



weekly worker

**Socialism 2012: friendly
and successful, but
programmatically adrift**

- Australian unity
- Living wage
- EU budget vote
- Letters and debate

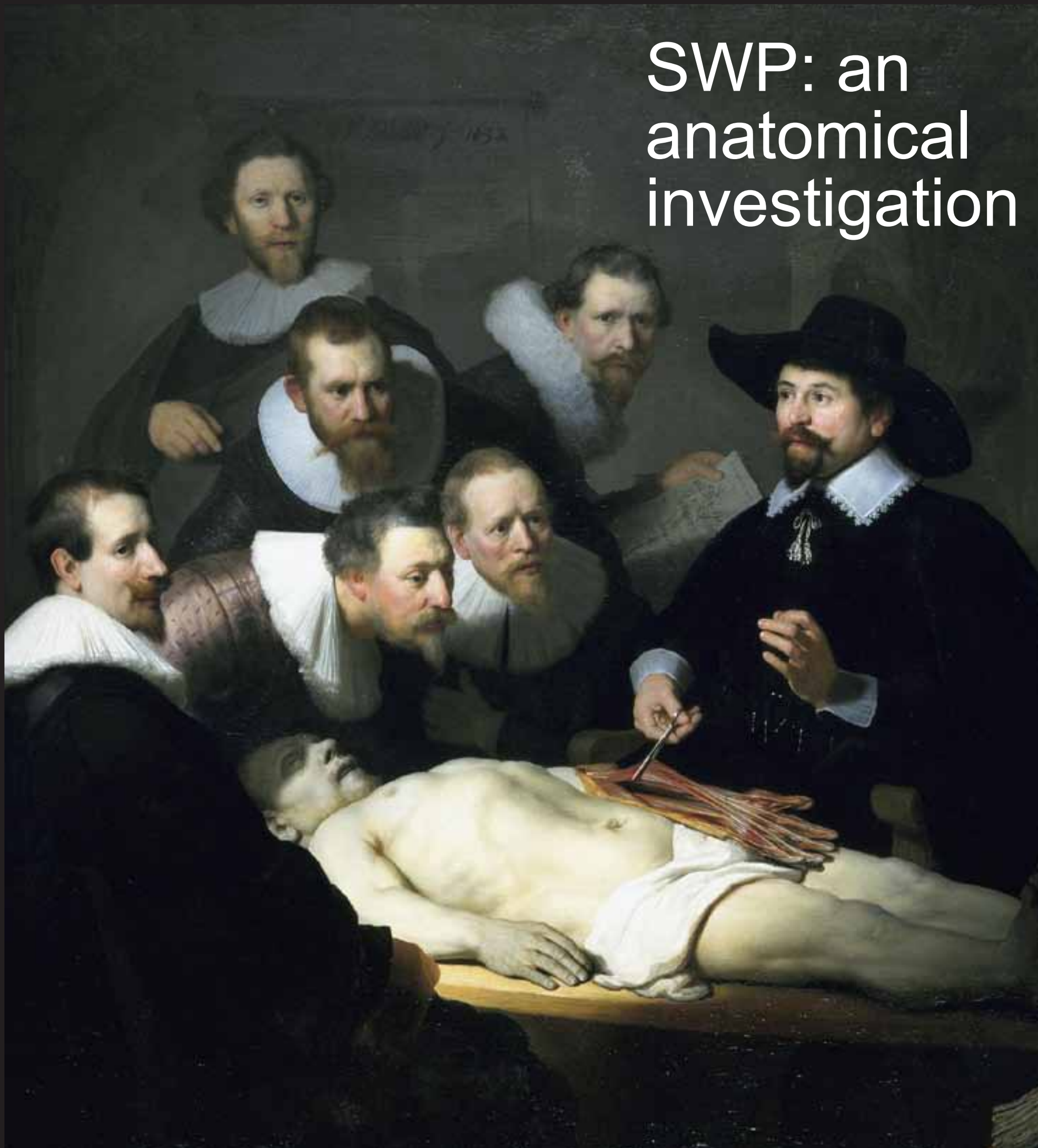
No 937 Thursday November 8 2012

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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SWP: an anatomical investigation



LETTERS



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

Invisible left

November 15 sees the police and crime commissioner elections. Glancing over the candidates reveals a distinct absence of the left wing. Has the left nothing to say about policing, crime and punishment?

Granted, these elections are an idea from the Conservative Party and therefore a policy change to be deeply sceptical about. As with everything that emits from that eternal and holy institution for the promotion of misanthropy and general nastiness, it isn't good news for the working class. But still the left ought to have something to say about it.

Searching the archives of *Socialist Worker* draws a blank: not a column inch about the upcoming election. Likewise the Socialist Party.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty, however, has noticed.

Line starts off well before descending into drivel about how "Labour Party activists' time would be better spent building the fight against the cuts and privatisation." I say 'drivel' because that's what it is to suggest that Labour activists should not be interested in anything other than quibbling over those issues. Are they to be allowed no opinion on anything other than the cuts, comrades? Should the Labour Party just concede and let the Tories win every commissioner post in the country?

Politics is not just about economic squabbles, which is something you'd think the AWL would be able to comprehend when it also points out in the same piece that many parties to the right of the Tories have jumped at these elections as a chance to air their politics. Indeed, the candidate lists

feature Ukip, English Democrats and British Freedomers, all on the 'Hang 'em high, give 'em a good kicking' approach to criminal policy.

To give the AWL its due, it is correct in its analysis that these elected commissioners will just "give a faint veneer of legitimacy and accountability to a reactionary, anti-working class state institution" (www.workersliberty.org/story/2012/10/23/dont-buy-police-and-crime-commissioners). The comrades can see the wood from the trees and the forest, but it seems they are completely against the idea of going in with a chainsaw to see what a left intervention might do - even a left intervention from the centre-left of Labour's activists.

The Communist Party of Britain also draws a complete blank. The CPGB tackled the issue back in June by giving space to Labour Party Marxists ('Police commissioners or citizen militias', June 21). Jim Moody there makes the correct point that, "Were a revolutionary to stand in the November elections, he or she might use the opportunity to challenge the whole notion of the state pretending to bend to the popular will by inserting its placemen (of whichever party) in PCC posts." As he predicted then, it has come to pass that no-one even vaguely revolutionary has stepped up to have a go.

I think that, just as this new election opens up space for the right, it is a shame that no-one from the left has realised that it also opens up room for them. Standing a candidate would have been the most effective way to intervene, but I hope that the blindness of much of the left doesn't lead them to continue to just concede by not taking part in the election.

