as a subsidiary aspect of the party's parliamentary work.

In the run-up to these elections the SP was polling at 35 seats or higher for quite a few weeks and for a moment it even looked as though it was going to become the biggest party in parliament - a prospect that provoked a degree of consternation in elite circles. However, the SP ended up with the same number of seats it won in 2010: 15. More on this below.

- PVV: The far-right party of Geert Wilders, having enjoyed a huge boost in 2010 when it won 24 seats (before that Wilders was a lone breakaway MP from the VVD), saw a significant drop to 15 seats. Part of the reason for this can no doubt be found in the fact that Wilders' demagoguery has had less purchase in view of his support for the previous cabinet, which implemented very few policies that one would

associate with Wilders. This time around, he changed his tune and, instead of focusing on the 'Muslim threat', gambled on tapping into an anti-Europe sentiment. However, this can hardly be said to have paid off - the Dutch media have enthusiastically reported on how the 'pro-Europe parties won the election' (the SP being the other big anti-EU party).

- GroenLinks: The Greens, while always having been small, deserve a mention because of their history. This party was founded in 1990 as a fusion of four groups, one of which was the Dutch Communist Party. So, yes, that is where the old pro-Moscow party went, in case you were wondering. These days the Greens are remarkably (or perhaps not so remarkably) on the neoliberal right on many issues, such as labour legislation. They suffered a meltdown in these elections and slumped from 10 to four seats.

- D'66: The Democrats are the last party I want to mention. You could say that they are the 'real liberals', as compared to the more conservative and rightwing VVD. In their election

campaign they aimed specifically for the better educated and more fortunate - the same target audience, incidentally, as GroenLinks - and presented themselves as a solid, safe pair of hands for prospective coalition partners. They had a small rise in support from 10 to 12 seats, but, given the dominance of VVD and PvdA, it is unlikely they will get into the next coalition.

Right and left

As I have said, the last government coalition fell in April. This produced a somewhat strange situation for Dutch politics in that there was a formal minority government with VVD and CDA ministers, but with outside support from Wilders' PVV.

The coalition was meant to be mutually beneficial for the PVV and VVD. Both parties have for a long time been clones when it comes to economic policy. So, Wilders could pose as both a supporter of the coalition and leader of the opposition (throwing the occasional verbal hand grenade in the direction of the coalition). The VVD, on the other hand, could carry on with its agenda, in the absence of any real opposition, while the CDA played a not too dissimilar role to that of the Liberal Democrats in the UK: a junior coalition partner tied hand and foot to the bigger party. It was a lose-lose situation for them.

But what looked like a solid relationship for almost two years was thrown into crisis when the PVV suddenly changed tack over the next round of threatened cuts. Wilders opportunistically pulled the plug and forced new elections, fearing that backing such cuts would wipe out his party's support. By doing so, he hoped to be seen as 'principled', but the ploy was not exactly successful.

As noted, the SP, for its part, was heading for between 35 and 40 seats in July and August. However, just before election day its support evaporated. What happened?

I think the main reason lies in the fact that the SP, which has never been in government, picked up support by presenting itself as the party of principled opposition. However, in 2006, when it got its best result with 25 seats, it attempted to position itself as an respectable coalition partner. There were no takers, but ever since the party has steadily moved to the right. For example, in these elections, significantly, it dropped its opposition to raising the retirement age from 65 to 67. When this was highlighted in the mass media, the party was unable to offer any convincing explanation in keeping with its previous radical image.

Incidentally, the dynamic I have described is exactly one of the reasons I do not support the CPGB majority position in favour of proportional representation. While it is obviously true that PR means you could get elected far more easily than is now possible in the UK. This also carries with it a trap - the allure of being 'sucked into the system', a breeding ground for *Realpolitik*. The Dutch bourgeoisie has historically been very proficient in exploiting the 'We're all in this together' idea. Parliament is one example of this and the SP shows exactly what can happen once you get big enough for the coalition question to be posed.

But this question deserves a more thorough discussion.

Another reason for the SP's inability to gain ground can be found in its focus on personalities during the election campaign. The performance of SP leader Emile Roemer was poor in the televised debates - he often had no ready answers and resorted to shallow attacks on his opponents. This was exploited by the media to show how unfit the SP is for coalition government. The satirical and elitist *Quote* magazine even published a feature depicting Roemer as a homicidal maniac armed with a chainsaw and covered in blood.⁴

Whatever the reason, the SP lost its lead in the polls and has seen its position as the left pole of Dutch politics taken over by the PvdA (the right pole is still occupied by the VVD), and SP support has further decreased. In fact if the elections had been delayed by even a few days later, the SP would probably have lost quite a few of its 15 seats.

