

weekly worker

Mark Fisher: capitalist realism and the necessity of historical memory

- Economic recovery?
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- Science and oppression

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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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The more effective evil



LETTERS



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

Definitions

I was much amused by Tony Greenstein's statement that I see "class and women's oppression having no relationship with each other" and I find my defence of Andrea Dworkin even more remarkable than Tony does, since I never defended her: I merely pointed out that her political views were not limited to democratising capitalism, as Tony claimed (Letters, October 25). I was, unsurprisingly, already aware that Andrea Dworkin was a Zionist because I can read.

Since Tony's commitment to class politics is undoubted, we can expect his political activities to reflect his good advice in an equal commitment to emphasising the relationship to women's oppression. He might be good enough to furnish us with recent examples.

Tony goes on to describe the "grey areas", where "one person feels pressurised to having sexual intercourse". By what process this pressure is manifest is unclear. Maybe if we rephrase it to include some active verbs and human agency it might become clearer. How about "where one person pressurises the other"? Off the top of your head, Tony, bearing in mind that around 90% of people in this society are heterosexual, and that research (you know, evidence and facts - remember them?) shows around 90% of rape victims know their attacker, one in 12 men admit to using sexual coercion against women and around one in four women disclose being subjected to such coercion, who do you guess is usually applying the pressure?

And these "grey areas" we hear so much about in discussions of sexual violence (and at no other time) - what about them? Rape Crisis projects around the world explain that "grey areas" provide camouflage for coercive men, muddying the water just enough to cloud the judgement of the confused. The legislation is clear - unless you have reasonable belief that your partner consents, stop. Where's the grey area? Neither is it found in Tony's Hollywood idea of the usual behaviour of rape victims. Tony, the behaviour of every fourth woman you meet is the typical behaviour of a rape victim.

The slogan 'the personal is political' is given a comforting interpretation as relating only to demands that can realistically be made on the state. This is understandable, as it distances the systematic exercise of power inequality away from personal relationships and behaviour. But this is the great insight of feminism - that domestic violence (for example) is not a private matter between individuals or a result of personal inadequacy, but one feature of the underlying structure of the whole culture.

Turning to Phil Kent (Letters, October 25), his views are generally quite helpful, but rather confused. Phil says the two Swedish women in the Assange case "didn't feel raped" and suggests this is because they "are committed to casual sex", so have "different psychology". Enjoying casual, anonymous sex with men bears no relationship to a woman's reaction to being raped. Consensual sex, whether with men or women, in a long-term relationship or a brief encounter is enjoyable. If it involves "fear or repulsion" it's probably not consensual. And sex without consent is (all together now) rape.

Since we are all constantly bombarded with misinformation about masked men leaping out of bushes, mythical "grey areas", 'usual behaviour' of rape victims, etc, it's no wonder that a lot of people don't

recognise rape when it happens. The Swedish women went to the police to find out if it was possible to compel Assange to take an HIV test because he had refused their requests to use condoms. They were then informed that because they had not consented to penetration without condoms, Assange had committed rape. Since several people (eg, George Galloway) have contributed to debates on this case, both in this paper and elsewhere, without knowing the legal definition of rape, why should those two women be expected to know?

I agree with Phil that the legal system is wholly inadequate in dealing with most things, particularly sexual violence. There is no alternative available, so we must use this system at present. I would be equally reluctant to entrust the interests of sexually abused women to a group of men drawn from the current left, as their attitudes in this area are, at best, hopelessly inadequate and, at worst, appallingly misogynist.

It would be helpful if the misplaced energy devoted to the defence of accused rapists and pimp-led 'unions' that donate to the Tory Party was focused instead on education about the realities of sexual violence.

Heather Downs
Medway

Tea pots

In comrade Tony Greenstein's letter, he presented a review of how one section of women based on nationality or race viewed the oppression of women of a different national or racial entity. He drew attention to Arab women raped by Jewish men of the Palmach, black slave women raped by white owners in the US deep south and black women raped by white rulers in the Belgian Congo, Rhodesia and South Africa. He then added the role of 'Aryan' and the rape of Jewish women. All this was to demonstrate the errors of "western feminists".

I feel his analysis only encourages the growth of equally problematic issues. If the 'Aryan' women were, irrespective of their class, oppressors of Jewish women, were not 'Aryan' male workers oppressors too? So gender was not a factor, nor was class; it was all race and nationality. Was there no 'Aryan' rape of 'Aryans'? No Jew rape of Jew?

In these events, comrade Greenstein finds no class-conscious women - or dare I say it? - women with any gender solidarity other than in South Africa. In his aim of demonstrating the linkage of rape to oppression and imperialism, he leaves out one major example of mass rape. That is the thousands of rapes committed by the Red Army (a name I believe they retained by theft) in the process of defeating the Nazis. Are we, if not to forgive, at least to forget this crime against humanity, primarily the female of humankind? Were the proletarian Russian women, in their support of the proletarian Russian soldiers, not acting like the 'Aryan' women, white colonialist women and the wives and daughters of the slave-owning Confederates?

Comrade Greenstein says he is "placing rape in a class and not merely a sexual and gender context" and, in my view, this is correct. But, if simply left at that, it becomes a very crude analysis, a form of 'Marxism' reduced to the level of chocolate tea pots. It may be OK for a kids' tea party providing a quick choc boost, but not much use for a full-blown lunch, tea or supper.

Rape and gender issues are far more complex than a simple oppressor/oppressed analysis. Yes, gender conflict is fundamentally a product of class society. My starting point is still old Fred's *The origin of the family, private property and the state*, where he, in my crude description, outlines gender roles

determined by modes of production, the relationships of ownership and exchange of goods. These led to historically traced gender cooperation and conflict. The end to such conflict can only be achieved with the overthrowing of capitalism and social, economic and gender competition and freedom gained through the cooperative commonwealth. But we are not there yet and women, as a gender, need the support of all in fighting, for example, the rapist.

I now turn to comrade Phil Kent. He correctly states that "Bourgeois states are bodies of armed men, backed up by judges and prisons. Communists need to be cautious about supporting their laws." He says that he is "baffled" as to why we would rely on a rape law "to protect women's safety" rather than "arguing for something more effective", arguing that "we should have confidence in the improbability of human nature and the patience to see it through ..."

How long do the victims of rape have to wait until human nature under capitalism has improved to a position where women's safety is no longer a problem?

He asks why "non-rape denialists ... despair in human nature?" I cannot comment as a 'non-rape denialist' - only as someone who lives in a capitalist world, where rape, genocide, slavery, imperialism and war exist. I am aware that the opposites of these also exist within society. But the filth of capitalism, in all its forms, can only be got rid of under socialism. Yes, we should campaign for alternatives and improvements in the 'criminal justice system'. I admit, reluctantly and with a certain amount of despair, that I have no answer to those who demand the removal of rapists from general society other than the already-mentioned change of society.

As to the Assange case, comrade Kent says it was not about rape. Everything must be OK then. I didn't know that. I restate my own position. I do not know what Assange did or did not do. I do know that two women say he committed some sort of abuse involving sex. There must be *no* removal to Sweden - we must ensure there are *no* actions allowed that would get him out of the embassy - and an independent, labour movement-led investigation into the charges against him.

But I am at a total loss on seeing the following statement by comrade Kent: "It is strange that we should be talking about rape now, when it was the first problem solved by our species." He then seems to contradict himself when he says, "Sometimes to solve something ..." - didn't he claim that rape had already been "solved"? It is "the process itself that produces the answer and that process must come out of a belief in human nature, not reliance on the culture of punishment".

I will not pretend to have answers to all the immediate problems posed by rape, but I'm sure that platitudes about human nature will not work. I am sure the only lasting and complete solution lies in socialism, where humankind will stand head and shoulders above its present position under capitalism.

For me, the most telling sentence in comrade Greenstein's letter was this: "The fact is that white women were part of the oppressor society and also complicit in the oppression of both black women and men." I fail to see the relevance of this. Is it to say the oppressor class oppresses as a class, and contains both men and women? I would suggest this is a given, a part of the ABC of class analysis. Is it a call for the working class to act as a class and overthrow the oppressor? Is it a reminder to recognise that a significant part of the struggle is the fight against the attacks on working class women,

which ruling class women do not suffer in a similar way? That too is something I have no problem with. But that does not remove the duty, as a workers' movement, to tackle issues such as rape, abortion, female circumcision and others that cross the class-gender lines within society.

Terry Burns
email

Sorry

Thanks to Terry Burns (Letters, October 25) for clarifying his position and correcting my misinterpretation of it in my letter of October 18. On the basis of these corrections, I clearly had the wrong impression, for which I have no problem in apologising.

David Douglass
South Shields

Wrong again

Nick Rogers again misunderstands fundamental Marxist concepts - here value and exchange value (Letters, October 25).

Nick says: "In the opening pages of that work Marx defines value as the unity of use-value and exchange-value." Marx said no such thing. Marx defines the *commodity* as the unity of use-value and exchange-value.

In chapter 1, Marx writes: "A thing can be a use-value, without having value. This is the case whenever its utility to man is not due to labour." In other words, what gives it value is the fact that it is the product of human labour. How much value? The amount of labour time required for its production. "A use-value, or useful article, therefore, has value only because human labour in the abstract has been embodied or materialised in it. How, then, is the magnitude of this value to be measured? Plainly, by the quantity of the value-creating substance, the labour, contained in the article." Note that Marx does not say 'commodity', but only "use-value, or useful article". That is because a thing may both be a use-value and possess value (ie, be the product of human labour) without being a commodity (ie, without being an exchange-value).

Marx writes: "A thing can be useful, and the product of human labour, without being a commodity. Whoever directly satisfies his wants with the produce of his own labour creates, indeed, use-values, but not commodities." That is the reality of all human production prior to generalised commodity production. Marx gives the example of the payments made by peasants as rent: "The mediaeval peasant produced quit-rent-corn for his feudal lord and tithe-corn for his parson."

Does Nick deny that these payments were payments of value? Marx did not doubt that, although these payments did not represent exchange-value, they were payments of value; nor that the value was measured by the labour time expended. Marx writes: "The whole mystery of commodities, all the magic and necromancy that surrounds the products of labour as long as they take the form of commodities, vanishes therefore, so soon as we come to other forms of production."

He continues: "But for the very reason that personal dependence forms the groundwork of society, there is no necessity for labour and its products to assume a fantastic form different from their reality. They take the shape, in the transactions of society, of services in kind and payments in kind. Here the particular and natural form of labour - and not, as in a society based on production of commodities, its general abstract form - is the immediate social form of labour. Compulsory labour is just as properly measured by time as commodity-producing labour; but every serf knows that what he expends in the service of his lord is a

definite quantity of his own personal labour-power."

Nick misreads Marx's statement, therefore, that "it is only a historically specific epoch of development which presents the labour expended in the production of a useful article as an objective property of that article: ie, as its value". Marx is not saying that objects prior to this time do not have value, but that it is only when commodity production becomes generalised that this value is presented as being an objective property of the article - ie, that commodity fetishism arises!

In fact, it is commodity fetishism that Nick is guilty of. Value is *not* an objective property of the commodity, as Nick suggests, but a measure of the labour time expended upon its production. The commodity is merely a vessel within which that labour is contained. Where Nick believes that value is something specific to the commodity, and that what is happening is the exchange of commodities, Marx says this is an illusion: what is really being exchanged, as with all previous forms of production, is human labour. It's in order to expose the illusion of commodity fetishism that Marx examines value in non-commodity-producing modes of production.

Nick's undialectical view of time and history leads him to view things as discrete blocks, sealed off by Chinese walls from what has gone before and what comes after. So the law of value, like value itself, for him has no process of evolution or dissolution. It springs, like Minerva, ready formed into history alongside capitalism and disappears in the same way. It is as though he has never read chapter 3 of *Capital*, on the development of money, where Marx sets out its role as a universal equivalent form of value. He writes that money first emerges amongst nomadic tribes. If, as Nick claims, value is specific to capitalism, how does he explain the circulation of coins as symbols of value in antiquity?

When Marx describes Robinson Crusoe's calculations, measuring the labour time spent producing various use values, what does Nick think Marx means when he then says: "... those relations contain all that is essential to the determination of value"? He does not mean value in the sense Nick understands it as "an objective property" only of a commodity, because a requirement for a commodity is that it is exchanged, and Robinson has no-one to exchange with.

The real situation is given by Marx when he writes: "The value of commodity A is qualitatively expressed by the fact that commodity B is directly exchangeable with it. Its value is quantitatively expressed by the fact that a definite quantity of B is exchangeable with a definite quantity of A. In other words, the value of a commodity obtains independent and definite expression by taking the form of exchange value."

Marx sets out the dialectical relation by which value, embodied in all use-values, as products of human labour, across all modes of production, becomes exchange-value, as a consequence of historical development, resulting in the production of commodities.

It is by this historical process that "the value of a commodity obtains independent and definite expression, by taking the form of exchange-value". It could not have found independent expression as exchange-value unless it already existed within the commodity as value. It is only in the process of exchange that a use-value becomes a commodity, and that the value contained within it is expressed as an exchange-value.