Given its nature, the spoilt ballot or non-participation is the only correct position the left can take,

since it isn't in the game stating its case. But it need not be taken passively. The lack of interest from the three main left groups, however, does make it seem likely that the election will be ignored; just as the questions of democracy and politics are ignored by the opportunist, economic sects in general. They have their hopes pinned on the fightback against the cuts and the TUC calling a general strike that turns everyone into revolutionaries overnight, but it seems they cannot see that several years into austerity there is no major growth in the forces of the left.

The majority of the class are not even union members. There is general consent in the country that the effort to 'balance the books' for the nation is a desirable aim and that their roads to socialism are going nowhere fast.

John Masters
Hertfordshire

Rape solution

Terry Burns criticises me in his letter of November 1. Just to clarify my position, I am not calling for the abolition of the offence of rape, but merely pointing out that it offers very little protection to rape victims, as the 90% acquittal rate testifies. The reality is that rape usually occurs in private, so when it comes to court it is usually one person's word against another's. In addition, the woman may be suspected by some of making a malicious accusation. No wonder most victims are reluctant to go to court.

Comrade Burns asks: "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?" It depends on the development of social solidarity. Capitalism, with its privilege for a minority and isolation and atomisation of the majority, creates the conditions for rape.

I was not contradicting myself when I said the problem of rape had been "solved". Women's oppression was defeated in our struggle to become human, only to be reinvented by class society. Frederick Engels' position, I think. In other words, we will have to solve the problem again. An example of how ancient class society viewed rape is perfectly encapsulated in the *Ramayana*, where Sita, having been rescued from the demon, Ravana, is put aside by her husband because the mere possibility of penetration meant that she had to be banished.

In that view of rape nothing else matters but the act of penetration. Violence, imprisonment, pain, humiliation, powerlessness - all are immaterial. It disturbs me that the Swedish law has exactly the same definition. I do not deny that penetration distinguishes rape from all other forms of oppression against women and therefore must be a key element, but in excluding social, physical and psychological factors it introduces new problems for women.

The example of the two Swedish women in the Assange case demonstrates this: women lose control over the question. They were not raped in their opinion and were not interested in having Assange punished. This decision was thrust upon them by the state prosecutor, while their real concern regarding paternity was ignored. They were treated like children - not a liberating experience.

Heather Downs has made the point that one of the women did not complain about the non-use of a condom because she was asleep. If you can sleep through rape, then perhaps rape is not such a serious

offence. In the public mind it is a very serious, nasty offence. Is it a good idea to spread the definition so wide that you risk devaluing the concept?

Phil Kent
Haringey

Crisis dogma

Ben Lewis and Harpal Brar, representing the left, participated in the Durham Union Society debate on October 19. The basis of this debate was the motion: "This house believes capitalism has failed" ('Stalinism reinforces capitalist apologetics' *Weekly Worker* October 25).

No-one seemed to have recognised the reason why capitalism is in crisis. Brar believes we are facing another crisis brought on by overproduction. While this can and does lead to crisis for capitalism, it is not the primary reason for the world economy slowing down at present.

Capitalism is facing a crisis it has never faced before, as readers of this page should know by now: that is, the peaking of global oil production, while demand for oil in every upturn increases. A world where oil production is increasing - ie, 1859-2005/08, is a different world to that where production is stagnating and set to decline. To blame the present crisis on overproduction is just Marxist dogma, which ignores the fact that ultimately overproduction is itself an artefact of cheap, abundant energy, which increasingly is becoming a thing of the past.

Dogma allows people to ignore reality. Look at Arthur Bough claiming that capitalism was facing a new period of long-term growth and prosperity. He failed to see how world peak oil was undermining the new Kondratiev wave. You need abundant and cheap energy if you want a boom.

On the other hand, the defenders of capitalism divide into two camps, made up of those who call for more regulation and their opponents who want a free market. The latter sometimes cite how Thatcher turned Britain around by freeing up the market. But the British capitalist economy was not saved by Thatcherism, but by North Sea oil coming on stream in the 1970s. Those who support capitalism are failing to recognise that capitalism, which needs constant growth, resulted from cheap, abundant energy. From a peak

oil/energy perspective, Marxists are not very different from orthodox economists. They don't see that with the decline of abundant, cheap power capitalism must also decline, and if capitalism was to gain access to a new form of energy equal or superior to fossil fuels it would simply intensify the overproduction problem, which an unplanned system with advanced productive forces suffers from.

Ben Lewis thinks that Harpal Brar's Stalinism serves to reinforce capitalist apologetics. It's hard to disagree with Lewis in this respect. Harpal's totally uncritical approach to Stalin and the Soviet Union he led is not exactly calculated to win over politically intelligent support to the fight for communism - which, despite the efforts of bourgeois propaganda, is a goal still worth fighting for.

Tony Clark
London

Nasty recipe

Paul Demarty's critique of the Tories' attacks on social policy ('Revenge of the nasty party', November 1) recalls Dean Swift's *A modest proposal - for preventing the children of poor people in Ireland from being a burden on their parents or country, and for making them beneficial to the public* (1729).

Swift satirically proposes cannibalism: "I have been assured by a very knowing American of my acquaintance in London that a young, healthy child well nursed is, at a year old, a most delicious, nourishing and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked or boiled, and I make no doubt that it will equally serve in a fricasie or ragout."

The more things change ...

Daniel Trevenna
email

The apprentice

Your article on the American elections was a masterpiece, and pristinely in tune with my instincts! ('US elections: The more effective evil', November 1).

How could I train to write for you or write like that? Where do you find the courage? And, only being 29, if I started writing for you, what do you think are the chances I'd end up in a secret imperialist prison before I die?

Note: I wouldn't consider the latter a perk.

Christopher Hastings
email

Second edition: It's here



Extra four chapters and completely revised throughout

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sigh of the oppressed creature 2. Religion and the human revolution 3. When all the crap began 4. Religion, class struggles and revolution in ancient Judea 5. Peasant socialism and the persistence of polytheism in ancient Israel 6. Royalist nationalism, opposition prophets and the impact of Babylonian exile and return 7. Uses and abuses of Jesus 8. Roman society and decline 9. Jesus - a man of his times 10. After king Jesus 11. John Paul II, liberation theology and US decline 12. Origins of Islam 13. Bolshevik lessons 14. Muslim brothers 15. Jews and Zionism 16. Zionism and the holocaust | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 17. Forty-one theses on the Arab awakening and Israel-Palestine 18. Free speech and religious hatred laws 19. Secularism <p>"Jack Conrad writes in the best Marxist tradition. Following the insights of Marx and Engels, he analyses religion as a socially conditioned individual outlook, a social ideology that reflects reality in fantastic form, and an oppressive institution of social and political control."</p> <p>Moshé Machover</p> <p>pp625, £20, plus £3.50 p&p, from BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX. Make cheques payable to November Publications.</p> |
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Fighting fund

Consolidate

After last month's success, when we exceeded our £1,500 fighting fund target by £342, we are looking to consolidate by ensuring another good month in November.