Only six days after the elections, there was what is known as 'Prinsjesdag' (Prince's Day), when the following year's budget is presented. This time that duty fell to the outgoing cabinet and its budget contained proposals for a further €12 billion in cuts, bringing down the deficit below the requisite 3%. But it does this by cutting into the purchasing power of working class people, who have already been hit by a wage freeze and pension cuts these last few years.

A particularly controversial cut is what is commonly called the 'commuter's tax'. Many people get compensation for travelling to work, and so for many public transport is free, paid for by the bosses. The outgoing cabinet, however, proposed a tax on this compensation in order to raise €1.3 billion in the next financial year. But the most likely post-election coalition will be between the VVD and PvdA, and this tax could well go out of the window - the latter made it a key point of its election campaign. So no doubt the incoming administration will be looking for an alternative way of cutting €1.3 billion ...

The left

The performance of the far left, which is extraordinarily small in the Netherlands, has been dismal in all this. Many groups called for a vote for the SP, critical or uncritical, a recommendation partly explained by their own weakness.

The biggest, most visible group is the International Socialists, Dutch franchise of the British Socialist Workers Party, which has about 200 members. On August 28 it called for a critical vote for the SP - not in order to raise hopes in a left government "that can solve the problems of the working class", but to "form an effective opposition that can block VVD policies" and in the meantime "build an opposition on the streets, in workplaces and universities" against neoliberal policies.⁵

Its September 13 article maintained that line, arguing that it is "better to have an SP with 15 seats that connects the fight on the streets with that in parliament". The IS is not expecting any initiative from the SP leadership on that score: on the contrary, it expects the party to move further to the right to "show everyone that they can have government responsibility".⁶

So, while the IS opposition to parliamentarism is commendable, it displays the same kind of movementism that we see in the SWP mother ship - and, of course, if you want "real opposition", you know what to do: join the IS, of course!

Socialist Alternative, the sister organisation of the Socialist Party in England and Wales, which has only a few dozen members, is more uncritical. In an August 23 piece titled 'Towards a thunderous victory for the SP!', it called for "the biggest possible result" for the SP in the elections.⁷ It also urged readers to join that party and become active within it. Apparently the SP leadership is doing a fine job, since no call is made by Socialist Alternative for a leftwing opposition within the party. The piece ends by predicting that the SP will probably remain in opposition for now, but by the next elections there could be an SP majority government able to carry out a socialist programme!

In a later piece, two days before the elections, the same writer is a lot more down to earth and even makes some tentative criticisms of the SP programme. If the SP would fully commit to nationalising the banks and "large parts of the economy" we would soon be ushering in socialism (of a kind that uncannily resembles the post-war welfare state.⁸ 'Transitional demands' no doubt, comrades ...

The Mandelite group, Socialist Alternative Politics, also no bigger than a few dozen members and more commonly known by its journal, *Grenzeloos* (No borders), argued in its commentary that "despite the hangover from the elections, the SP stands on solid ground. If they keep up their opposition towards neoliberal policies, there is huge potential. Not for government participation in the short run, but for a strong movement against current policies". This movement then, in the mind of the SAP comrades, will provide the basis for a "fundamentally different policy",

which the SP is ready to play its part in constructing.⁹ Yes, of course, comrades.

Lastly, Doorbraak (Breakthrough) calls in its commentary on the elections for no illusions in the SP (but expect worse from all the other parties), and for the building of "extra-parliamentary opposition from the bottom up" - code for doing your own thing locally wherever you are active.¹⁰ Commendable for its lack of illusions, but totally insufficient nevertheless.

Way forward

During the whole campaign, the position of the VVD as leader of the rightwing pole was never questioned. I believe the reason for this is more than just the weakness of the other parties (mainly PVV and CDA) and the fact that the previous coalition was implementing an outright VVD agenda. The main reason why the VVD was successful was that it stuck to *political* slogans - as opposed to, for example, the SP, whose election posters just carried the slogan "Now SP", sometimes alongside a photo of Roemer.

This immediately raises the question of programme. The current SP leadership is set on a parliamentary road and as such stands on a programme that is 'realistic'. What is needed is a communist opposition within the SP that fights for a totally different programme - one that aims for the revolutionary transformation of society and in opposition to *all* capitalist policies (not just neoliberal ones). This is a first, seemingly obvious, conclusion that no left group has arrived at.

Maybe this is because there is an added difficulty in the way of forming such an opposition within the SP. One thing the party has retained from its Maoist past is a top-down, bureaucratic structure. Any opposition would therefore have to focus on the democratic right to speak out openly. This in itself is a political fight, and a fight worth taking up, given the position the party holds in the workers' movement. Many trade union activists, for example, are aligned to the SP.

But none of this is enough. Because left currents cannot organise openly in the SP without facing the risk of expulsion, the far left (tiny as it is!) has to overcome its weak, splintered state and come together within a single organisation that *could* make an impact - within the SP and the working class itself. This is a second obvious conclusion that we never hear from any of the groups.