Nick also refers to the wrong quotation from the *Critique of the*

Gotha programme in this regard. The relevant quote to which I was referring was where Marx refers to “a communist society, not as it has *developed* on its own foundations, but, on the contrary, just as it *emerges* from capitalist society ... Here, obviously, the same principle prevails as that which regulates the exchange of commodities, as far as this is exchange of equal values. Content and form are changed, because under the altered circumstances no-one can give anything except his labour, and because, on the other hand, nothing can pass to the ownership of individuals, except individual means of consumption. But, as far as the distribution of the latter among the individual producers is concerned, the same principle prevails as in the exchange of commodity equivalents: a given amount of labour in one form is exchanged for an equal amount of labour in another form.”

I have replied to Nick’s other letter about the temporal single-system interpretation (TSSI) on my blog at <http://boffyblog.blogspot.co.uk/2012/10/filleting-nick-rogers-latest-argument.html>.

Arthur Bough
email

Read it

I agree with the bulk of what Anne Mc Shane argues in her piece on the United Left Alliance, but I must correct her critique of my election statement (‘Sectarian self-annihilation’, October 25).

Anne claims that my election statement “makes no argument for democracy, working class or otherwise”. She might well take the time to read it a bit more closely, as I explicitly argued that “Big business (both Irish-based and the multinationals) must be expropriated and placed under democratic control of new working class organs of direct participatory democracy.”

She then goes on to argue in reference to me that, “Contrary to what he argues, we should not be out to ‘salvage’ the ULA - we need to transcend it.” I am not proposing to salvage the ULA in and of itself. What I actually argued was: “The key task for the upcoming period should be trying to salvage *what we can from* the ULA for the project of building a new workers’ party” and I then went on to outline the general revolutionary framework I believe such a new party should have.

For anyone interested in the real content of my election statement, please see <http://goo.gl/GHXXg>.

Alan Gibson
email

Day of action

The following statement was received from the O/C of the republican prisoners of war in Maghaberry Gaol, Co Antrim, in October 2012:

“We, the republican prisoners of war incarcerated in Maghaberry prison camp, wish to send greetings to those assembled all over the world today protesting on our behalf. At present we are engaged in a ‘dirty protest’ to end the archaic practice of strip-searching and 23-hour lock-down, and to secure conditions befitting of prisoners of war. The age-old British policy of criminalisation of Irish republican prisoners is in full swing in Maghaberry and as always we, as republicans, will oppose this in any way we can.

“We have been on this current phase of protest now for over 18 months and we see little movement from our captors. The conditions we endure are far from humane or acceptable, yet we will continue in our struggle until our demands are met. We have a duty to all republicans and to those prisoners who may follow us.

“We find ourselves incarcerated due to British rule in Ireland and are part of the broader struggle for Irish

independence. We take heart that Irish republicanism is alive and vibrant, kept alive by people like you. As republican prisoners of war we will not shy away from our duty and we salute all those in Ireland and abroad who work towards the independence of Ireland by any means necessary.

“The support we have received from those across the world makes us more determined and resolute. We are indeed grateful, and ask for your continued support and activism on our behalf. We applaud those of you who take to the streets all over the world in protest at the detention of true republicans.

“We will continue to resist all attempts by the British government to criminalise us and our struggle and, with your continued support, we are confident of victory. Onwards to the republic!”

International Coordination Committee
email

No deportations

Deportations of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) asylum-seekers are continuing despite government pledges to ensure fairer treatment.

Traumatised refugees who have fled homophobic intimidation and violence should not be subjected to removal to countries where they are at risk of discrimination, harassment, assault, arrest, imprisonment, torture and murder. These deportations violate David Cameron’s and Nick Clegg’s commitment to a fairer deal for LGBT refugees fleeing homophobic and transphobic persecution.

The coalition government pledged: “We will stop the deportation of asylum-seekers who have had to leave particular countries because their sexual orientation.” In 2010, David Cameron personally promised: “Those Africans seeking asylum on the basis of sexual orientation and at real risk of persecution in their home countries should be allowed to stay in the UK.”

In an apparent bid to reduce asylum numbers, the home office is sometimes resorting to the despicable tactic of refusing to believe that refugees are gay, even when they provide evidence of same-sex relationships and witness statements from their current or former partners. If this evidence is not good enough, how are refugees supposed to prove their sexual orientation? It is an impossible task. The UK Border Agency seems to be making it deliberately impossible - presumably in order to boost the numbers being deported to satisfy the anti-asylum lobby. This is shocking and shameful.

No-one in government is taking responsibility to end this injustice. Ministers are doing little or nothing to stop this ongoing unfair treatment of LGBT refugees. The UK is not honouring its obligations under the Refugee Convention.

I have been working with a Malawian lesbian refugee, Esther C. She was scheduled for deportation twice, despite seeking a judicial review of the decision to refuse her asylum. What kind of justice system attempts to deport people before their cases are heard? Esther has now won a last-minute reprieve, but this was only due to a determined campaign to save her from deportation.

On October 16, Alice N, whose asylum claim had been dismissed on the grounds she and her female partner had not done enough to prove her lesbianism, was deported to Cameroon, despite the well known anti-gay witch-hunt that is happening in that country. Just over two weeks ago, a gay Nigerian man, Olalekan M Ayelokun, who provided testimonies of his homosexuality from male sexual partners, was deported after a judge refused to believe he was gay. What else is he supposed to do to prove his homosexuality?

We are helping many genuine LGBT refugees, who tell heart-breaking stories of discrimination and violence in their home countries. These are very vulnerable people who have suffered greatly. They’ve shown great courage, given their persecution in their country of origin and their subsequent mistreatment here in Britain. These people have come to the UK expecting a safe haven, only to be thrown into a detention centre and treated like a common criminal. When they protest against the appalling way they are treated, they can face punitive action and be subjected to fast-track deportation.

Many LGBT asylum applicants have poor legal representation. The legal aid system does not provide solicitors with sufficient funds to prepare a proper case.

We are calling on the coalition government to reform the asylum system to end the deportation of LGBT people who have a sincere, well-founded fear of persecution.

Peter Tatchell

Peter Tatchell Foundation

Up yours

The upcoming conference, ‘Up the Anti: Reclaim the Future’, taking place on December 1 at Queen Mary University in London, has been co-sponsored by the Platypus Affiliated Society, along with the Anti-Capitalist Initiative, *Ceasefire*, Globalise Resistance, *New Left Project*, *The Occupied Times*, Pluto Press and *Red Pepper*. However, recently, at the urging of conference speaker Jamie Allison, who claimed pressure from members of the *Historical Materialism* journal editorial board to exclude Platypus, the other sponsoring organisations voted to remove Platypus’s sponsorship of the event. This was done with one notable abstention, by *The Occupied Times*.

The red herring was Platypus’s publication of translations of articles by ‘Anti-German’ tendencies, which was regarded as political endorsement of the articles’ views. In the Stalinist manner of ‘amalgamation’, Platypus has been accused of guilt by association. But, as readers of the *Weekly Worker* know, Platypus’s mission is to “host the conversation on the death of the left that would not otherwise take place”, which means including perspectives of great disagreement that claim to be on the ‘left’.

Such action as the involuntary withdrawal of Platypus’s sponsorship by the Up the Anti conference organisers, alas, is typical of conditions on the dead ‘left’ today. We can only hope that such actions will *not* claim our future!

Chris Cutrone

Platypus

Rebuild tax

I agree with Mike Macnair’s article where he says the left must rebuild the movement (*Weekly Worker* October 18).

Recently, on several left websites, there has been much discussion about tax avoidance by the super- and not so super-rich and corporations such as Amazon, Starbucks, EBay, etc. David Cameron has also implied that George Osborne will include anti-tax avoidance measures in the December autumn statement to parliament. The left is facing an open goal here.

Rather than wasting time arguing for a general strike, the left would do better spending its time, money and energy in campaigning against tax avoidance.

John Smithee
email

Good job

Good job on the Scottish Independence article (‘Independence from what?’, October 25). I like what you say.

Christopher Hastings
email

ACTION

CPGB podcasts

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

London Communist Forum

Sunday November 4: No forum.

Sunday November 11, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Calthorpe Arms (upstairs), 252 Gray’s Inn Road, London WC1. ‘Bringing back Bolshevism to the Bolshevik revolution’. Speaker: Lars T Lih. Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesday November 6, 6.15pm: ‘Some current issues in human origins research’. Speaker: Chris Stringer. St Martin’s Community Centre, 43 Carol Street, London NW1 (two minutes from Camden Town tube). £10 waged, £5 low-waged, £3 unwaged.

Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: www.radicalanthropologygroup.org.

Against Islamophobia

Friday November 2, 6pm: Public meeting, East London Mosque, 46-92 Whitechapel Road, London E1.

Organised by Islamophobia Awareness Month: www.facebook.com/IAMonth.

Free Palestine

Friday November 2, 7pm: Public meeting on 95th anniversary of Balfour Declaration, Friends Meeting House, 173 Euston Road, London NW1. Admission £3.

Organised by Haringey Justice for Palestinians: www.hjfp.org.uk.

Troops out of Afghanistan

Monday November 5, 6.30pm: Public meeting: ‘Afghanistan: what exit strategy?’ Committee room 9, House of Commons, London SW1. Speakers include: Paul Flynn MP, Jeremy Corbyn MP. Chaired by Caroline Lucas MP.

Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk.

Shut down Guantanamo

Tuesday November 6, 6pm: Demonstration, US embassy, Grosvenor Square, London W1.

Organised by London Guantanamo Campaign: <http://londonguantanamocampaign.blogspot.co.uk>.

Witness from Palestine

Tuesday November 6, 7pm: Public meeting. SCRSS, 320 Brixton Road, London, SW9. Leah Levane talks about her recent visit to the West Bank.

Organised by Lambeth and Wandsworth PSC: www.lwpssc.org.uk.

Palestine solidarity

Tuesday November 6, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Centrecom, 602 North Row, Milton Keynes.

Organised by Milton Keynes PSC: miltonkeynespsc@gmail.com.

Radical alternative to austerity

Wednesday November 7, 8pm: Public meeting, Great Hall, Leyton town hall, Adelaide Road, London E10. With John McDonnell MP and John Cryer MP.

Organised by Leyton and Wanstead CLP: 020-8556 5185 (Andrew Lock).

Left Front Art

Thursday November 8, 6.30pm: LGBTQI forum, London Queer Social Centre, 42 Braganza Street, London SE17 (entrance Doddington Grove). ‘Beyond anti-capitalism’ - discussion framed by Ronan McNern (Queer Resistance).

Organised by Left Front Art: mabuse@mabuse.plus.com.

Historical Materialism

Thursday November 8-Sunday November 11: Academic conference. School of Oriental and African Studies, Thornhaugh Street, London WC1.

Organised by *Historical Materialism*: www.historicalmaterialism.org.

Labour Representation Committee

Saturday November 10, 10am to 5pm: Annual conference, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1.

Organised by Labour Representation Committee: <http://l-r-c.org.uk/events/detail/lrc-agm-2012>.

Socialist films

Sunday November 11, 11am: Screening, Renoir Cinema, Brunswick Square, London WC1. Edward Milner’s *Vietnam after the fire* (UK 1989, 105 minutes).

Organised by London Socialist Film Co-op: www.socialistfilm.blogspot.com.

Media and war

Saturday November 17, 12 noon to 5pm: International conference, Ian Gulland lecture theatre, Goldsmiths, University of London, New Cross, London SE14. £5 admission. Free for students with NUS card. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: mediaconf@stopwar.org.uk.

Grassroots Left

Saturday November 17, 12 noon to 4pm: National conference, Comfort Inn, Station Street, Birmingham B5.

Organised by Grassroots Left: www.grassrootsleft.org.

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.

ECONOMY

Bumping along the bottom

Whilst the UK economy is officially no longer in a recession, writes **Eddie Ford**, it remains in deep trouble



Things will get worse

Much to the relief of the sweating coalition government, the Office for National Statistics released figures on October 25 which showed that the UK economy had grown by one percent in the third quarter of 2012, in contrast to the 0.4% contraction in the previous quarter. Phew. This appears to represent the fastest growth in five years, ending nine months of shrinkage, during which the economy fell under the heavy hammer blows of austerity measures, high inflation and the ongoing euro zone crisis.

According to the ONS survey, service-sector output - which accounts for 80% of the economy - expanded by 1.3% in the third quarter and is now above its pre-recession peak. Making the critical difference. In fact, this service sector increase during the third quarter of 2012 alone was greater than in the entire period between the summer of 2008 and the second quarter of this year - though this is almost certainly a one-off or 'freak' occurrence unlikely to be repeated.

Jubilant headlines declared that the double-dip recession was officially over. Rejoice. Naturally, chancellor George Osborne welcomed the news. Though there is still a "long way to go", he said, the statistics show that the government is "on the right track" - yet another sign that the economy is "healing".