And, as usual, things have got off to a good start, with £427 received in the first week. But, as I have pointed out before, that first week is always a bit misleading, because that is when the greatest part of our standing order donations come through. And this month has been no exception, with a total of £313 received in SOs. In all, 21 comrades made their start-of-the-month payments, ranging from £5 to £30. Thank you all!

One of the above donors is YM, who, I am informed, meant to increase the £10 that comes our way some months ago. Having forgotten to organise it then, the comrade has now written me a cheque for £84 to make up for the backlog. So that's £94 from YM all in one week!

I also received three further

cheques - all of them for £10. So thank you, LP, BG and DW, with a special mention for DW, who writes: "I'm hoping to make this a regular donation. I might even go for a standing order!" That's what I like to hear, comrade.

Although new subscriptions via PayPal are continuing to come through, I've not had any donations via that method this week. But there was a welcome increase in the number of online readers - up to 10,983, the first time we've been over the 10,000 mark for some time. So let's hope a fair number of our internet readers get out their credit or debit card over the next three weeks, and help us break through the £1,500 barrier once again.

Robbie Rix

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

PAY

Living wage farce

Minimum pay should be determined by workers' commissions, argues **Michael Copestake**



Five million workers below 'socially acceptable minimum'

There has been a brief flurry of media and political commentary sparked by the release of a report by accounting firm KPMG, which revealed that five million UK workers were earning less than the nominal 'living wage'. This is a figure calculated by the Centre for Research in Social Policy at Loughborough University, which currently stands at £7.45 per hour for the UK outside of London and £8.45 per hour in the capital - raised incidentally by a generous 10p for Greater London Authority workers by London mayor Boris Johnson. These sums are said to be the minimum hourly wage required in order to live in some degree of comfort.

But where do they come from? The CRSP, which is funded by the Rowntree foundation, derives them from surveys of the general public on what they think are the necessary costs of living and working, plus a "socially acceptable minimum level of comfort" for those at the bottom of the labour force. This nominal figure is campaigned for by the Living Wage Foundation, which seeks to get employers to pay their workers the calculated living wage rather than the lower national minimum wage.

Labour leader Ed Miliband quickly got in on the act by declaring that a future Labour government would "name and shame" employers who were not paying the living wage - excluding small and medium-sized enterprises, that is. In addition he praised Labour councils who were already committed to paying their workers the living wage - though the latest Labour local authority to proclaim its adherence to the policy, Sheffield council, will be doing so only for those workers who have not been sacked as part of the wider austerity programme. But those lucky enough to remain in a job will get the increased rate.

So far though, only 45,000 workers since 2005 have benefited from an increase in line with the CRSP living wage - yet there are five million workers on the official minimum wage, which is now widely recognised as being insufficient for a "socially acceptable minimum level of comfort". Here conscious social determination meets market

determination and it is clear which one is still winning.

Even though the living wage only affects a limited number of public sector workers and those employed by larger companies that typically have very few minimum-wage staff to begin with, and even though none of the political parties is for anything other than the voluntary adoption of the living wage, it has nonetheless been enough to provoke the usual suspects - the Confederation of British Industry, Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) and so on - into explaining why it must absolutely not be made compulsory, and why the whole thing is a bad idea anyway.

Ruth Porter, director of the rightwing, 'free market' think tank, the Institute of Economic Affairs, said it was all well and good big business coughing up for "more motivated and less transient" staff, but what about those poor small businesses who just cannot afford it? Speaking on behalf of said small business people, the chair of the FSB, having said out of one side of his mouth that it was a lovely idea in theory, added that the costs for small business in the current climate - what, with rent and energy, not to mention the owners' own cost of living increasing - meant that many small business could not afford to pay the living wage. The niceties end abruptly with his simple final claim that "The market would determine what was affordable."

Even the CBI is continuing to advise its members to hold back on recruitment and pay until further signs of economic improvement are visible, keeping people on shorter hours and lower pay in exchange for remaining in some kind of employment at all.

So Labour is able to adopt a moral pose, the right gets to agree with the good intentions, whilst shooting down the idea anyhow, and the media gets something to say. Everyone's a winner, and at no additional expense to the exchequer.

For communists this is simply a farce. No employer will voluntarily agree to redistribute their profits in favour of their employees, while it would be most unlikely for the capitalist state to insist they do so in this period of austerity. Perhaps the brief publicity given to the idea of

the living wage is connected in part with the economic crisis. On the one hand, it could be viewed as part of an economic stimulus package. On the other hand, the think tank that goes by the bizarre name of International Security Forum has calculated that paying the living wage would increase state revenues and decrease the benefits bill. But it is highly doubtful whether there will be government action to push through higher pay.

However, some have said that if the living wage were to be calculated regionally, and this was accompanied by the breaking up of national pay bargaining in the public sector, then perhaps the idea would be more palatable. Sounds more like a way of cutting pay to me. Who knows how low any so-called 'living wage' could sink using such methods.

The living wage itself, as expressed by the CRSP, Rowntree and so on, is also problematic. For a start it is not that much higher than the minimum wage, which is clearly utterly insufficient, despite the fact that since its inception it has increased above inflation and relative to general rates of pay. A testament perhaps to the very low level at which it began. It also would take the low-paid worker over a number of tax and allowance thresholds, so that much of the extra earned income would disappear.

Finally it would do nothing to address broader questions. Those in work who have not been forced onto part-time working are often subjected to long, crushing hours. At the same time the numbers of those partly or fully unemployed continues to grow. In order to gain the maximum benefit from any supposed 'living wage' one would have to work maximum hours in the midst of mass unemployment.

The labour movement ought to be campaigning for a substantial reduction in working hours without loss of pay, alongside the setting of a national minimum wage, to be determined by workers' commissions; and unemployment benefit set at the level of that minimum wage or training at union rates of pay and under union supervision ●

Notes

1. www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-20204594.
2. www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-20104177.

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 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 13, 6.15pm: 'Bayaka singing workshop: "I want honey, not money, honey"'. Speaker: Ingrid Lewis. 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.

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: Conference. School of Oriental and African Studies, Thornhaugh Street, London WC1. Organised by *Historical Materialism*: www.historicalmaterialism.org.

Unto the breach

Friday November 9, Saturday November 10: Dance theatre adaptation of Shakespeare's *Henry V* set in modern-day Palestine. 5 Nether Street, Tally Ho Corner, North Finchley, London N12. Organised by Al Zaytouna: www.alzaytouna.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>.

Children in chains

Saturday November 10, 1pm to 5pm: Seminar, Hilton Edinburgh Grosvenor Hotel, Grosvenor Street, Edinburgh EH12. Stop detention and abuse of Palestinian children.

Organised by Scottish Friends of Palestine: www.scottishfriendsofpalestine.org.