This implies the same *political* fight for democracy - most of the grouplets are in organisational terms simply a smaller version of the bureaucratic perversion seen throughout the international workers' movement. The Dutch left is in that regard little different from its British counterparts. Only if we win the right to openly disagree can we hope to make progress in the struggle for principled unity.

To sum up: the changes in the Dutch political landscape are hardly going to improve the lives of working people and the SP is not going magically conjure up the opposition that is necessary. The far left therefore needs a two-pronged strategy: one that is based on building a left opposition within the SP and, in order to do so effectively, uniting on the basis of an international programme for communism.

Such a strategy would stand a chance of overcoming the false dichotomy between automatically voting for the SP on the one hand and focusing on 'extra-parliamentary action' on the other. It could start to pose a positive alternative: a party-movement that is independent of the state and other classes, internationalist, democratic and committed to a fight for a democratic workers' Europe ●

Notes

1. *Weekly Worker* May 23 2002.
2. <http://nos.nl/artikel/420236-kleine-partijen-weg-bij-kiesdrempel.html>.
3. http://dnpp.ub.rug.nl/dnpp/partijen_in_de_2e_kamer.
4. www.stoproemer.nl.
5. <http://socialisme.nu/blog/nieuws/29575/waarom-sp-stemmen>.
6. <http://socialisme.nu/blog/nieuws/30188/verkiezingsanalyse-linkse-doorbraak-vereist-reele-tegenmacht>.
7. <http://socialisten.net/2075>.
8. <http://socialisten.net/2082>.
9. www.grenzeloos.org/2012/09/12/de-kater-van-de-sp.
10. www.doorbraak.eu/?p=11213.

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.**

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weekly worker

Wipeout or life with the Tories

Remorse and retrenchment

The big story from the Liberal Democrat conference is Nick Clegg's apology for raising student fees - but his party is as wedded to the Tories as ever, argues **Paul Demarty**

It is a common misconception of Catholicism that one can commit all the sins one likes - venal, mortal or whatever - and, so long as one presents a penitent countenance in the confession box, the Lord God will be appeased.

The small print points out, of course, that remorse has to be genuine. The Almighty is likely to twig, in the case of repeat offenders, that he is being taken for a ride. Nick Clegg, we must conclude, does not have the makings of a good Catholic.

Public discourse on the Liberal Democrat conference in Brighton has centred on Clegg's apology for conspiring to raise university tuition fees, in direct contradiction to his party's promises in the run-up to the 2010 general election. It has been lauded, mocked and - inevitably - given a YouTube autotune 'remix' (not as slick as some of them, it must be said).

Almost nothing in his little piece to camera is new: we have already had the 'It was a mistake to make promises that we didn't know we'd be able to keep' line trotted out several times by Clegg, Vince Cable and their flunkies. The only new element is the word 'sorry', which - given the brazen dishonesty of the general line - is somewhat hard to credit. Clegg's apology to students amounts to saying he got a better offer. It was pointed out repeatedly at the time that Clegg's argument was akin to that of a notional thoughtless lover: 'Yes, darling, I know I promised to take you to the movies, but at that time I didn't know the boys would be going to the pub to watch the football.'

That better offer was the prestige and power of office - in an organisation as congenitally opportunistic as the Liberal Democrats, quite an incentive. Students are not stupid: they, like god, know when they are being had. And Clegg's apology has, if anything, inflamed resentment - an NUS poll suggests that less than 8% of students would vote Lib Dem - way behind Labour and the Tories, and also lagging behind the Greens.

His student *mea culpa* may have been met with derision, but Clegg's message to his faithful flock has gone over better. This is clear enough not so much from what *has* taken place in Brighton, but what *has not* - there has been no sign of a rebellion beyond the usual griping from backbenchers and other marginal figures.

Partly this is due to the usual party conference hot air. Both Clegg and Cable have been fulsome in their condemnation of Andrew Mitchell, the Tory chief whip, who verbally abused police officers at Downing Street after they refused to open the main gates to let him out on his bike, directing him instead to the pedestrian exit. Worse even than the pettiness of the dispute, the content of the abuse was fairly clearly directed at the luckless coppers' less privileged class background - "Best you learn your fucking place," he ranted, according to the police report. "You don't run



Nick Clegg: natural Tory

this fucking government ... You're fucking plebs" (eloquence such as that, naturally, can only be learned at Rugby School).

In the first couple of days, you could be forgiven for thinking that the events in Brighton were some sort of school in etiquette, rather than a political conference. Cable was in a particularly good position, having been a grammar school boy himself - and thus a fully certified 'pleb' by British establishment standards.