Some are also trying to take comfort from Bank of England

figures, which show that consumers in the UK took on £1.7 billion of debt in September, including the biggest surge in *unsecured* borrowing in more than four and a half years. Meaning that individuals borrowed £0.9 billion during September (unlike the summer, when borrowing remained static in June-July and net repayments totalled £163 million in August), whilst also spending £0.3 billion on the never-never using credit cards - with an additional £0.5 billion rise in mortgage lending boosting the figures. So the number of mortgages approved in September rose to 94,385 from 90,023 in August and the number of loan approvals for house purchases reached 50,024 - higher than the previous six-month average of 48,832, though still roughly half the long-run average of 90,000 to 95,000.

Bounce-back?

Of course, the less benign truth is that a run of meagre wage 'rises' below the rate of inflation, and a switch in emphasis across commercial and industrial employers to part-time working, has forced low- and middle-income households to increasingly rely on debt in the run-up to Christmas. The same old story - buy, buy, buy and be merry. Nevertheless, the recent crop of statistics provide a more encouraging backdrop for Osborne to deliver his autumn statement in December. Maybe put a little festive smile on his face.

But the reality behind the figures is much less flattering for the government. The ONS and many others pointed out that the growth in GDP had been artificially boosted by two short-term factors: the Olympic Games, which took place in July-August, and the effect of June's extra bank holiday for the queen's diamond jubilee celebrations (as well as unusually bad weather, you could argue). For instance, the ONS has estimated that the extra bank holiday wiped 0.5% off growth in the second quarter, meaning there would inevitably be some sort of automatic 'bounce-back' effect in the third. It is surely only a matter of time before a rightwing think tank advocates the abolition of all 'unproductive' bank holidays, which only encourage laziness and sloth. As for the Olympics, the ONS roughly calculates that ticket sales in the quarter increased GDP by a whopping 0.2%. The report also mentioned in passing the existence of undefined "other effects", which are "impossible to quantify" - alien transmissions?

Actually, the Olympic statistics are in some respects an accounting sleight of hand. A decision was made, for whatever reason, to include *all* the Olympics income as counting towards economic output in the third quarter - regardless of when and how it was spent. But there is scant evidence to suggest that the Olympics resulted in the boost to tourism that the organisers

and the government hoped for. If anything, some parts of the economy (online shopping, for example) *suffered*, as people sat on their sofas watching the medal-winning exploits of Jessica Ennis and Bradley Wiggins rather than doing their real patriotic duty - ie, shop, shop, shop.

In other words, the UK economy is at best bumping painfully along the bottom, along with the coalition's political fortunes. The real 'growth' figure for the last quarter - once you remove the Olympics/diamond jubilee factors - comes to a less than impressive 0.3% - the same for the year as a whole. Perhaps not something to rejoice about, after all. Especially when you recall the 0.8% growth predicted by the Office of Budget Responsibility as recently as March. Indeed, in June 2010 the OBR predicted 2.8% growth for this year - which now seems like a fantastic figure. Then again, the OBR had confidently predicted that investment would "rebound" from 0.7% this year to 6.4% next year when in fact over the last year investment has grown just 0.3% and the government's policy framework is positively deterring major infrastructure projects in energy generation, rail and airport expansion, broadband, etc. Perhaps it should be renamed the Office for Science Fiction Speculation.

But nothing can alter the fact that GDP is still more than three percent short of its pre-crisis peak. The ONS

informs us that the economy had contracted by 6.4% between the start of 2008 and the middle of 2009, and had since recovered about half of that lost output. Or, to put it another way, the level of output in the third quarter of 2012 was almost exactly the same as it had been in the third quarter of 2011. It will take a year of *genuine* and robust growth simply to return the economy to where it was during the period between the run on Northern Rock in September 2007 and the collapse of Lehman Brothers a year later. And it will take at least a decade to make up even half the output lost over the past four and a half years, given that GDP is 13%-14% below where it would have been, had growth continued at its pre-recession trend of 2.5% a year.

Remember too, extremely unpleasant thought though it is, that some 80% of the spending cuts are still to come. We are not at the beginning of the end, as suggested by George Osborne and David Cameron, but instead at the end of the beginning. None other than the International Monetary Fund - well, its managing director at least, Christine Lagarde - admitted earlier this month that the impact that austerity has had on growth (or non-growth) had been drastically "underestimated". Those pesky fiscal multipliers. Barring a miracle, more demand, not less, will be sucked out of the economy in 2013-14 than in 2012, as the chancellor's fiscal

tightening intensifies. Economics of the madhouse.

All this will be played out in a crisis-ridden global economy, first and foremost the *deepening* recession in the euro zone. Eurostat announced on October 31 that there are now 18.49 million people out of work in the euro area, with an extra 146,000 joining the ranks of the unemployed in September. Across the European Union as a whole, there are now 25.75 million jobless, up by 169,000 since August. Grimly, numerous business surveys suggest that firms are becoming increasingly reluctant to hire - thus the euro zone unemployment rate looks set to rise even further. Up to breaking point.

On top of all that there is the slowing of growth in China and the possibility that the United States could soon fall off the edge of a 'fiscal cliff'. As things stand now, America will wake up on January 1 to tax increases and spending cuts worth four percent of GDP - perhaps enough to plunge the entire global economy into deep recession, or worse. Then if Greece gets kicked out of the euro or Spain goes bust...

Unsurprisingly, the more intelligent bourgeois economists are feeling distinctly gloomy. Howard Archer of IHS Global Insight believes that the UK economy is "far from out of the woods", with "further relapses highly possible" in the face of still tough domestic and global conditions. Hard to deny. The chief economist at the Institute of Directors, Graeme Leach, is "uncertain where we're going", as "you can't see the road ahead through the rear-view mirror". More bluntly, Spencer Dale - who also sits on the Bank of England's monetary policy committee - thinks that the Olympic boost had been "even greater than we had expected" and hence there will be a "very sharp fallback" in growth in the coming

fourth quarter. For Dale, the UK was likely to remain stuck in "relatively weak" expansion, with recent increases in energy bills - plus a hike in food prices - likely to put further pressure on households.

Furthermore, government efforts to talk up the economy were sabotaged by news of the closure of the Ford Transit plant in Southampton, as well as cuts at the firm's plant in Dagenham - with the loss of 1,400 skilled jobs. Factory orders also fell in October. As revealed by a Confederation of British Industry survey of industrial trends, the total order book balance dropping to -23 this month, from -8 in September. It seems the 'recovery' is over even before it began. In the words of a senior economist at the BNP Paribas investment bank, these figures were "shocking" and blew away "any hope" that the UK manufacturing sector would somehow "dodge the bullet" from the chronic weakness in euro zone manufacturing.

To use an analogy that has almost become a cliché - but no less true for that - the British economy is facing years of Japan-like stagnation, a lost decade. Nor can you rule out the chance the UK will shortly suffer its first ever triple-dip recession. What a glorious legacy.

Bypassed

Even if the UK economy did magically undergo a period of rapid growth, the working class will not benefit - maybe the opposite. Or so argues - predicts - the Commission on Living Standards in a report published on October 31. The commission was set up by the Resolution Foundation, run by Gavin Kelly, a former senior advisor to Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. The commission includes the managing director of British Gas, Phil Bentley, the chairman of Lloyds, Win Bischoff, and Paul Johnson, the director of the Institute for Fiscal

Studies - not to mention the soon-to-be general secretary of the TUC, Frances O'Grady, and a director of Netmums, Sally Russell.

Hardly a bunch of radical lefty firebrands, you can safely say. Anyway, in their report they pose a direct question: can a tide rise with all boats? Answer - not very likely.

The study outlines how living standards could stagnate for the next 10 years or more, saying it is "now entirely possible" they will be no higher in 2020 than they were in 2000 and that millions of poor and middle-income households may be "bypassed" by any putative economic recovery. Its authors lay the blame on the "demise" of administrative and manufacturing jobs in the UK economy and warn that high unemployment will continue to depress wages. As has happened in many other countries, they expect a "hollowing out" of middle-income jobs in the UK - forecasting that there will be two million new senior and professional posts created by 2020, plus 400,000 "basic service and elementary jobs". At the same time, maybe 800,000 mid-level administrative and manufacturing jobs could be lost. On "current trends", we read, the outlook for the bottom half of the working population is "bleak" - even if some form of growth returns.

Interestingly, the report contains an analysis of why incomes were able to carry on rising - for most households - for as long as they did. In their view, incomes in the lower half still grew up until the current financial crisis only because of two factors - higher tax credits and more women going out to work. Therefore, on average, women brought in 14% of earnings in low- to middle-income households in 1968. By 2008 that had risen to 37%, while the male share had fallen to 63%. Over the same period, they contend,

the share of the total income - after tax - that came from tax credits or benefits rose from 8% to 18%. Tax credits did even more work in the years just before the crisis. Between 2003 and 2008, employment and other non-government income for these kinds of households fell by £570 a year, on average. That was offset, however, by a £730-a-year rise in tax credits and benefits.

Now, of course, the coalition government is launching an assault on such benefits - they cannot be afforded, apparently. Living standards will drop as a result. Bitingly, the report notes that only the US has seen a larger rise in income inequality than the UK since the 1970s. Therefore we have a relatively high share of workers languishing on very low pay, which for the commission means an hourly wage of less than two-thirds of the median.

The commission's report quickly follows, of course, an analysis into 'wellbeing' published on October 23 by the ONS. This showed that net national income (NNI) per head - considered by many to be a much superior guide to real living standards than GDP, etc - held up in the early stages of the recession, but has continued to drop as a result of the squeeze on family budgets from rising prices, high unemployment and stagnating wages. Living standards have been viciously "slashed", pure and simple. Income per head, taking inflation into account, had fallen by more than 13% between the first three months of 2008 - when the economy peaked - and the second quarter of 2012. Over the same time frame, GDP per head fell by 7%.

In the opinion of the ONS, the decline in living standards has been more pronounced and longer lasting than in the UK's two previous recessions in the early 1980s and early 1990s. Stating the obvious

really. NNI dropped by around 6% in the slump of the early 1980s, but was back to its pre-recession peak within three years. In the early 1990s, the decline was a more modest 4%, and the lost ground had been recouped in two and a half years - mainly due to unemployment not rising to the same extent as in the previous recession and historically low interest rates reducing mortgage payments for those lucky enough to be on tracker loans. But in contrast to the recovery from the 1990s recession, the study explained, as the economy emerged from the contraction that started in 2008, real household incomes began to fall - a downwards trend that continued into 2012 with the relentless increase in fuel, utility and food bills. Screwed, even under the best scenario.

In conclusion, the Resolution Foundation moots a series of rather unspectacular measures to redistribute income and wealth. These include more state subsidies for cheap or free childcare; cutting the national insurance contributions paid by workers aged 55 or over; ensuring that the government's forthcoming universal credit system is as generous to second earners in a family as it will be to first earners; switching child tax credit from parents of older children to those with younger ones; reducing council tax bills for cheap properties by increasing the tax on expensive ones, and so on. The changes which actually cost money - god forbid - will be funded, the foundation optimistically claims, by cutting tax relief for top earners and means-testing benefits which are currently universal, such as winter fuel allowance.

Frankly, there is far more chance of George Osborne turning into Father Christmas than measures such as these reversing the recession ●

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KURDISTAN

Hunger strike reaches critical stage

More than 700 Kurdish political prisoners have been on hunger strike in Turkey since September 12: ie, more than 50 days. The first group of more than 300 have reached the critical time where the adverse affects on their health could be permanent.

At the start, the hunger-strikers stated their aims as follows:

1. End the isolation of comrade Abdullah Öcalan on the prison island of İmralı.
2. End the ban on mother-tongue education for Kurdish pupils.
3. End the ban on using Kurdish in defence statements at criminal courts.

As may be remembered, both comrade Öcalan's family and his solicitors were prevented from visiting him at İmralı prison for over a year, using paltry pretexts such as "adverse weather and sea conditions" and a "mechanical breakdown" of the shuttle boat. His younger brother was finally allowed to visit him on September 21, and subsequently the concern over comrade Öcalan's health reached international audiences. However, since then no further access has been permitted.

After a spring and summer of increased guerrilla activity, when Kurdish fighters attempted to set up permanent bases within the boundaries of Turkey, there were hundreds of deaths and as a result prospects of a negotiated settlement started to look quite slim. The developments in the Syrian Kurdistan, where Kurds have suddenly assumed control of a wide swathe of land along the Turkish border, have ended any enthusiasm

among sections of the AKP government for such a settlement. At present the government seems adamant in its unaccommodating attitude towards any talks with the PKK and its recognised leader, and refuses to allow comrade Öcalan to express his opinions to his followers and to Turkish public opinion.

After the much vaunted 'democratisation programme' grudgingly implemented by the AKP government, Kurdish-language teaching became a school option, with dictionaries and course books prepared. In practice, however, many schools were unable to find trained teachers or sufficient pupils to start the courses, with many families scared of being stigmatised if they opted for their children to take up Kurdish. So for most Kurds mother-tongue education remains unavailable.