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.

No to Blair

Tuesday November 13, 11am: Protest, University College London, Gower Street, London WC1. Tony Blair is among the speakers at a conference at UCL.

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

European day of action

Wednesday November 14: Solidarity demonstrations **Sheffield, 4pm:** Town hall, Pinstone Street, Sheffield S1.

Organised by Sheffield Trades Council: www.en-gb.facebook.com/pages/Sheffield-TUC/136443963099901.

London, 5pm: European Commission, 32 Smith Square, London SW1, followed by march past parliament to rally.

Manchester, 12 noon: Piccadilly Gardens, Manchester M60.

Glasgow, 6pm: George Square, Glasgow G2.

Organised by Coalition of Resistance Scotland: www.coalitionofresistance.org.uk.

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: mediacnf@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.

National Shop Stewards Network

Saturday November 17, 12 noon to 4pm. Midlands regional conference. Unite offices, 211 Broad Street, Birmingham, B15.

Saturday November 24, 10am to 4pm. Yorkshire and Humber regional conference. Cosmopolitan Hotel, 2 Lower Bridgate, Leeds, LS1.

Organised by the NSSN: www.shopstewards.net.

Educate, employ, empower

Wednesday November 21, 11am: National Union of Students national demonstration. Assemble Temple Place, London WC2, for march to rally in Kennington Park.

Organised by NUS: www.demo2012.org.uk.

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.

SPEW

A friendly, successful but programmatically adrift event

The Socialism schools of the Socialist Party in England and Wales provide a far more accurate snapshot of the state of the host organisation than the Socialist Workers Party's summer equivalent, Marxism. This is simply because, in relative terms, SPEW mobilises a far smaller proportion of non-members to its event.

For instance, the SWP's November *Internal Bulletin* has this confusing typo - we are told that at Marxism this year, there were "3,063 members and 1,822 members" (sic). We presume that the first figure (rather than the second) should read 'non-members'. Either way, the pull this main rival to SPEW exercises is considerably larger - I would say that at least 90% of those attending the November 3-4 Socialism 2012 were SPEW comrades. Despite its generally 'safe' ethos (ie, Marxism has no debates featuring

differences in the SWP or awkward customers from other rival left groups), the SWP does cast its net far wider in terms of both audience and invited speakers.

The timetable at this year's event Socialism therefore largely composed of SPEW comrades talking to other SPEW comrades. The CPGB was the only group with a stall inside the event at the University of London Union. The International Bolshevik Tendency made a brief appearance with a stall outside and its comrades spoke in one or two sessions, but the rest of the left was generally conspicuous by its absence.

This rather intense insularity might lead readers to assume that SPEW would have a surly, resentful attitude to outside organisations, but that would be incorrect. In general, the comrades were friendly, willing to buy papers, take leaflets and engage in

discussion. In the individual sessions, our comrades were frequently called to speak - certainly, we got the impression that this was the inclusive attitude of older cadre and leading members (some younger chairs appeared a little more narrow in their approach, it must be said). My general impression was that the organisation is confident about itself and has grown (marginally) over the past period.

For instance, we estimate that there were between 750 and 850 at the Saturday rally - and with a noticeable contingent of younger and often inexperienced comrades in the hall. This demographic is the one that the bulk of Socialism is designed to serve, with the inevitable lowering in quality of many openings and debate that follows from this. That is not to suggest that an organisation should not facilitate younger or less

experienced comrades finding a way into the discussions and be given the chance to swat up on the language and concepts being used. However, when much of what is said in a political meeting is consciously designed to engage with the *least* knowledgeable, the *least* experienced comrades in the room, the result tends to be that everyone comes away feeling patronised.

The apparent confidence of the SPEW comrades should not blind us to the problems of perspective the organisation is running up against. Its main political project - the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition - is making no headway and, as a consequence, some ominous noises have come from the one union organisation the comrades have managed to pull on board. Speaking at the September 22 Tusc conference in London, RMT president Alex Gordon warned that his

union would not remain the only one officially supporting Tusc "forever and a day" (*Weekly Worker* September 27).

As the debate on the Labour Party reported below shows, the general viability of the political project is suspect. Although SPEW stabilised itself after a couple of debilitating splits during what its hapless general secretary, Peter Taaffe, had dubbed the "red 90s", it is really not hard to see political icebergs looming once more on the horizon. For example, how about those old favourites that have caused the organisation so much pain in the past - the question of the Labour Party and working class political representation, on the one hand, and Scotland and the national question, on the other? We cover these and other topics in our reports over the following pages ●

Mark Fischer

Unity of the left can wait

The talk by SPEW general secretary Peter Taaffe - 'Can capitalism escape economic crisis? Is socialism viable?' - was largely standard fare. The answer to the two questions that made up the title of the session was, rather obviously, 'no' and 'yes' respectively.

Of course, both parts of the talk contained what might be termed SPEWisms. For example, Liverpool council, when it was run by Militant in the 1980s, was a "living example of what planning can achieve", said comrade Taaffe. Which struck me as a rather mundane use of the word 'planning' - a handful of people making policy decisions within capitalism - rather than an inspiring glimpse of the future socialist society, as it was intended.

Then there was the statement that a workers' state represents "a transitional regime leading to socialism". Which makes me wonder what comrade Taaffe understands socialism to be: probably what most of us call 'communism' - a word long banished from the official Militant/SPEW lexicon.

But in my intervention in the

subsequent discussion I ignored such details. Pointing out that I agreed overwhelmingly with the *thrust* of comrade Taaffe's presentation, I said that for the most part it could have been delivered at Marxism, the annual school of the Socialist Workers Party. The difference being that, whereas the immediate conclusion drawn by comrade Taaffe was 'Join the Socialist Party', that drawn at Marxism would be 'Join the SWP'. This struck me as a wasteful duplication of energy. Shouldn't we be looking to unite within a single,

democratic-centralist Marxist party, rather than maintaining our own sectarian grouplets?

Former Liverpool councillor Tony Mulhearn thought that this was a totally different question - one that would be better dealt with in a session on the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition,

he said. This was evidently incorrect for two reasons: first, because Tusc is not considered by anyone as a step towards a single Marxist party; and, secondly, because there was no such session at Socialism 2012 (which, by the way,

demonstrates how much 'priority' Tusc really has in SPEW's eyes).

The question was, however, taken up by other SPEW members. A Cardiff comrade agreed that it was "time the left unified", but another activist said that unity was easier said than done - the "real, practical difficulties" could not be ignored. A Manchester member thought that left unity was a "great idea", but only if it brought the class together. The first priority must therefore be a "new working class party" - a specifically *non-Marxist* formation is what he meant. Another south Wales comrade thought there was potential for "left parties" to come together - he mentioned SPEW, the SWP and CPGB - and we could best do that in a replacement Labour Party.