Yet this is easy money for the embattled Lib Dems. In order to keep the ranks disciplined, it is more and more necessary to find answers to the question, 'So why don't we just go and join the Tories?' Mitchell's astonishing outburst was a gift to Lib Dem ministers from the Bullingdon Club. Clegg and Cable snatched onto it like drowning men onto a mouldy bit of driftwood.

Apart from that, there was a lot of insubstantial mood music. Clegg argued that deficit reduction must surely target the rich as well as the poor in the form of taxation; the hue and cry raised over *that* makes it clear that the notion is unacceptable to

his coalition partners. Vince Cable's speech nodded in the direction of a Keynesian approach, some version of which is increasingly favoured by the financial cognoscenti (the *Financial Times* is glowing in its assessments of Cable's talents).

Cable, it should be conceded, has gotten out *relatively* clean from all this. He was even more directly involved in the tuition fees reverse-ferret, in his position at the department for business, innovation and skills, but Clegg has taken the lion's share of the flak. On the other hand, his stated and frustrated intention - rumbled by undercover journalists - of declaring war on Rupert Murdoch's bid for total control of BSkyB looks less like an embarrassing gaffe and more like prescience. This fits into his carefully cultivated image as an intelligent man of principle. Indeed, some polls suggest that replacing Clegg with Cable at the helm of the Lib Dems would put five percentage points on the party's poll ratings overnight.

Yet all this stuff is basically empty, because in the first instance the Lib Dems are committed to a formally unified economic policy with the

Tories down to 2014, with an option to renew. Senior Lib Dems concede that this deal will last the lifetime of the parliament (beyond that, they are more cagey, but a lot can happen in three years). Cable can huff and puff about stimulus all he likes: inasmuch as he is committed to loyally carrying out policy decided by George Osborne at No11, it is all moot.

Any attempt to *mould* that policy faces a bigger problem: Clegg and Cable are simply in no position to make demands on the Tories. To torpedo important legislation - particularly economic policy - would in effect be to destroy the coalition. If the coalition dies, certainly at the present time, so do the Liberal Democrats. David Cameron has expertly used Clegg and co as a meat shield against public opprobrium. There is every chance that they will be beaten at next year's Euro elections by Ukip; to trigger a general election in the immediate term carries the real risk of completely decimating the yellow benches in the House of Commons.

Osborne has no interest in giving his partners more leverage than strictly necessary to maintain Lib Dem morale at a level sufficient and stop them splitting the coalition. Frankly, he faces more serious problems to his right; the Thatcherite hardliners are perpetually unhappy at the chancellor's timidity in grinding working class living standards down to the desired level, and the reactionary-religious sections of his party are hardly happy with the concessions given to Clegg on 'social issues'. Cameron and Osborne have consistently attempted to play these two forces - the Tory right and the Lib Dems - off against each other. However fraught things sometimes look, it must be conceded that they have done a relatively good job of it so far.

Perversely, this almost plays into the hands of Clegg and Cable. These are people from what used to be called the 'Orange Book' wing of the Liberal

Democrats - thoroughly committed to Thatcherism. Their programme is in reality far closer to Osborne's than they would like to admit. Occasional bust-ups over 'constitutional' issues (the recent farrago over House of Lords reform being one example) aside, their natural home is the Conservative Party. Cameron, all things being equal, will be happy to welcome them in - formally or *de facto* - when the time is clement to do so.

Making predictions in politics is a dangerous business, but still it is difficult to see the Lib Dems surviving as a substantial third party, in their current form, after the next election. On the one side, there is the possibility of a split, which sends Clegg and co into the Tories, while the rump go gentle into that good night. On the other, there is the complete electoral obliteration of the Lib Dems. If Clegg manages to steer a safe course through these waters, we will have to revise our opinion of him and declare him a master statesman.

He certainly does not cut that kind of figure just now. Indeed, whether even the patronage of the Conservatives will be enough to save Clegg's skin as an individual is not certain. This man, it must always be remembered, is hated. He is hated because he looks exactly like what he is - a smug, treacherous turncoat, whose patronising, nice-guy facade is simply not enough any more to hide behind.

In a way, he is guilty of the same sin as Andrew Mitchell. It is all very well to be brought up with absolute contempt for the masses - and to marry that contempt with the vocabulary of Malcolm Tucker - but the "plebs" absolutely must *not* find out. Likewise, total opportunism is a useful selective trait in the primordial swamp of bourgeois politics; but only on condition that it is hidden from the masses. The more Nick Clegg says sorry, the less people believe him ●

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Weekly Worker, Box 928, London WC1N 3XX, UK.

I enclose payment:
Sub £/€ _____
Donation £/€ _____
Total £/€ _____
Date _____

To _____ Bank plc _____

Branch Address _____

Post code _____

Re Account Name _____

Sort code _____ Account No _____

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

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

Signed _____ Name (PRINT) _____

Date _____ Address _____