Since April 2009, when 2,000 alleged members of Öcalan's Union of Communities in Kurdistan (KCK) were detained in a single sweep, more than 8,000 people have been arrested and about 4,000 are still held, accused of being members of an illegal organisation. Those detained include elected members of parliament, mayors, municipal council members in several cities and towns, lawyers, trade unionists, teachers, academics and human rights activists.

During the various trials the defendants have not been allowed to speak Kurdish and many have been forcibly removed from court when they attempted to do so. A good number have been convicted and sentenced to lengthy prison terms

without having been able to present a defence. Their cases are now going before the supreme court of appeal.

The AKP government and the mainstream media controlled by the Islamists have employed a news embargo on the hunger strikes, and news coverage has appeared in the press only when, for example, a demonstration has been crushed by the police.

Facing the onslaught of the state for its support of the hunger-strikers, the Democratic Society Congress called a "day of total resistance" on October

30 in support of their demands and to prevent their deaths. The action in the Kurdish provinces of eastern and south-eastern Turkey was met by oppressive measures on the part of the state. However, in many places the courage and determination shown by protestors resulted in police lines being broken, and impromptu marches were turned into mass demonstrations.

In Istanbul, under the benevolent eyes of the police, fascist thugs attacked people on their way to one of the demonstrations and several people were stabbed (more up-to-date

information and photos are available on the website of the Firat news agency at en.firatajans.com, or on the Firat Facebook page). There have also been many solidarity actions in major European cities, including London.

It remains to be seen whether the hunger strikes and mass demonstrations will be enough to force the AKP government to abandon its obstinate stance on a negotiated settlement, or whether instead there will be an autumn of mass funerals.

Esen Uslu



Abdullah Öcalan: in isolation

USA**Obama: will attack the working class**

The more effective evil

Barack Obama hardly represents a rampart against Republican extremism, as some on the left still maintain. **Jim Creegan** looks at the state of play in the final week of the election campaign

When in March a reporter asked an advisor of Mitt Romney if the Republican presidential candidate was not tacking too far to the right in the primaries to win the presidential election, Eric Fehrstrom replied that the post-primary campaign would be “like Etch a Sketch - you can shake it up and we start all over again”.

Fehrstrom spoke on behalf of a candidate whose political career has depended heavily on the use of the above-named drawing toy with an erasable screen. To capture the Republican nomination, he had already morphed from the ‘moderate’ Republican governor of liberal Massachusetts into the self-described “severe conservative” playing for the allegiance of the party’s far-right base.

Now, for the three televised presidential debates held in October, the nominee shape-shifted yet again. Gone was the Tea Party firebrand, for whom refusing to rescind Bush’s tax cuts for the rich was a matter of rock-bottom principle; in his place on the platform stood a Romney anxious to assure a viewing audience of nearly 70 million (in language vague enough to avoid reneging on his earlier pledge) that the top 5% will continue as now to pay 60% of federal income taxes under his plan.

In place of the man who had praised as a model for the nation Arizona’s ‘stop and frisk’ law, permitting police to detain anyone suspected of being an illegal alien and demand proof of citizenship, stood a candidate who emphasised that he had no wish to round up aliens, and even thought that the more worthy among them should have a way to become citizens. The candidate who had earlier spoken of a possible unilateral nuclear strike against Iran now affirmed

his commitment to “peaceful and diplomatic means”, at least to begin with. And, instead of repeating his original criticism of Obama for setting a withdrawal date from Afghanistan, Romney now affirmed his intention, if elected, to abide firmly by the scheduled 2014 departure deadline.

The newly unveiled moderate Mitt put himself forward as the saviour of a middle class, “crushed during the last four years” of the Obama administration, which, he said, offers nothing but more of the same in a second term. He reiterated his commitment to reducing the federal deficit and promised to create 12 million new jobs. Apart from getting tough on Chinese “currency manipulation” and drilling for more oil on federal lands, he was vague on specific means to these ends. But he asked the American people to trust that his decades as a successful CEO have given him the know-how to get the job done.

Taken aback by the new Romney, and perhaps a little groggy from the mountain altitude of the first debate venue of Denver, Colorado, Obama turned in a semi-comatose performance, which cost him dearly in the opinion polls. By the second debate, however, he seemed to have regained his composure (though not his wide polling-number lead). There, he sounded the note that he has struck repeatedly on the campaign trail ever since, and hopes will carry him through to the election: pointing out the yawning discrepancies between Romney’s currently proclaimed softer positions and his ‘radical’ utterances of just a few months, or even weeks, before. Obama has given a name to his opponent’s condition. He calls it “Romnesia”.

To shore up the crucial women’s

vote, Obama never ceases to remind audiences of Romney’s earlier statement that he would be happy to sign any bill outlawing abortion, or that he favours (or until recently favoured) leaving the decision about whether to cover contraceptive care in the hands of the private employers who pay health-benefit premiums for their employees. Nor does he cease to remind Latino voters of Romney’s support for the Arizona ‘Show me your papers’ anti-immigrant law.

And, given Romney’s role as finance capitalist and political spokesmen for his class, Obama can hardly avoid a few jabs at his view that the main answer to the country’s economic woes is to help the wealthy and the corporations even more. But the mild class content that has forced its way into Obama’s stump speech - “The rich should pay their fair share of taxes” - is usually accompanied by declarations of fealty to free enterprise.

Matter of degree

Moreover, there is a bleakness at the heart of Obama’s election effort. The slogans of “hope” and “change” that electrified his followers in 2008 after four years under Bush would be absurdly out of place in 2012. During his first four years in office, the president has shown himself to be not the crusading reformer most of his supporters imagined (contrary to the evidence) that they were voting for, but a right-centrist bourgeois politician.

His multi-billion-dollar bailout of the banks at public expense can hardly be forgotten easily. His signature reform initiative, the health insurance scheme now known as Obamacare, actually consolidated the grip of private-insurance profiteers on the

medical industry. The exceptions, loopholes and ambiguities of his party’s attempt to rein in financial speculation, the Dodd-Frank Bill, greatly weaken the restrictions it places on Wall Street swindlers. This record makes it amply clear that any reform efforts to come out of a second Obama term will, like those of the first, strain to stay within the limits of acceptability laid down by corporate power, even though Wall Street will denounce such reforms as steps toward socialism anyway. Obama’s attempts to undo some of the grosser inequities of the tax code have been abandoned time and again to achieve a legislative compromise with Congressional Republicans.

Thus Obama stands before the electorate with little in the way of inspiration. The ‘progressive’ achievements he touts - the Lily Ledbetter ‘fair pay’ act, making it easier for women to sue over pay inequities in the workplace; his decision to allow gays to serve openly in the military; and his personal acceptance of gay marriage - seem inadequate in relation to the mass joblessness, underemployment and low wages that are foremost in the mind of the electorate. To these deep worries, Obama offers answers that ring hollow. He promises no new government stimulus of any kind, and his emphasis on expanded training for “the skilled jobs of tomorrow” ignores what everyone knows: that there are not, nor will there be, enough of these jobs to absorb even the university-educated young now entering the job market under mountains of debt.

So, as Romney argues that a second Obama term will mean that the next four years will be as bad as the last four, the incumbent, bereft of any big ideas or arresting slogans for the

future, and unable to argue that he will implement any major changes after having failed to do so when he had the chance, can only reply that things were not so bad as all that during his first term - and will get even worse under Romney.

But, for the mass of people, things will get worse under Obama too. It is only a matter of degree. The first major crisis of a second Obama term would take place at the end of November, when Congress must once again consider voting to raise the government debt ceiling. The stand-off between the two parties that occurred when Congress last took up this matter in the summer of 2011 resulted in a compromise by which a bipartisan committee of lawmakers must either come up with a plan for deficit reduction or face automatic cuts (‘sequestration’) in January, including reductions in military spending, which neither party really wants. To avoid going over the ‘fiscal cliff’, as the automatic cuts are called, Obama is already talking once again about a “grand bargain” with the Republicans, which would include “entitlement reform” - most likely decreases in social security and/or Medicare.

A foretaste of what labour can look forward to in a second Obama term was provided in Chicago. The city’s recently elected mayor, Rahm Emanuel, previously served in the White House as the president’s chief of staff. In Chicago, he intensified the war against teachers’ unions being carried out by the ruling class throughout the country with the support of Obama’s secretary of education, Arne Duncan. In contract negotiations, Emanuel sought to lengthen the school day, replace teachers’ automatic pay increases by ‘merit pay’, based largely on student performance on

standardised tests, and make teachers redundant without regard to seniority from the many schools he plans to close. The teachers, however, had earlier replaced the Democrat-loyal, concession-prone leadership of their union with a more militant reform group (the Caucus of Rank and File Educators, or Core). In contrast to the bureaucratic methods of most union officials, Core mobilised the rank and file of the union and reached out to parents and community organisations in preparation for the seven-day strike that closed the schools and made national headlines in September. Public opinion in Chicago favoured the strikers.

The result was a concessionary contract (the school day was lengthened, school closures were not stopped, and seniority in redundancies remained unprotected) that in a period of greater labour strength would have been considered a defeat. But perhaps the most significant aspect of the strike was that - unlike the outcome of many recent union struggles - defeat was less than total. The union forced the withdrawal of certain give-back demands (for a merit pay system) and the dilution of others (only 30% of teacher evaluations, as opposed to the 45% originally demanded, will be based on standardised student tests), thus demonstrating to its members, and workers throughout the country, that striking is not futile. But, however one judges the outcome, there could be no doubt in the minds of the strikers concerning the commitment of the Obama administration to the bipartisan ruling class policies of deepening austerity and assaults on workers.

‘National security state’

If austerity is one pillar of the ruling class programme being pursued by both parties, the other is the retrenchment of the American empire around the world. Both these objectives require the strengthening of the ‘national security state’. And, in this area, the winner of the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize has made the considerable efforts of George W Bush seem modest by comparison.

Figuring prominently in the final presidential debate on foreign policy was the prospect of military intervention against Iran following the elections - either by the US directly or by Israel with US approval. Both candidates sought to outdo each other in proclaiming their support for the Zionist state. Regarding Iran, Obama pointedly pledged to “keep all options on the table”. Despite Romney’s effort to appear more decisive and belligerent than Obama, it soon became apparent to most commentators that little divided the two candidates where foreign policy is concerned. As Obama quipped to his opponent, “Governor, you’re saying the same things as us, but you’d say them louder.”

As a result of the failure of US military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, Obama seeks to place greater emphasis on remote, high-tech warfare. His sixfold expansion of US drone strikes in the Pakistan tribal areas since taking over from Bush, with a corresponding fivefold increase in (mostly civilian) deaths, are well known, along with the private ‘kill list’ from which the president personally orders the lethal strikes. So too is his government’s vindictiveness toward Bradley Manning and Julian Assange for piercing the veil behind which the empire conducts its military and diplomatic operations.

But subtending these more visible actions is a vast expansion in secrecy, surveillance and repression, abroad and at home. In 2011, 70 million government documents were ordered classified, 40% more than in the

previous year. The government now hires 30,000 people to listen in on the private telephone conversations of Americans, and has built a \$2 billion facility in Bluffdale, Utah for storing the data thus gathered. The Obama administration pushed through Congress the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which permits the government to imprison anyone, including US citizens, for an indeterminate length of time on suspicion of terrorism, in blatant violation of the right of *habeas corpus* guaranteed in the fifth amendment to the constitution.

The administration has also authorised the assassination of anyone living abroad said to be participating in terrorist activities, again including US citizens, even though they are not directly involved in armed combat. The most famous target of this policy was Anwar al-Awlaki, a self-exiled American citizen who made propaganda videos for al Qa’eda, and was accused, without public proof, of participating in plotting the 9/11 attack. Al-Awlaki was killed in Yemen by a US drone strike. His 16-year-old son was also killed in another drone strike two weeks later. No one alleged that the Denver-born high-school student was involved in terrorist activity.

Although Obama failed to keep his election promise to close the Guantanamo Bay prison, and is proceeding with military trials of those held there, he seems inclined to replace the whole cumbersome process of detention, ‘secret rendition’ and military tribunals with the simpler expedient of assassination. Quoting the *Washington Post*, left-liberal columnist Glenn Greenwald reports that a government agency called the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) has developed what it calls a “disposition matrix”. According to Greenwald, “One of its purposes is ‘to augment’ the ‘separate but overlapping kill lists’ maintained by the CIA and the Pentagon: to serve, in other words, as the centralised clearing house for determining who will be executed without due process, based upon how one fits into the executive branch’s ‘matrix’.” He adds: “... the NCTC operates a gigantic data-mining operation, in which all sorts of information about innocent Americans is systematically monitored, stored and analysed. This includes ‘records from law enforcement investigations, health information, employment history, travel and student records ...’ In other words, the NCTC - now vested with the power to determine the proper ‘disposition’ of terrorist suspects - is the same agency that is at the centre of the ubiquitous, unaccountable surveillance state aimed at American citizens” (*Common Dreams* October 24).