In his reply comrade Taaffe reiterated that left unity would have to be "cemented by real forces", the implication being that Marxist regroupment would be just a waste of time in the absence of a mass working class party. He took issue with my use of the word

'sectarian'. The Socialist Party's position was the very opposite of sectarian, he said, since it was based on the need to unite the whole class, not further the interests of SPEW.

Having comforted himself with that thought, he went on to describe the role of SPEW within a future workers' party: it would provide the "Marxist, revolutionary spine" - although he conceded that other left groups might be involved too. But Marxist unity? The left reminded him of Marx's own words: "If that's Marxism, I am not a Marxist."

But the main reason why a "broad party" was needed "in the first instance" was that the movement had been "thrown back". Admittedly at a "certain stage" there will have to be a mass revolutionary party, he said. But in the meantime unity can wait. It was obvious from this whole argument that everything would depend on the SPEW embryonic party-in-waiting: "If the Socialist Party didn't exist the working class would eventually come up with socialist answers," said comrade Taaffe. In other words, the working class could not possibly get those answers from any other leftwing group.

He also responded to a question from comrade Yasmine Mather of Hands Off the People of Iran relating to SPEW's propaganda for a general strike to bring down the government. Surely under current circumstances that would only lead to a Labour administration under Miliband, she said. Comrade Taaffe's answer was that a Labour government brought to power through a general strike would be a creature of the new situation. There would be opportunities for socialists and the possibility of splits, leading to a "government based on the movement".

But, if Labour is now just another "bourgeois party", in what way would it be more susceptible to working class pressure than the Tories and Liberal Democrats? ●

Peter Manson



Peter Taaffe: mass party first

Joining the nationalist bandwagon

One of the more interesting sessions at this year's Socialism was 'Should Scotland become independent?', introduced by comrade Philip Stott. His talk was reasonably comprehensive, giving a detailed account of the political situation in Scotland with regard to support for independence, outlining where it stems from and which sections of Scottish society tend to identify with the Scottish nationalist position. A comprehensive opening, but one which drew fundamentally wrong conclusions.

The Committee for a Workers' International has maintained ostensibly the same position on the national question in Scotland since the late 90s: it just chooses to give it more or less prominence depending on the given political situation. Back in the era of the Scottish Socialist Alliance and the early days of the formation of the Scottish Socialist Party, CWI comrades (then including SSP leaders such as Alan McCombes and Tommy Sheridan) noticed a rise in support for Scottish independence (in part reflected in the Scottish National Party's vote) among sections of the working class and youth. This is still the case and, as the comrade mentioned, the reasons for this are to do with political disenfranchisement and disillusionment with the Scottish Labour Party.

Opportunistically, in the late 90s, the CWI decided to tail this movement, adopting the left-nationalist call for an "independent socialist Scotland". As the SSP developed, its leadership took up an ever more reformist and ever more nationalist stance, eventually splitting from the CWI to form the Frontline leadership faction. The position on the national question became theorised and difficult to overturn or even debate. Comrade McCombes's writing justifying this



Independence will be a vote for Scottish regiments in Nato and Scottish capitalism

position is now echoed in the Socialist Workers Party's pamphlet *Yes to independence, no to nationalism*. Meanwhile the comrades who stayed loyal to the CWI maintained the position they had assumed in the late 90s - for an independent Scotland, yes, but not an independent *capitalist* Scotland, which would not be beneficial to the working class; rather, for an independent *socialist* Scotland. This is the line that comrade Stott reiterated.

One must then pose the ironic question to our CWI comrades: would socialism in one country not be a bad idea, in your view? To which the reply is always, well, we would see an independent socialist Scotland as part of an alliance with a socialist England and Wales. One

has to beg the question then: in that case, why separate? And by putting the word 'socialist' before Scotland, England or Wales the comrades are still implying that socialism can be achieved within the confines of national boundaries (a view that, mercifully, they do not *formally* hold). So why raise it? Apparently in order to engage with nationalist sentiment and raise socialist demands through campaigning for a 'yes' vote.

In order to counter CPGB comrades' arguments against adopting a pro-independence position, CWI comrades made the point throughout the discussion that the alternative was unthinkable. Correctly, they pointed out that if you line up with the 'no' camp - or Better Together, as the campaign is known - then you are

aligning yourselves with the British state, the monarchy, etc, etc. This is, of course, true, but it is not our position. We will most likely advocate an active boycott as the only principled position. That would ensure we would not become an ally either of the British state or of Scottish nationalism.

Comrade Stott, knowing our politics fairly well, had anticipated that we would be for a boycott and countered this position in his summing up. He suggested that the boycott campaign would not engage with the debate in Scotland, as there is no-one actually raising that demand. This is a view that I have some (albeit limited) sympathy with. It is true to say that in the political circumstances in Scotland at the moment such a call would not register easily in people's

consciousness. But there will be no alternative to the call for a boycott - not because we have nothing to say, but because nothing on offer is in the interests of our class. It will be the only principled stance to take.

As comrade Stott correctly pointed out, support for independence is disproportionately higher among the working class and the youth (arguably support for capital punishment might also be higher among those sections, but that would not lead us to adopt a pro-hanging line, in order to 'have the conversation').

The left for many decades did not seriously engage with the national question in Scotland and, when it finally did, got it profoundly wrong. The appalling theoretical weakness on this question was evidenced by the contributions from the floor in this session, which confused the *principle* of the right of nations to self-determination with the *tactic* of advocating secession in a small minority of cases. A common idea is that by voting 'yes' we will be sticking two fingers up at the imperialism.

The point, of course, that we have repeated ad nauseum, is that Marxists must support the democratic right to self-determination, while promoting the greatest voluntary unity of the working class. Workers in England should support that right for the peoples of Scotland and Wales, while workers in Scotland and Wales should advocate unity - not the division of our historically constituted working class along national lines. The key to resolving national antagonisms in the present situation in Britain is the call for a federal republic of Scotland, Wales and England.

That way, we refuse to align ourselves either with the British constitutional monarchy state or with petty bourgeois nationalism ●

Sarah McDonald

Labour: for a 'civil war'

At one point in the 'Is the Labour Party a vehicle for socialism?' session, Clive Heemskerk, the deputy editor of the SPEW monthly *Socialism Today*, outlined a fighting programme for the Labour left that had CPGBers in the packed audience nodding along in agreement. In his debate with the media-friendly left *Wunderkind*, Owen Jones, comrade Heemskerk conceded that it was "theoretically possible" to "reclaim" Labour, but only if:

- "the Labour party were restructured from top to bottom";
- "all those who were expelled or had left in the past were readmitted";
- "the parliamentary party and council Labour groups were made to re-apply for membership of the Labour Party in front of reconstituted committees of workers, trade union delegates and anti-cuts community activists".