No Republican or Tea Party supporter, for all their talk about the encroachments of “big government”, has to our knowledge uttered a peep of protest about these developments. And no-one who has been on the receiving end of nationally coordinated efforts to remove Occupy encampments from public squares, or stepped-up police harassment of leftwing protestors, will believe that the government will limit itself, in a period of imperial decline and mass austerity, to deploying this repressive apparatus against Islamic terrorists.

Zyklon C

Hopes that disappointment in Obama would lead to a leftward break with the Democratic Party have thus far been unrealised. The Occupy movement had little sympathy for Obama. But its stalwarts consider themselves above not only Democratic politics, but politics in general. This abstentionism left Occupy unprotected against the inevitable efforts to channel the energies it had released into electoral

support for the party of the ‘lesser evil’. Few among Occupy’s quasi-anarchist core will vote for the Democrats, but almost none were able to conduct the active anti-Democratic propaganda effort that any shift to the left would require.

Hence, on a left spectrum bounded on one end by liberalism and on the other by populist radicalism and socialism, with many indistinct hues in between, little has changed since 2008. The two principal candidates running to the left of the Democrats, Jill Stein of the Green Party and Rocky Anderson of the Justice Party, are local politicians virtually unknown outside their states (Massachusetts and Utah respectively). The anti-Obama minority clustered around the webzine, *Counterpunch*, has stuck to its guns. The other two left media mainstays - Amy Goodman’s syndicated television and radio programme, ‘Democracy Now!’ and the Pacifica radio network - remain, as before, non-committal.

On the rest of what calls itself the left, lesser-evilmism is rampant. In the 2000 presidential elections, the pages of the country’s leading left-liberal magazine, *The Nation*, hosted a lively debate between the supporters of the Democratic candidate, Al Gore, and partisans of the Green Party’s Ralph Nader. But all the then-Naderites have since been purged, and, with the death in July of the last columnist to advocate an independent politics of the left, Alexander Cockburn, the magazine is drably homogeneous.

A special election issue, titled ‘Why Obama?’ (October 22), contains contributions from 10 writers, all of whom advocate critical support for the president, arguing only about just how critical one should be. The authors can hardly make their case on the basis of the naive hopes of 2008, so completely disappointed in the four years since. They can only argue on the basis of fear of Romney and the Republicans, heightened by the party’s right-extremist *dérivé*. They provide a pristine example of what Cockburn dubbed the “Zyklon C” approach to politics: resisting the use of Zyklon B (the gas used by the Nazis in the death chamber of Auschwitz) will only result in the deployment of an even more lethal gas called Zyklon C.

Perhaps the most comprehensive Zyklon C manifesto was issued over the summer by a long-time social democrat, Bill Fletcher, and a former Students for a Democratic Society leader and Maoist, Carl Davidson, who is now with the National Committees of Correspondence, a rightward split from the Communist Party. The article is entitled, ‘The 2012 elections have little to do with Obama’s record ... which is why we are voting for him’. The best thing about the article is its acknowledgement that the position of the left represents a “Groundhog Day” scenario - alluding to the movie in which the protagonist, played by Bill Murray, finds himself trapped in a perpetual February 2. What they forget to add is that lesser-evilmists like themselves are a predictable part of the scenario.

Fletcher and Davidson state that the 2012 elections are “unlike anything that any of us can remember”, and will be “one of the most ... critical elections in recent history”. The authors were, however, saying similar things during the elections of 2004 and 2008, in which both also urged support for the Democrats.

The arguments of Fletcher and Davidson boil down to alarmism over the Republican Party, which they claim has been captured by the forces of “revenge-seeking white supremacy”, bent upon resisting the political influence of the country’s soon-to-be non-white majority, even to the point of severely curtailing electoral democracy. They argue further that Barack Obama, regardless

of his political record, has become a hate symbol for these forces. His re-election would therefore represent a defeat for white revanchism, which would give “progressive forces” a “breathing space” in which to build their strength.

The problem with this line of argument is its tendency to view the racial question in isolation from the class dynamics with which it is interwoven and to which, in the end, it is subordinate. The ugly racist undercurrent in the Tea Party is certainly real enough. But so also is the fact that the racial (and misogynist) insults that regularly arise from the movement’s depths are a source of embarrassment to its leaders, who routinely apologise and have made a conscious attempt to appropriate the symbols and rhetoric of the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Open, vulgar racism may still be alive and well in the south and beyond, but, despite the temptation to pander to these sentiments at election time, there is a recognition amongst national Republican political operatives that the programme of white revanchism, given an eventual non-white majority, could only mean the construction of a neo-apartheid state, which cannot be sold to the electorate, and therefore ultimately not to the ruling class, as the preferred way of pursuing their principal agenda of austerity.

No rampart

And this agenda is one in which the Democratic leadership shares. It is true that the Republicans, because their base includes far fewer of the victims of austerity, are less constrained than the Democrats about pushing it. But the Democrats are hardly a rampart against Republican reaction. A victory for Obama and Democratic Congressional candidates will not be the electoral equivalent of the Treaty of Brest Litovsk, affording the working class and unemployed “breathing space”, as Fletcher and Davidson think. It is rather more akin to the Munich Pact, opening the way for a new round of retreats before the Republicans, and Democratic-sponsored measures to weaken social programmes and worker rights, encouraging even bolder rightwing thrusts.

It may be true, as Fletcher and Davidson aver, that merely not voting

for the Democrats, or voting for a protest candidate, is hardly a political strategy. Voting for them, however is not a strategy either, but a resigned acceptance of the status quo. Refusing to vote for the lesser evil is at least the *beginning* of the wisdom required to exit Groundhog Day.

Obama’s lacklustre performance in the first presidential debate was not only the result of the mountain altitudes in which it took place. What the country perhaps glimpsed was the real Obama, lacking the will to do battle with the Republicans, and profoundly bored with the whole adversarial charade (he even went so far as to say that he and Romney had the same essential views on social security). That performance cost the president what was till then a commanding lead in the opinion polls, and the contest has become much closer. Some opinion samplings even show Romney with a slight advantage.

The president is not elected by direct popular suffrage, but the Electoral College, whose delegates are apportioned according to the population of the state, and in which the candidate with the majority in each state gets all of its delegate votes. The popular vote in solidly Republican or Democratic states is therefore irrelevant, having been figured into electoral calculations from the start. The outcome therefore hinges on a few ‘swing states’, the most important in this election being Ohio, where both contenders are campaigning heavily. Despite the evening out of opinion polls, the arithmetic of the Electoral College still favours Obama only a few days before November 6.

An Obama victory will surely cause great consternation in Republican ranks, and a ripple or two in the ruling class. Certain factions will be driven even further to the right. But perhaps others will become convinced that racial innuendo and open contempt for the majority are no way to run a country or an empire. It would be wrong to be too confident in the rationality of the bourgeoisie, but we shall see. And perhaps the inevitable rightward trajectory of a second Obama presidency may yet convince the enemies of the ruling class that Obama is, in the words of *Black Agenda Report* editor, Glen Ford, not so much the lesser evil as the more effective one ●

Fighting fund

Big success

Not surprisingly, we easily reached our £1,500 fighting fund target for October. I say ‘not surprisingly’ because, as readers may recall, we were just £15 short of that target last week! And over the last seven days a further £357 was added by our readers and supporters, taking our final total to a fine £1,842.

You may detect a slight hint of disappointment in what I have just said, though. That’s because October got off to a great start with a brilliant £500 donation from TM. Enough not only to wipe out September’s £167 deficit, I thought, but to take us over the £2,000 mark in a single month for the first time. Well, we obviously did the first, but were a bit short of the second. Nevertheless, the October total must go down as a big success.

The biggest part of this week’s income came from standing orders - in truth it is those SOs that provide the foundation of every month’s fighting fund. Amongst them were JT’s usual generous £75, £35 from DS and £30 from PM. Incidentally,

DS’s £35 is actually a new standing order - and very welcome it is too. Also among the total was DC’s £12 - he decided to increase his previous payment of £5 a month. Thanks to all.

Then there was a more than useful £50 PayPal transfer from comrade TB. It came at the very last moment - but, of course, that’s the beauty of donating via our website: we get the cash straightaway. TB was one of 9,918 online readers last week, by the way.

Finally, there were three nice cheques in the post - from RG (for £75!), SL (£20) and DM (£10). RG did his usual trick of slipping the cheque in an envelope without a covering note. Talk about modest!

Anyway, once more a big thank you to all contributors. Let’s aim to repeat this month’s success in November ●

Robbie Rix

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

IDEOLOGY

Not failing better, but fighting to win

Is there no alternative? Mark Fisher, author of *Capitalist realism*, criticises neo-anarchism and outlines his perspectives

Capitalist realism, to sum it up briefly, can be seen as both a belief and an attitude. It is a belief that capitalism is the only viable political/economic system, and a simple restatement of the old Thatcherite maxim, "There is no alternative".

People like Paul Mason have been saying that since 2011 there has been an upsurge in global militancy, including a number of uprisings, and this represents the end of capitalist realism. But that is clearly not the case. It is true that the major crisis of capitalism from 2008 led to a situation where capital has never been weaker ideologically in my lifetime, and as a result there is widespread disaffection, but the question is why *nevertheless* capitalist realism still exists.

In my view it is because it was never really necessary about the idea that capitalism was a particularly good system: it was more about persuading people that it is the only *viable* system and the building of an alternative is impossible. That discontent is practically universal does not change the fact that there appears to be no workable alternative to capitalism. It does not change the belief that capitalism still holds all cards and that there is nothing we can do about it - that capitalism is almost like a force of nature, which cannot be resisted. There is nothing that has happened since 2008 that has done anything to change that, and that is why capitalist realism still persists.

So capitalist realism is a belief, but it is also as an attitude related to that belief - an attitude of resignation, defeatism and depression. Really then, capitalist realism, whilst it is disseminated by the neoliberal right, and very successfully so, is a pathology of the left, or elements of the so-called left, that they succumb to. It was an attitude promoted by New Labour - what was New Labour if not instantiating the values of capitalist realism? In other words, we resign ourselves to the fact that there is no getting around capital: capital will ultimately run things, and all we can do is perhaps bolt on a couple of tethers as gestures toward social justice. But essentially ideology is over, politics is over: we are in the era of so-called post-ideology, the era of post-politics, where capital has won. This so-called 'post-political' presentation by New Labour was one of the ways in which capitalist realism imposed itself in the British context.

There is a problem, however, in seeing capitalist realism *just* as a belief and an attitude, in that both are based on individual psychology. The discussion needed is one that interrogates where those beliefs and attitudes come from, for what we are actually dealing with is the social decomposition that gives rise to them. For that, we really need a narrative about the decline of solidarity and the decline of security - the neoliberal project achieved its aim of undermining them. Capitalist realism then is also a reflection of the recomposition of various forces in society. It is not just that people are persuaded of certain beliefs, but rather that the beliefs people have reflect the way that forces in society are composed in contemporary capitalism.

'Modernisation'

The decline of the unions is probably the biggest factor in the rise of capitalist realism for ordinary people. Now we find ourselves in a situation



Neo-anarchists: how not to win

where everybody disdains bankers and finance capitalism, and the level of control that these people still hold over all of our lives. Everyone is aghast at the plunder, avoidance of tax and so forth, yet at the same time there is this sentiment that we can do nothing about it. And why has that sentiment grown so powerful? It is because there really is no agent to mediate the feelings people have and organise those people. The effect is that discontent can be widespread, but without such an agent it will remain at the level of individual disaffection.

That easily converts into depression as well, which is one of the stories I try and tell in my book, *Capitalist realism*. I deal with the association between post-politics, post-ideology, the rise of neoliberalism and the conjoined rise of depression, particularly among young people. I call this process the "privatisation of stress".

I do not want to hang everything on trade union decline - unions are just an example of what has been removed from the psychic and political infrastructure of people's lives over the last 30 or 40 years. However, in the past, if your pay and conditions got worse, you might go to the unions and organise, whereas now we are encouraged, if, for example, stress at work increases, to see it as our own problem and deal with it as an individual.

We must deal with it through self-medication, through antidepressants,

which are increasingly widely prescribed, or, if we are lucky, through therapy. But these concerns - experienced now as individual psychic pathologies - do not really have their roots in brain chemistry: they reside in the wider social field. But, because there is no longer an agent, a mediator, for a class acting collectively, there is no way of tackling that wider social field.

Another way of getting to this story is via the restructuring of capital in the late 70s and early 80s, the arrival of post-Fordism. That meant the increasing use of precarious conditions at work, just-in-time production, the dread word 'flexibility': we must bend to capital, no matter what capital wants; we are required to bend to it and we will bend to it. On the one hand, there was that kind of stick, but there was also at least the appearance of carrots in the 80s: neoliberalism did not *just* hammer workers; it encouraged people no longer to identify as workers. Its success was in being able to seduce people out of that identification, and out of class-consciousness.

The genius at the centre of Thatcherism could be found in the selling-off of council houses, because alongside the straightforward inducement of owning your own home was the narrative about time and history, whereby Thatcher and people like her were out to make your life more free. They were opposed to

those stuck-in-the-mud, centralising bureaucrats, who want to control your life for you. That involved a very successful harnessing of the desires that had grown up, particularly since the 60s.

Part of the problem here was the absence of a left response to post-Fordism - instead there was an attachment to the comfort of old antagonisms, you could say. We had internalised the story that there was a strong workers' movement which depended on unity. What were the conditions for that? Well, we had Fordist labour, the concentration of workers in confined spaces, the domination of the industrial workforce by male workers, etc. The breakdown of those conditions threatened the breakdown of the workers' movement. There was the emergence of a plurality of other struggles, leading to the undermining of the common purpose that the workers' movement once possessed. But that kind of nostalgia for Fordism was actually dangerous - the failure was not that Fordism ended, but that we had no alternative vision of modernity to compete with the neoliberal account.

In fact, neoliberalism owns the word 'modernisation' now. If you hear the word in news broadcasts, it is synonymous with neoliberalisation. Whenever there is a dispute - in, say, Royal Mail - the phrasing used is something like, 'Royal Mail is trying to modernise, but its plans

are opposed by workers'. But when they say 'modernise', they really mean 'privatise' and 'neoliberalise'. We saw this with Blairism: those who wanted to 'modernise' really wanted to neoliberalise the Labour Party. Of course, if you are opposed to modernisation, you must be out of touch with reality and you immediately find yourself on the back foot.

The left almost seemed to believe it, and the only way to 'modernise' was to make some sort of accommodation with capital. But the opposite mistake was to think that things could stay as they were before - and that was really a very dangerous line to go down. The challenge was to come up with a post-Fordist leftism - a project which was begun in the 80s. But this soon got derailed, as any attempt to do this was seen as just folding to Blairism, even though that was not the case.

Education

There is more than just one particular zone where capitalist realism applies and most of the anecdotes and key concepts that went into the book came from my experiences teaching 16 to 19-year-olds. So let us turn now to the key question of capitalist realism in education.

One of its central features in this area is "business ontology", as I have called it, which is simply the idea that the only things that actually count, the only criteria that matter, are related to business. Within education we have seen a creeping spread of practices, language and rhetoric from business. And this has spread into teaching, into the kind of self-policing and self-surveillance teachers are now required to perform.

One of the things I try to point out in *Capitalist realism* is the strange anomaly here: one of the things we were sold about neoliberalism was that it liberated us from bureaucracy, that it was only old Stalinists and crusty social democrats who obsess with bureaucracy. Neoliberalism was supposed to cut away the red tape. So why is it that teachers are required to perform more bureaucratic tasks than they ever were in the heyday of social democracy?

Simply because neoliberalism has got nothing to do with the freeing of markets, and everything to do with class power. That is reflected in the introduction of certain methods and strategies, ways of assessing teachers and schools, justified because they allegedly increase efficiency. Well, anyone who has engaged in this kind of, to coin another phrase, market Stalinism knows that nowadays what matters is what appears on the forms, irrespective of whether it actually corresponds to reality.

It was New Labour which accelerated this development in education by introducing targets - isn't it interesting that New Labour presented itself as the extreme antithesis of Stalinism, but it ended up reconstituting at a formal level Stalinism's really bad aspects (not that there were many good ones!). The language of planned targets has come back, like the return of the repressed.

Given that this clearly does not increase efficiency, we need to see it as a disciplinary mechanism, an ideological, ritualising system. If you are a teacher sitting at home filling in lots of forms full of quasi-business rhetoric, you are not going to teach a better lesson the next day. In fact, if you just watched TV and relaxed, you

would probably be better equipped in that regard. But the authorities are not idiots: they know this; they know they are not really increasing your performance.

So what is the function of these practices? Well, one is obviously discipline and control: control via anxiety, control via the destabilisation of professional confidence. These things are framed as ‘continuous professional development’, and that sounds good, doesn’t it? You always want to learn more, don’t you? And now you always have access to training. But what it really means is that your status is never really validated - you are constantly subject to review. And it is a review of a bizarre and Kafkaesque type, because all the assessment criteria are characterised by a strategic vagueness, whereby it might appear possible to actually live if you were quite frugal. In other words, there was this funded time outside the frenetic activity of work. I say that because now work has changed into simply a means of paying off debt.

The article in the *New Left Project* was arguing against a ludicrous rightwing Tory book, *Britannia unchained*, which claims that Britain had been chained up, but those chains have now been cut.² So how are we freed as a result? We can work harder and longer - even harder than those Chinese, because we need to do a far better job of exploiting ourselves than we have up to now. But the reality of work is that it does not pay enough and that is why we are in debt. This government has attempted to moralise debt. It is analogous to the ludicrous assertion it keeps making (the government operates in a kind of neuro-linguistic way, believing that if you repeat something often enough then it will become true) that the crisis was caused by New Labour overspending - just like an individual who has maxed out their credit cards. Of course, it was not a moral failing at all when people relied so much on their credit cards: it was unavoidable. More importantly, the entire economy now *needs* people to be in debt - they are doing their duty to capital! That duty to capital in the past is used as a new reason in the present to exploit them further, to cut their public services and standards of living. It would be funny if it were not so grotesque. But this ridiculous personalisation of debt, as if it were a moral failing, is the meat and drink of capitalist realism.

Connected to this is the reduction in the amount of time that could be spent for purposes other than the kind of frenetic anxiety related to the world of work. That Tory book is really part of this attempt to impose such anxiety - we are not working hard enough, after all. What we have seen with the coalition government is the systematic shutting down of space, where time could be used differently. This has a massive impact on culture, because it was within those spaces that any alternative culture could be produced. Many of the key developments in popular culture since the 1960s were facilitated by the space provided by the welfare state, social housing, etc. They amounted to a kind of indirect funding for cultural production. With those spaces closed down, much of the culture of late-capitalist Britain is moribund, miserable, repetitious and homogenous.

Debt

There are many different dimensions to capitalist realism in education, but the other key one is debt, plainly. What is interesting is that after the phoney peace, I suppose you could call it, following 2008, where nothing really significant happened in terms of public displays of anger, the first real manifestation of discontent was the student movement of 2010.

Just before it started, I said to a friend of mine that there was going to be some expression of anger over the cuts in higher education, and he responded to the effect that that could not happen: it was just “revolutionary nostalgia” on my part. I do not tell that story to claim some special prophetic vision, but to illustrate the fact that his view had seemed to be the realistic one - there really had been no sign of such anger erupting.

But it did erupt at the end of 2010. Why was that? What was really being argued over with regard to fees? Clearly the rhetoric about paying down the debt is ludicrous, in as far as anyone can make out anything in this necromantic economics surrounding university fees. It seems that it is costing the government more to impose this new system anyway, so it has actually increased the deficit. What were they actually trying to

achieve with this massive hike in fees? To me it is obvious that this is another version of the production of a certain kind of anxiety - the student population had to be constituted as debtors.

There was a good piece by Mark Bolton in the *New Left Project* arguing that debt is now the key social category in capitalism: capital does not need to work in the same way as before, but it does need us to be in debt - a main source of our subjectivity.¹ What is debt? It is also a capture of time, of our future. So the confrontation with university students in the UK is a dramatic example of the kind of switch-around we have seen - a struggle over the use of time.

What was university like when I went? First, I did not pay a penny in fees and, secondly, I received a maintenance grant, upon which it was possible to actually live if you were quite frugal. In other words, there was this funded time outside the frenetic activity of work. I say that because now work has changed into simply a means of paying off debt.

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Another one of the paradoxes of capitalist realism is the hyper-regulation of learning in the classroom, so that any deviation from the official programme is closed down. When you step outside the narrow parameters of the examination drill, students themselves will complain today. They will ask, ‘Is this going to be in the exam?’ A narrow teleological focus is what is inculcated, along with a super-instrumentalisation of education.

Of course, one of the things senior

management is trying to do with the introduction of fees is to create a split between students and lecturers. As the students are paying more in fees, it is expected that they will demand more from the lecturers. Management is fairly cynically trying to get students to behave as ‘aggrieved consumers’ who should demand more for their money, but the problem is that none of that extra money is going to the lecturers. I know of a communication from a senior manager at a higher education institution saying that, in the wake of the hike in fees, ‘We’d better prepare ourselves for students demanding more’. Which means that lecturers will have to work more for the same money.

In it together?

How is it possible to impose all this? Well, only because of the general ideological atmosphere of capitalist realism. Whilst I do not agree with Paul Mason, capitalist realism has certainly changed its form compared to before 2008. Then it had a bullish quality that declared: ‘Either you get on board with us or you’re a sad loser who will die drinking meths in a gutter - if you’re lucky.’ Since 2008, it has had a more desperate quality, which is what lies behind the ostensibly inclusive rhetoric of ‘We’re all in it together’. In other words, if we do not all pull together, we will all go down - rather different from the previous implication that anyone who does not come on board will just be crushed beneath the juggernaut of capital.

So the tone of capitalist realism has changed, but harsh measures have been imposed very quickly because of the absence of an alternative. In fact it is even worse than that, because the previous form of the system to which we are told there is no alternative is now impossible. There is no returning to pre-2008 capital. Capital has no idea of any solution to the crises which led up to 2008. There is no guarantee that the current crisis can be ended, because capital’s means of keeping wages low and demand up was debt itself. If you make debt harder to come by, then what is going to take its place? There is no answer to that, and plainly capital’s apologists are just flailing about.

Their only answer has been the strategy of austerity, which in large part has been based on a historical forgetting of why the welfare state was introduced. It was introduced not out of the kindness and largesse of the capitalists, but as ‘revolution insurance’, so that widespread discontent did not spill over into revolution. They have forgotten that and as a consequence they think they can keep pulling away those social safety nets without any problem. Last year’s riots give us a glimpse of some of the possible repercussions.

What then can we do? Well, it is first necessary to defeat the anarchists - I am only half-joking about that. It is essential that we ask why it is that neo-anarchist ideas are so dominant amongst young people, and especially undergraduates. The blunt answer is that, although anarchist tactics are the most ineffective in attempting to defeat capital, capital has destroyed all the tactics that *were* effective, leaving this rump to propagate itself within the movement. There is an uncomfortable synergy between the rhetoric of the ‘big society’ and a lot of the neo-anarchist ideas and concepts. For example, one of the things which is particularly pernicious about some of the dominant ideas within anarchism at the moment is their disengagement from the mainstream.

There is the idea, for instance, that the mainstream media is an inherently corrupt monolith. The point is that it is completely corrupt, but it is *not* a monolith. It is a terrain that is effectively controlled at present by neoliberals, who took the fight over the mainstream media very seriously,

and consequently won that struggle.

One of the things which I am pushing for is media consciousness-raising with some younger people - for example, Channel 4 used to have hour-long programmes featuring a debate between three philosophers. Now *Big brother* takes up that slot. The slot once occupied by European Arts cinema is now taken by *Location, location, location*. If you want to look at the changes in British society, politically and culturally, over the last 30 years then there is no better example than Channel 4.

Why is that? Because Channel 4 emerged as a result of all sorts of struggles within the media for control of things like film, and people took that very seriously. Alongside the labour struggles of the 80s there were also cultural struggles. Both were defeated, but at the time it was by no means obvious that they would be. If you remember, the 80s were the time when there were moral panics about ‘loony left’ councils, and there was also a moral panic over Channel 4 with its politically correct lefties, who were supposedly taking over broadcasting.

That is part of what I mean by an alternative modernity - an alternative to the neoliberal ‘modernity’, which is actually just a return to the 19th century in many ways. But the idea that the mainstream culture is inherently coopted, and all we can do is withdraw from it, is deeply flawed.

The same is true about parliamentary politics. You should not pin all of your hopes on parliamentary politics, because that would be sad and ludicrous, but, at the same time, if it was pointless then you have to ask why the business class expends so many resources in subjugating parliament to its own interests.

Again, the neo-anarchist idea that the state is finished, that we do not need to participate in it at all, is deeply pernicious. It is not that parliamentary politics will achieve much on its own - the object lesson of what happens if you believe that to be the case was New Labour. Power without hegemony - that is effectively what New Labour was. But that is pointless. You cannot hope to achieve anything through an electoral machine alone. But it is hard to see how struggles can succeed without being part of an ensemble. We have to win back the idea that it is about winning the hegemonic struggle in society on different fronts at the same time.

Because the anti-capitalist movements that have arisen since the 90s have ultimately done nothing, they have caused capital no concern at all - it has been so easy to route around them. Part of the reason for that is the fact that they have taken place out on the street, ignoring the politics of the workplace and of the everyday. And

that feels remote to ordinary working people, because at least with the unions, for all their flaws, there was a direct connection between everyday lives and politics. That connection is now missing, and anti-capitalist movements have not provided it.