If they had to answer the question, 'What did you do in the war against cuts?', some of them might get through, he thought.

However, a "tiny detail" implied in all this, he sadly observed, is that "you need a war, a civil war, an enormous battle inside the Labour Party" and "where are the forces going to come from" for that?

In many ways, this absolutely correct observation went to the heart of the matter and exposed the similar squeamish flaws in *both* platform arguments in the debate.

Comrade Heemskerk made the telling point against Owen Jones that non-affiliated unions such as RMT, NUT, PCS - amongst the most militant in the country and organising today more forces than those deployed

in creating the original Labour Representation Committee in 1900 - were left out of the equation. "You can't convince them to join the Labour Party to change it," he stated, but not only that: "You're not prepared to organise a campaign in those unions to affiliate to the Labour Party ... in effect you are demobilising perhaps the most militant section of your army for this battle."

A good criticism, and one not simply confined to comrade Jones. The general lack of an appetite on the left of the party for a potentially fractious and difficult affiliation campaign in non-Labour unions was illustrated in the debate around one point in a Communist Students motion to the January 2011 AGM of the LRC. The idea that "the LRC will campaign for all trade unions to affiliate to the Labour Party" was actually *contested* by LRC activists in the PCS (a union within which SPEW is more than influential, of course), who were also members of PCS Labour Left! In that meeting, Barnet trades council secretary Austin Harney unconsciously revealed the timid rationale for this when he suggested he "would be lynched" if he proposed affiliation to Labour in his union.

Interestingly, in a pre-debate exchange with Clive in *Socialism Today*, comrade Jones actually showed he had little stomach for this required "civil war" in his party. When comrade Heemskerk asked him if in his view activists in non-affiliated unions should launch a campaign for affiliation, he said: "The only way that would happen is if the affiliated unions showed it's possible to transform

the Labour Party and how it works. There's no point going round leafleting NUT or PCS conference, saying, 'Brothers and sisters, pass a motion for affiliation to the Labour Party'. Of course I wouldn't" (October, p17).

On the other side of the argument, SPEW essentially theorised its current extra-Labour practice that was actually forced on it by the expulsion from the party of what was then Militant Tendency in the 1980s. Its profound political disorientation was neatly illustrated by comrade Heemskerk when he responded to a comment by comrade Jones. Picking up on a point made by the CPGB's John Bridge in a contribution from the floor, Owen had emphasised the dangers of simply abandoning the fight against even firmly entrenched rightwing bureaucracies in the workers' movement: "Why not apply the same logic to trade unions?" he asked. Why not simply walk out of them? Tellingly, he gave the example of the PCS as was, which for years was under the control of a reactionary clique. Comrades - including those in the forerunner of SPEW itself - could have thrown up their hands and just bailed out: "Thank god that didn't happen," comrade Jones correctly observed.

In Clive's riposte he positively cited as "absolutely correct" the decision of striking miners in South Africa to leave the National Union of Mineworkers and form a rival organisation and, even more worryingly, claimed that this was the "music of the future in relation to Britain as well". These comments from a leading Socialist Party comrade

underline that, whatever its purported merits in the past, the organisation is now characterised by a worrying disorientation.

Elements of SPEW's former incarnation as the profoundly Labour-loyal Militant do remain, however. This made for the rather odd spectacle of Owen Jones - the Labour *member* - talking his party down in contrast to some of comrade Heemskerk's upbeat assessments of moments from its history.

Remember, comrade Jones told the assembled SPEW comrades, "the Labour leadership has *never* supported a strike in this country - it didn't support the General Strike, it didn't support the miners' strike; there's nothing new about that position". Surprisingly, this correct observation drew some heckles from sections of the audience.

Similarly, comrade Heemskerk talked up the Labour Party democracy of the past, when local branches and even national conference were "effectively parliaments of the workers' movement". Now, he added sadly, "conference doesn't decide party policy". But when *did* it? As Owen correctly noted, "Historically, the trade unions have not used their potential power at conference, preferring backroom deals" with the Labour bureaucracy.

Clive spoke of the "ideological basis" of the party reflecting - although inadequately - the needs of the working class to protect itself from the logic of capitalism and that this process had "culminated in clause four" in 1918. Owen quite rightly located its adoption more as a

"response to bubbling ferment" of this period - particularly after the Russian Revolution of the year before.

So an interesting debate with some effective blows landed on both sides. Overall, however, whatever our other criticisms, comrade Jones displayed a far more realistic perspective when he used the example of trade union representatives on the party's national executive committee "often voting with the leadership". "This is the point," he emphasised. "Often the struggle isn't simply within the Labour Party to shift it: it's a struggle to democratise our trade unions, to use their potential power." In other words, the pivotal struggle to democratise the core of the workers' movement - both the trade unions and the Labour Party.

This is the serious strategic game plan, not the notion that SPEW's Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition represents "an embryo" or an "outline" of the answer, as comrade Heemskerk put it. At one stage in the debate, he compared the "remote possibility" of Labour moving in a positive direction to the hopeless optimism of some fans of smaller football clubs. He was and would remain a loyal supporter of Southend United, he told comrades. But when it comes to success in Europe, say, he would back Manchester United any time, rather than his beloved Blues. It actually took CPGB comrades in the room some moments to realise that in this analogy the *Labour Party* was Southend United and *Tusc* was Man U.

No, comrade, that really doesn't work at all ... ●

Mark Fischer

SPEW

Economist republicanism

**Elizabeth II: not just an expensive symbol**

In a sense it could be regarded as an advance that a session on the monarchy was even included in the Socialism 2012 programme. But the low priority given to the question of how we are ruled was demonstrated by the very poor attendance at the session entitled 'The royal delusion', which was introduced by national committee member Becci Heagney.

Overwhelmingly her talk was

dominated by questions relating to the distribution of wealth. While the workers are told we must cut back, millions are wasted on the royal family, whose individual members have huge personal fortunes. And it was not true that the monarchy earned its keep by bringing in the tourists, other SPEW comrades argued. They would come in anyway if a socialist government opened up the palaces to visitors! Well, so long

as we keep pulling in the tourists, that must be good for 'the country'.

While comrade Heagney's presentation was not without class content - the monarchy was a pro-capitalist institution symbolising privilege and would in the last analysis be used against the working class - it did not deal at all with its ideological role in the here and now. The fact that the institution is supposed to be not only 'above

politics', but 'above class' too - the fact that it symbolises a classless 'national interest' - seemed to pass her by.

I argued from the floor that what really ought to cause outrage was not so much the wasted millions - in reality petty cash compared to the state budget as a whole - but the monarchical notion that we workers are held to be mere 'subjects' within the 'one nation'

British order. We should prioritise amongst our immediate demands not only the abolition of the monarchy, but the dismantling of the whole constitutional monarchy system: get rid of the second chamber, no monarchical president (or presidential prime minister), accountable and recallable MPs on a worker's wage, the replacement of the standing army by a people's militia - in short, a democratic republic.

SPEW comrades were unanimous, however, that none of this was "a campaigning priority". One said that we should not feature the monarchy on placards or on the front page of *The Socialist*, but should rather bring it up only in connection with cuts and so on. Another said we must fight for socialism and only bother about the monarchy when it "gets in the way" of that fight. Once again the central ideological role of the institution was ignored.

I was allowed back in to point out once more that the institution should not be regarded as *just* a "reserve weapon", in the words of one comrade. The fact that the majority of our class either supported the monarchy or had a neutral attitude towards it ought to cause us great concern. If workers are prepared to tolerate such a symbol of ruling class power, how on earth could they be won to the notion of "socialism": ie, *working class power*?

In her reply comrade Heagney informed us that one SPEW branch had indeed run an anti-monarchy stall at the time of the jubilee. But we "can't campaign on it every day". For her the monarchy was "not a central issue" (which made me wonder why she had bothered to talk about it in the first place). What mattered was "getting the government out". To be replaced by an alternative government administering capitalism under the constitutional monarchy state, obviously ●

Peter Manson

Fascism v Labourism

There can be no annual Marxist school without a session on the far right and that was the case with Socialism 2012. But, credit where credit is due, the Socialist Party in England and Wales does not treat the subject as an easy recipe to stir up emotions, conjure up apocalyptic visions and cohere the troops around an easy target. Unlike the SWP's, its treatment of the English Defence League is not only remarkably sober: it acknowledges that it is a social question rather than just one of physical threat.

Take the question of social base. The SWP assumes that fascism always and everywhere attracts primarily the declassed petty bourgeois - because that was the case in inter-war Germany, and because Trotsky's famous analysis is, apparently, a timeless formula that one only needs to copy and paste. Back in the 1920s and 30s, however, the proletariat was solidly organised in mass parties and unions around social democratic and communist politics. The Communist Party of Germany was, by the early 30s, a 'radical party of the unemployed' as well as employed workers. But, given the low level of working class organisational culture in today's Britain, surely the frustrated petty bourgeoisie is not the only social class that feels it has neither a future nor a political home? A study

conducted by the Blairite think tank, Demos, would suggest that, despite its moneyed leadership and lumpen, hooligan hard core, the overwhelming majority of EDL supporters are backward, disaffected workers. Rather than worrying about burning poppies and Islam, anxiety about their future prospects and immigration seem to be their prime concerns.¹

Consequently, SPEW does not limit its engagement with the EDL to hollering Unite Against Fascism demos, which set 'us' (the multicultural multitude) against 'them' (the fascists). In her talk, 'How to combat the far right?', London secretary Paula Mitchell drew attention to the importance of raising social demands in connection with anti-fascist work. Socialists needed to "go around the estates and argue for genuine class politics instead of capitulating to the liberal anti-fascism of the popular front", she argued. In a contribution from the floor, a Greek comrade cited Golden Dawn's 'social programme' of handing out food to "true Greeks" - where on earth, she wondered, was the numerically far stronger left?

There were a few more contributions from mainly young comrades - among them many anecdotal accounts of anti-EDL protests and local campaigns - before I intervened. The notion

that a real political alternative is needed, I assured comrade Mitchell, was understood. I confessed I was sceptical, however, whether the Labour Party mark two advocated by SPEW, which would inevitably stand on a Keynesian platform of one sort or another, could possibly do this.

Despite their relatively diverse manifestations in modern history and sometimes anti-capitalist posturing, far-right movements are, in essence, parasitic of mainstream nationalist discourse, I pointed out. Mainstream nationalism, whether of the Conservative or Labourite variety, imbues its subjects with the idea that it is their right and duty to work for their country's competitiveness and economic growth. This, it is promised, supposedly translates into abundance for the whole national collective.

Life under capitalism, however, can be quite disappointing. Leaders make 'difficult decisions'. The country never seems to be performing well enough. Not even the dubious privilege of selling one's labour-power for a living is secure. The frustrated nationalist is left asking questions, and the far right is happy to provide the answers: elements alien to the nation are undermining its coherence, morale and performance - and they do so in cahoots with treacherous, insufficiently patriotic governments. What is merely a radicalisation of

already existing concepts thus assumes an anti-establishment posture.

Now, if we want to undercut the ideological breeding ground of the far right, I wondered, how about simply telling people the truth and nothing but the truth? What use is there in a new Labour Party, which would continue to sow illusions in economic recovery on the level of the nation-state - as if Britain was somehow disconnected from the world economy? What good is perpetuating the ideology of national 'growth' through investment, as SPEW is quite happy to do? Why not a party that argues for an explicitly Marxist, internationalist alternative - one that not only challenges fascist ideology by radically subverting the nationalist paradigm, but also points to a real way out of the mess that is global capitalism?

To advocate Keynesianism and nationalism as a 'political alternative', I concluded, did not actually represent an alternative to either the existing Labour Party or the far right.

Comrade Mitchell's reply was not wholly satisfactory. The new workers' party, she begged to differ, would not be like the old Labour Party at all: instead of only claiming to represent workers, it would provide "actual working class representation" and put forward "clear class politics". This, she added, is what "ultimately

undercuts the far right when talking to people on the estates". What is more, SPEW would argue for "the best possible, socialist and internationalist programme" within that party.

The time was up, the session was over. Why building another nationalist workers' party would be a better move than arguing for Marxist internationalism in the already existing one remained comrade Mitchell's secret.

One needs a sense of perspective. Despite allegedly numbering 25,000-35,000 'members', the EDL does not enjoy the support of more than a tiny segment of British society, and we are not yet in an economic situation such as Greece. However, as comrade Mitchell correctly observed, 80% of the cuts are yet to hit us. It is never too early to work towards an antithesis to the nationalist consensus currently spanning from the far left to the far right: a real Marxist party ●

Maciej Zurowski

Notes

1. Given the unwillingness of the far left to seriously analyse the EDL's social base and its tendency to use class categories as a means of moral condemnation, one has to make do with statistics such as those provided by Demos: www.demos.co.uk/files/Inside_the_edl_WEB.pdf?1331035419.
2. www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/12775/14-09-2011/austerity-policies-strangle-growth.

Euro confusion reigns

SPEW's politics around Europe and the European Union have more than once drifted into pretty dubious territory (cough, cough, No2EU), and a Socialism session on the euro zone crisis brought out many of the problems SPEW has on the issue.

Introduced in a fairly straightforward manner by Lynn Walsh, SPEW/Militant veteran and editor of *Socialism Today*, the group's theoretical magazine, the central analysis goes something like this. There are those on the left who consider the EU progressive, in that it undermines outdated national boundaries. There are others who consider it reactionary: a 'bosses' club'.