Coordination

It seems to me that the crucial question now is coordination, and so many debates around centralisation versus decentralisation, top-down versus horizontal, obfuscate the real issues, which are about what is the most effective form of coordination against capital. Coordination does not need centralisation: in order for things to have common purpose they do not have to be centralised. We need to resist the false oppositions which come out of the way neo-anarchist ideas are narrativised.

Obviously all the anti-capitalist movements, right up to Occupy, have managed to mobilise disaffection, but they have not been able to coordinate it in a way that causes capital any long-term problems at all. What could coordinate discontent? And what could convert ambient disaffection into sustainable antagonism? It is a lack of the sustainability of these antagonisms which is part of the problem with them. Another problem with them, which my comrade, Jeremy Gilbert, has raised, is their lack of institutional memory. If you do not have something like a party structure then you do not have institutional memory, and you just end up repeating the same mistakes over and over.

There is far too much toleration of failure on our side. If I ever have to hear that Samuel Becket quote, “Try again, fail again, fail better”, I will go mad. Why do we even think in these terms? There is no honour in failure, although there is no shame in it if you have tried to succeed. Instead of that stupid slogan we should aim to learn from our mistakes in order to succeed next time. The odds might be stacked in such a way that we do keep losing, but the point is to increase our collective intelligence. That requires, if not a party structure of the old type, then at least some kind of system of coordination and some system of memory. Capital has this, and we need it too to be able to fight back ●

M Fisher, *Capitalist realism: is there no alternative?*, Zero Books, London 2009, pp95, £7.99

Notes

1. ‘Work isn’t working’: www.newleftproject.org/index.php/site/article_comments/work_isnt_working.
2. K Kwarteng, P Patel, D Raab, C Skidmore, E Truss *Britannia unchained: global lessons for growth and prosperity* London 2012.



Mark Fisher: party

ITALY

Another guilty verdict

If past form is anything to go by, Silvio Berlusconi will not serve a day of his latest jail sentence, writes Toby Abse

Whilst the assessment of the Italian weekly *Famiglia Cristiana* - "Berlusconi: game over"¹ - is hardly justified, especially in the light of his subsequent threats about bringing down the Monti government, presumably over the 2013 budget,² the October 26 verdict sentencing Silvio Berlusconi to four years imprisonment for tax fraud is a serious blow to the 76-year-old former premier's political prospects.

It should be emphasised that it is more than 14 years since he was last given a guilty verdict carrying a potential prison sentence; even in his recent trial over the massive bribe he was alleged to have given to David Mills for bearing false witness in an earlier case, Berlusconi escaped the only logical verdict (since Mills had already been convicted of receiving a bribe from Berlusconi, all the evidence suggested that Berlusconi had paid such a bribe) because of a particular, arguably slightly bizarre, calculation about precisely when the statute of limitations kicked in.³

The three earlier verdicts carrying a prison sentence all date back to 1997 and 1998, a period when the centre-left was in government and a weakened Berlusconi, whose first seven-month premiership in 1994 had ended in disaster, could probably have been finished off politically, if not judicially, had it not been for the ludicrous antics of what was then the ex-'official communist' Partito della Sinistra Democratica and its leader, Massimo D'Alema. Keen to involve Berlusconi in projects for constitutional reform, the PSD blocked every attempt to bring in legislation about a conflict of interests between large-scale media ownership (Berlusconi is estimated to be Italy's sixth richest man, largely as a result of his media empire) and high political office. Needless to say, once Berlusconi realised that he could not push through parliament changes in Italy's criminal justice system that would have been to his direct personal advantage, he pulled the plug on D'Alema's pet schemes. The verdicts of the lower courts in the Medusa case, the Guardia di Finanza corruption case and the 'All Iberian' case (the one that involved the payment of 23 billion lire to the Socialist Party leader and former prime minister Bettino Craxi in return for favourable laws about commercial television ownership) were all reversed on appeal and Berlusconi will undoubtedly be hoping for a similar outcome on this occasion.

It is a testament to the persistence of the Milanese magistrates involved in the latest Mediaset case that the October 26 verdict was ever reached. The investigations that led to the case being brought started in June 2001. Berlusconi was first charged in July 2006 on three counts relating to Mediaset's purchase of TV rights for American films: false accounting, embezzlement and tax fraud. In September 2008 the trial was suspended because of the *lodo Alfano* - a law which gave legal immunity to the prime minister and other leading state officials. That suspension lasted until the *lodo Alfano* was declared unconstitutional in November 2009. There was a second suspension between April 2010 and February 2011 because of the law on the 'legitimate impediment' - another of Berlusconi's

made-to-measure laws, which allowed the prime minister to claim that official duties prevented him from making court appearances. That law was subsequently declared by the constitutional court to be largely unconstitutional, even if premiers were deemed to be entitled to some limited protection.

Nor were the premier's acts of sabotage in relation to his own trial confined to devising ever more ingenious means of avoiding court appearances. They also included ways of decriminalising the alleged offences. Thus, in January 2007, the magistrates had to abandon two out of the three original charges in the Mediaset case because Berlusconi had in the meantime got parliament to pass two laws that affected the trial, one decriminalising false accounting and another shortening the period before the statute of limitations kicked in (the so-called *prescrizione breve*). Moreover, the revised version of the statute of limitations meant that, although an enormous \$368 million tax fraud had been discovered, Berlusconi is only criminally liable for \$7.3 million at the tail end of the scam: the far more massive frauds of the 1990s can no longer be pursued by the courts.

Whilst judge Edoardo D'Avossa's assessment in his verdict that Berlusconi possessed a "natural capacity to commit crime, as shown by his pursuit of the criminal plan" obviously refers to the precise mechanisms by which Berlusconi and the American-Egyptian Frank Agrama inflated the prices of the TV rights of American films sold to Mediaset, the systematic way in which Berlusconi sought to obstruct the trial lends no credence to his predictable claim that "This is a political, intolerable sentence": no defendant believing that the case against him was genuinely weak would have devoted such enormous energy to trying to ensure that no verdict was ever reached, as opposed to refuting the accusations in the courtroom.

Last week's nominal four-year sentence will also be reduced to one year under a 2006 measure that stripped three years off sentences for crimes committed before that date. Although this law was justified by reference to the overcrowding in Italy's prisons, it is extremely hard to believe that Berlusconi's motives in supporting it had anything to do with a generalised humanitarian concern for the fate of Italy's petty criminals. However, as Berlusconi is doubtless only too aware at the moment, there is one catch in this useful piece of legislation. If Berlusconi were to be found guilty in the ongoing trial in what is popularly known as the *caso Ruby* (Ruby case), in which he is accused of paying for

the services of an under-age prostitute, and were given a sentence of more than two years which is not revoked or reduced on appeal, the original four-year sentence in the Mediaset case would be restored, assuming that it too had not been revoked on appeal.

Nonetheless, given Berlusconi's previous record of time-consuming appeals to both the second-rank appeal courts and the Cassazione (supreme court), it seems highly improbable that he will ever be put behind bars on the Mediaset charges. As far as this tax fraud charge is concerned, the statute of limitations will start to apply in July 2013 and in Italian law the Mediaset sentence does not become definitive until all appeals to both the ordinary appeal court and then the Cassazione have been exhausted.

Berlusconi has been a defendant in 17 criminal trials since 1989.⁴ It is worth noting that, contrary to his protestations of innocence and frequently repeated claims about judicial persecution, only on four occasions has he actually been (rightly or wrongly) acquitted - far more often he has benefited from the decriminalisation of the offence, amnesties or changes in the statute of limitations. Massimo Giannini in *La Repubblica* has calculated that Berlusconi has passed "at least 18 *ad personam* laws" over the 18-year period of his political career.⁵

Arguably the one trial that could seal Berlusconi's public disgrace is not the Mediaset. The precise details of Berlusconi's Mediaset tax fraud are incomprehensible to the bulk of the Italian population - a large group of whom, such as shopkeepers, small businessmen and the self-employed, frequently defraud the tax authorities themselves, albeit on a much lesser scale. No, it is the Ruby case which has received far more publicity both in Italy and abroad than the Mediaset ever did.

A verdict in the *caso Ruby* is expected before Christmas and the vast majority of commentators believe that things are looking bad for Berlusconi, despite his enormous and continuing financial 'generosity' towards many of the women called upon to give evidence. Much of their courtroom testimony in Berlusconi's favour is completely contradicted by wiretaps involving the very same witnesses and in addition a significant minority of those who attended Berlusconi's 'bunga bunga' parties were prepared to swear on oath that these parties were

not the "elegant dinners" with some innocuous singing and dancing that the former premier claims them to have been.

So far Berlusconi's followers in his Popolo della Libertà party (Pdl) have shown great loyalty to their embattled leader, who is now lashing out in all directions - not just at the magistrates, but also at prime minister Mario Monti and the European Union leaders, particularly Angela Merkel.⁶ Arguably this is because they have no credible alternative; when Lega Nord leader Umberto Bossi was swept up in a corruption scandal earlier this year, the Lega Nord could turn to former interior minister Roberto Maroni to attempt a fresh start, but the Pdl possesses no comparable figure.

The one Pdl politician who seemed for a long time to have some credibility and a power base of his own, Roberto Formigoni - the president of Lombardy since 1995 and the best known representative of the hard-line Catholic movement, Comunione e Liberazione (CL) - has fallen into disgrace in a massive corruption scandal centring on kickbacks for the award of regional health contracts to private hospitals and foundations linked to CL. In Lombardy the vast majority of the regional councillors, quite a number of whom were facing a variety of criminal proceedings, have very recently tendered their resignations after a further scandal that saw one of them closely linked to the Calabrian mafia, the 'Ndrangheta. Unsurprisingly Formigoni is a lame-duck president, whose political career is now measured in weeks.

For his part, Angelino Alfano, the Pdl secretary since

November 2011, is totally dependent on Berlusconi, despite his quite understandable annoyance at his patron's tendency to hold him personally responsible for every disaster that is currently befalling the Pdl. Moreover, Alfano's position as a Sicilian lieutenant of Berlusconi's - already undermined by the Pdl's defeat in the Palermo mayoral contest in May - was further weakened following the party's disastrous performance in the October 28 Sicilian regional election.

Nationally the Pdl is badly split between pro-Berlusconi hawks and pro-Monti doves. The latter consists of the likes of Franco Frattini, who is less than keen on Berlusconi's populist, anti-EU, anti-austerity line. This wing could not be depended upon to vote against Monti over the forthcoming budget, so if Berlusconi goes beyond verbal threats, he is likely to split the Pdl parliamentarians rather than bring the government down ●

Notes

1. www.famigliacristiana.it/informazione/news_2/articolo/berlusconi_40201.aspx.
2. See *Corriere della Sera* October 28.
3. The statute of limitations means that a sentence cannot be enforced if the case has 'timed out': ie, if the sentence is handed down beyond a certain time after the offence was committed.
4. Berlusconi himself often cites much higher figures, plucked out of thin air, in a bid to paint himself as a victim of a campaign of judicial persecution.
5. *La Repubblica* October 27.
6. Berlusconi's attack on the Monti government's austerity policies coincided with No Monti Day (October 27), a series of events organised by the far left, the biggest of which took the form of a demonstration in Rome (150,000-strong according to its organisers and 20,000-strong according to the police). However, the emphasis of his polemic is much more nationalistic and he is clearly competing for electoral space with the far-right Lega Nord and Beppe Grillo's populist Movimento Cinque Stelle, not with the left and Rifondazione Comunista. One of the interesting aspects of No Monti Day was the reappearance of Fausto Bertinotti, the former Rifondazione leader. He participated in the march, saying he welcomed the Rome demonstration and hoped for a European general strike - an apparent repudiation of his longstanding associates in Sinistra Ecologia Libertà, who opposed the demonstration and seem ever closer to fusion, or at least a joint electoral list, with the ex-'official communist'-dominated Democratic Party.

Berlusconi: no porridge option

REVIEW

Imperialist abuse of science

David H Price **Weaponizing anthropology: social science in service of the militarized state** AK Press (Counterpunch series), 2011, £12, pp208



Avatar: anthropology

James Cameron’s 2009 film *Avatar* was, unusually for a blockbuster, about anthropology. Its plot turned on concerns that many anthropologists today have about the uses of their discipline for military gain. David Price’s book scrutinises those concerns.

Price’s academic home page tells you that his new book continues a history of the linkages between anthropology and military intelligence agencies. It brings that debate up to the current period from an American perspective. This book should also be read by all who are concerned about the fate of our academic institutions. Along with Roberto Gonzalez, Price is the leading researcher in this area. He is a contributor to *Counterpunch*, a radical journal covering American foreign policy, and a member of the Network of Concerned Anthropologists.

Price demonstrates the linkage between the military establishment, anthropologists and the university campus. The Human Terrain System (HTS) is the practical outcome of these linkages: a system providing frontline army personnel with knowledge of the areas they are occupying and the ‘enemy’ populations they are combating. This system was the tool used by US imperialism post-9/11 when George Bush announced, “You are either with us or with the terrorists”. But this new war on terror, unlike the terrorism of the US war machine in Central and South America during the 1980s, required a softer approach on indigenous and minority peoples struggling for human rights and political recognition. These struggles include non-violent action, such as taking part in banned religious ceremonies, where the asymmetric balance of power is weighted towards interests favoured by the hegemonic states. Price details the flawed approach of HTS, and the use of anthropological research to further the aims of the ‘war on terror’.

American anthropologist Franz Boas was censured by the American Anthropological Association (AAA) when he wrote that the actions of anthropologists in World War I had “prostituted science by using it as a cover for their activities as spies”.¹ The AAA was worried that Boas’s comments would hinder the ability of other anthropologists to do fieldwork. And this has been a problem for anthropology, where

political and economic priorities come first. Although the activities of Ruth Benedict, Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead contributed to the World War II war effort, this was a less cynical use of anthropology.

Price describes the AAA’s symbiotic relationship with the establishment. Not until quite recently did the AAA revise its code of ethics to restore the prohibition against secrecy, that “anthropologists should not withhold research results from research participants when those results are shared with others”.² This is one theme that Price shows has most damaged anthropology as a discipline.

The war on terror and the use of HTS bring to the foreground debates that have been ongoing since the beginning of the 20th century. Historically, anthropology has been concerned with indigenous people; the information provided by indigenous cultures through a process of informed consent is framed by ethical considerations as to its uses. British anthropology originated from a fuzzy haze of funding for colonial administrators trained in ethnographic methods and for anthropologists who secured funding to address colonial aims. Bronislaw Malinowski, AR Radcliffe-Brown and Raymond Firth emerged during the period leading up to World War II. British anthropology secured itself as a scientific discipline fulfilling the practical needs of an empire that was being challenged during the inter-imperialist conflict. Whereas 20th century anthropology involved quite overt uses of the knowledge it produced, Price shows that 21st century anthropology has become the victim of a much more systematised and covert war machine. In prosecution of the war on terror, with HTS as a frontline weapon, ethical concerns have all but disappeared.

Colonial administrators and willing anthropologists of the last century did the job to consolidate the empire. However, inquisitive anthropologists in the field could not be relied upon to provide anthropological service to their paymasters once they had been supplied with funding. Price shows nowadays that the CIA, FBI, the Defense Intelligence Agency and Homeland Security deliberately recruit and place students in universities that tie them

to those intelligence agencies. Schemes such as the National Security Education Program (NSEP) and the Pat Roberts Intelligence Scholars Program (PRISP) provide students with funds to study in areas of national security interest. In a period of austerity and reduced funding to universities from government, programmes such as NSEP and PRISP determine and direct the areas of study which bring in funding. Always the case to some extent, this has accelerated during the ‘war on terror’, bringing with it tensions in the academic establishment. And what of the students? They receive a wealth of funds, but with harsh payback penalties if they do not make themselves available for posts the military establishment needs to fulfil its imperial ambitions.

This new turn to a smarter war is encapsulated in the US Army and Marine Corps *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, published in 2006. In the foreword to the manual, US army commander David Petraeus - now director of the CIA - notes: “You cannot fight former Saddamists and Islamic extremists the same way you have fought the Viet Cong ... all insurgencies, even today’s highly adaptable strains, remain wars amongst the people.” Furthermore, he adds that soldiers and marines “must be prepared to help re-establish institutions and local security forces and assist in rebuilding infrastructure and basic services. They must be able to facilitate establishing local governance and the rule of law.” This raised the fears of anthropologists for the struggles of indigenous peoples, when the manual was being sold, to use Price’s words, as a “dream of cultural engineering”. Price reveals the manual to be nothing more than plagiarism of the first order, lifting texts without attribution from brilliant anthropologists such as Victor Turner. This reflects scant regard for anthropological ethics and academic integrity.

Bush’s wars in Iraq and Afghanistan opened the gates for many anthropologists to enter the ‘smarter war’, viewing ethics as a luxury. Price is withering about anthropologist Montgomery McFate, whom he sees as the architect of militarising anthropology and HTS. Her fieldwork on British counterinsurgency operations against the Irish Republican Army provided the model for military conquest. It is McFate, Price contends, who has betrayed basic interests of the studied populations. There was an excuse in World War I and II when there were no professional ethical standards - the AAA only formalised a code of ethics in 1971. Although the use of anthropology may signal a new softer turn in wars abroad that appeals to the liberal-minded, Price calls this an anthropological abomination.

To return to the ‘war on terror’, the answer to George Bush’s question, is not yes or no. There is another answer. Anthropologists, students and concerned others - like the ethnographers in *Avatar* - should side with the struggles of indigenous populations and demand the recall of occupying forces ●

Simon Wells

Notes

1. F Boas, ‘Scientists as spies’ in *Anthropology Today* 21 (3): 27 2005: www.blackwell-synergy.com/doi/anth/24/v1; originally published in *The Nation* December 20 1919.

2. See, for example, proposed changes outlined on <http://blog.aaanet.org/2008/09/24/proposedchanges-to-the-aaa-code-of-ethics>.

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What we fight for

- Our central aim is the organisation of communists, revolutionary socialists and all politically advanced workers into a Communist Party. Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.
- The Provisional Central Committee organises members of the Communist Party, but there exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called ‘parties’ on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed ‘line’ are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.
- Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.
- Communists oppose all imperialist wars and occupations but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question - ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.
- Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, ‘One state, one party’. To the extent that the European Union becomes a state then that necessitates EU-wide trade unions and a Communist Party of the EU.
- The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.
- Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.
- Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally. All forms of nationalist socialism are reactionary and anti-working class.
- The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote. They will resist using every means at their disposal. Communists favour using parliament and winning the biggest possible working class representation. But workers must be readied to make revolution - peacefully if we can, forcibly if we must.
- Communists fight for extreme democracy in all spheres of society. Democracy must be given a social content.
- We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.
- Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.
- Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women’s oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.
- Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin’s Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.
- Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism - a system which knows neither wars, exploitation, money, classes, states nor nations. Communism is general freedom and the real beginning of human history.
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**Tories come
out in true
colours**

Revenge of the nasty party

David Cameron once liked to pose as a compassionate Conservative, writes **Paul Demarty**. But no longer

In 2002, the Conservative Party was still reeling from a second consecutive electoral defeat. As the chaos of the John Major years phased into the banal irrelevance of William Hague's tenure, Iain Duncan Smith - then the party's new leader - faced the same problem as all Tory leaders in the Blair era. How to sanitise the brand, after Blair so effectively sanitised his?

The Tory chair at the time, one Theresa May, gave him a few pointed remarks to think about at that year's conference. "There's a way to go before we can return to government," she told a disbelieving audience. "There's a lot we need to do in this party of ours. Our base is too narrow and so, occasionally, are our sympathies. You know what some people call us? The Nasty Party." And after all Maggie Thatcher did for us ...

The perceived 'nastiness' of the Tories has swung wildly ever since. IDS lacked the desire or the authority to act on May's suggestions, and had his lame-duck leadership terminated by his own MPs. His successor, Michael 'Something of the Night' Howard, executed a whiplash U-turn from libertarian rhetoric to a gypsy-baiting *Mailism*, with which he was manifestly more comfortable. There was a burning need for a new face, and a new brand for Toryism. Step forward, David Cameron - the hoodie-hugging, plain-speaking, eco-friendly gent.

That speech, it seems extraordinary to recall, was 10 years ago. Duncan Smith, despite his humiliating exit from the leader's job, is now a cabinet minister; so is May, at the home office. And, while Cameron's green guff and nice-guy facade had a plausibility that the creepy and malignant Howard could never hope to match, in government he - along with his colleagues - has reverted to type. The Nasty Party is back - and it's tightening the thumbscrews.

Quiet man

It was almost possible to feel sorry for Duncan Smith nine years ago, when the self-proclaimed 'quiet man' of Tory politics was hounded out by a thoroughly noisy parliamentary bloc of undesirables. Not so today: IDS is the government point man for attacks on welfare - a role he clearly enjoys more than he wants to let on.

This week's victims are families. Of course, that is not how the sales pitch goes; the sales pitch, after all, is always based on the idea that welfare recipients live in a drab uniformity of self-inflicted economic inactivity. That is the way it is put most politely - as, for example, when Duncan Smith himself suggested to unemployed people all over south Wales that it would be a good idea to go to Cardiff to find work. Normally, the story is less hand-wringing, and is of scroungers and welfare queens, claiming more in benefits than you or I get in wages.

So child benefits and tax credits should be capped after a family has two children. Duncan Smith wants to



David Cameron: nasty toff

save £10 billion through this wheeze, and appeals to the usual petty bourgeois gripes to justify it: "Should families expect never-ending amounts of money for every child, when working households must make tough choices about what they can afford?" (And they accuse *us* of the politics of envy!)

This is an interesting statement, primarily because it implies that child benefits go predominantly to families who are not working. This, to put it mildly, is bunk. Four percent of households in receipt of jobseekers' allowance have more than two dependent children. A family can claim a whopping £65 extra per child per week through child benefits and tax credits. Add it all up, and that puts the benefits bill up by just £300 million.

To get rid of £10 billion, you would have to knock tax credits off the great many more working families, for most of whom the tax relief is the difference between survival and destitution (two million children would be affected by such a cut). The social consequences would obviously enough be horrible,

but, more to the point, they would be deeply ironic from a Tory point of view. A great many more abortions, for a start; and more generally, an assault on the fabric of family life for a decent slice of the British population. Compassionate Conservatism at its best!

The government is also busily engaged in slashing the housing benefit bill, which - again - goes as much to those in work as those on the dole. Once more, the dishonesty is almost impressive - the spiralling cost of HB is a direct result of the policies of Thatcher, who depleted social housing stocks and created the condition for the housing bubble that sent rents skyward. But it is not the Tories' fault, apparently - it is yours.

Pass the soap

Surely Theresa May has not forgotten her own decade-old admonition to the assembled Tory grandees? Alas, she has. She bristles endlessly at the European Court of Human Rights, which irritatingly insists on overruling her attempts at reactionary rabble-

rousing. We had the whole farrago over Abu Qatada's endless wait for deportation to Jordan for torture - sorry, interrogation.

Now, the running sore is votes for prisoners. ECHR decisions have set an appalling precedent for braying reactionaries in all the bourgeois parties - while it is not a requirement to allow *all* prisoners to vote, it is impermissible to deny people the vote on the sole basis that they are in prison. The very idea of letting the soaring prison population have a say in politics is enough to send the 'throw away the key' wing of the Conservative Party into paroxysms of horror.

Again, the argumentation is drearily instructive. Prisoners have forfeited their right to vote by abdicating their responsibility to obey the law. This is laughable. An ever greater number of people end up in the slammer for trivial offences - the legacy of endless successive governments' insistence on posing tough on 'law and order'. More to the point, prison has the effect of transforming the petty criminal into the career criminal. So obsessively punitive is this society, it actually manufactures people fit to punish. Perhaps prisoners might have something to say about these things. Certainly, MPs whose constituencies contain major prisons would have to give the issue more thought than is currently the case.

That is too much for the *Daily Mail et al*, and it is therefore too much for May. Tory politicians are congenitally incapable of empathy for anyone who gives them the smallest excuse to withhold it.

Misanthropy

All of this adds up to a frankly disturbing picture of the Tory psyche.

The function of prisons, in the eyes (and most especially the practice) of Theresa May and her ilk, is to be hell on earth. I mean this quite literally. What is hell, but the place where the Almighty exacts eternal vengeance on all who do not obey his command? The doctrine of

retributive justice amounts to the same thing; the means may not run towards direct physical torment, and the time frame may not stretch to infinity, but prison amounts to an environment of permanent anxiety and, in many jails, risk of physical harm. It is pretty much *torture*. The Tory mind is thus deeply and pathologically sadistic.

The child benefits issue, meanwhile, conceals a disturbingly misanthropic view of children. In this analysis, the very young are simply an economic burden, to be borne only by those quixotic enough to tolerate the loss of cash and spare time. A child is not the object of hope, not the symbol of our duty to make a tolerable future for the next generation of humans. It is rather the object of a cost-benefit analysis. A child - in this grey world - is £65 per week added to the treasury books. If only people would stop having the damned things.

The fish rots from the head down. Not only does the Tory Party carry such pathological views: Labour Party strategy since Blair has consisted of adopting Tory positions on these and other issues. It too has propagated scares about largely fictional benefit fraud and vastly expanded the prison population. It, too, has adopted the grotesque rhetoric that surrounds these issues.

Capitalist rule, meanwhile, is ensured by a Faustian pact between the ruling class and the petty bourgeoisie, to which the workers' movement is no longer strong enough to consistently offer an opposing ideological pole. So, inevitably, these ideas find an ever greater traction among the population at large, whose response to an atomised existence is to kick the next fellow below them.

The Tories, indeed, are the nasty party, and perversely proud of the fact these days - but the logic of capitalism, and the logic of bourgeois politics, makes that nastiness contagious ●

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