For comrade Walsh, the first of these arguments is fundamentally false - because the EU is utopian. Capitalism as a mode of production is unable to transcend the nation-state. All attempts to do so without a move to socialism will end in disaster. The euro crisis is simply a particular form of this impossibility. (Much of his talk consisted of laying out in considerable detail just how dire the situation is for the single currency.)

What about Marx's attitude to German unification, he asked? The analogy simply does not hold. The petty German statelets were at least united by a common national culture and language. Capitalism, in its ascendant and progressive phase, was able to turn such an agglomeration into a nation. The EU, however, consists of tens of different language groups. Basic economic practices like accounting and banking vary widely from one country to the next. Capitalism simply cannot overcome such incoherence.

No explicit link was made between this analysis and the *implied* political demand for withdrawal from the EU. Comrade Walsh had not been prepared to advocate the withdrawal of Greece around the spring elections, but only because the Greek working class was too far behind such a "radical" demand. In other situations, presumably he would.

How does this differ from the Europhobia of the right, one might ask? The Socialist Party would always combine a call for withdrawal with demands for nationalisation of the banks and the commanding heights of the economy, and

unspecified solidarity with those at the sharp end of the euro zone's convulsions. What is the difference between *that* and the Europhobia of Stalinism and left social democracy? Answers on a postcard, please ...

The debate that followed consisted of a great deal of 'What if...?' questions. I intervened early, criticising the implication that the nation-state is the natural political basis for capitalism. Even the UK is not a nation-state, but a multinational state. The failure of the EU to produce more convergence is only partly a matter of capital in the abstract; the fact is that Britain's role in it has been to undermine the EU's internal cohesion, keeping it as far as possible as a free trade bloc, in the interests of the USA. Capital is fundamentally international in nature, and erodes borders just as much as it throws them up.

Comrade Matt Dobson of Socialist Party Scotland seemed to object to this last part, saying that the internationalisation of capital was a phenomenon of the last 20 years of 'globalisation'. When I objected with the point that the first capitalist states were mercantile and therefore

international by nature, he clarified his argument to the effect that there had been a particular period of the building up of free trade zones, etc, in the last two decades, which is now coming to an end.

Far more reasonable, but that leaves the fundamental point - that capital is not tied to the nation-state - untouched. Most of the rest of the contributions reasserted the necessity of this link, with the exception of SPEW comrade Allan Coote, who directly questioned it, and comrade Lucy Parker of Platypus, who wondered whether the left was strong enough to fully assert its demands.

A more interesting thread was raised by comrade Dobson - the apparent trend for *decomposition* in European states. A Scottish independence demonstration in Edinburgh had received Catalan, Basque and even Venetian separatist contingents. It was difficult to gauge the attitude of the SPEW comrades to this development - they did not sound too enthusiastic, but their adoption of a substantively left-nationalist line in Scotland rather problematises this. It seems that the CWI as a whole is happy to interpret separatist

movements as anti-austerity in thrust, and attempts to give the campaigns a 'socialist' coloration - a pretty economistic line, all told. I may be putting words in their mouths, but this is certainly the approach adopted by the Scots contingent.

Summing up, comrade Walsh was a little more nuanced. He acknowledged that there was a fundamental contradiction between the international nature of capital and the existence of the nation-state - and conceded that it would be better to call such states 'territorial' rather than 'national'. Still, that contradiction was insuperable. Replying to comrade Parker, he "would put it a little differently" - the working class is strong, as can be seen from militancy in Greece, Spain and elsewhere. What is lacking is leadership (the off-the-peg, pat Trotskyist answer to everything).

Closing the meeting, chair Glenn Kelly specifically thanked those who had raised disagreements for helping his organisation clarify its ideas. A very positive attitude - but a shame there is such a dying need for that clarity ●

Harley Filben

On a publicity high

Alec Thraves' session - 'South Africa erupts: what does the miners' struggle represent?' - was more than useful, since it was largely a report-back from his recent visit. He had attended several mass meetings organised by the South African affiliate of SPEW's Committee for a Workers' International, the Democratic Socialist Movement.

The DSM has recently been thrown into the limelight, thanks to a fortuitous series of events, combined with the group's engagement with miners in and around Rustenberg, following the Marikana massacre by police of striking platinum miners in August. Looking for scapegoats, sections of the official union leadership linked to the South African Communist Party seized upon the presence of DSM comrades at a rally, where calls had been made to "kill the scabs" - meaning members of the SACP-dominated National Union of Mineworkers. In fact several NUM shop stewards had been amongst those killed before the August 16 massacre.

One SACP-linked website posted personal details, including names and photographs, of DSM comrades, who were dubbed "counterrevolutionaries". As a result, with the bitter miners' disputes continuing, hardly a day goes by without the DSM being mentioned - and often quoted - in the South African media, and this had the opposite effect to that intended by the SACP. The DSM was now able to call meetings and rallies attended by hundreds of militants and its membership had "trebled", said comrade Thraves. SPEW is on a high over this CWI success story.

Comrade Thraves reported how at one DSM rally, strikers in Rustenberg had seriously proposed that the following morning, when the NUM would be attempting to hold a counter-rally in opposition to the breakaway Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (Amcu), strikers should aim to "kill 50 scabs". Comrade Thraves - often the first speaker at miners' rallies - had urged the strikers not to go down that road: "Yes, we want to stop the scabs. But we need to win them over." Nevertheless, it is no wonder that comrade Thraves' car had been stopped and searched several times in the Rustenberg area.



Kill the scabs ... wrong road

From my own visits to South Africa, where I have had discussions with comrades on the socialist and revolutionary left, I knew that the DSM was a tiny organisation of a couple of dozen members, at most. In other words, similar to other far-left grouplets, all of them dwarfed by the SACP, which now claims well over 150,000 members. In response to my question, comrade Thraves said the DSM was now around 100-strong.

However, the group was "patiently building a party", he said - in fact it is to launch a "new mass party" next month. In other words, the aim was not a revolutionary party, but, just as in Britain, a Labourite formation, to which the masses would be drawn. Many members, including new recruits, had said, "Why not make the DSM the new party?" he reported. But comrade Thraves' response had been: "I don't want to pour cold water on that

idea, but we need a *broad* mass party."

I put it to him that this was an attempt to fit South Africa into the CWI 'one size fits all' template. In the dying days of apartheid its comrades had entered the African National Congress - viewed as the nearest thing to a social democratic party in South Africa. But, when Militant was purged from Labour and subsequently abandoned the entryist tactic, this was replicated around the world. The ANC, like Labour, was now a "bourgeois party" - as if it had ever been anything else.

Comrade Thraves confirmed that, just as in Britain, its comrades should aim to provide the putative new party with its "revolutionary spine". But, I asked, if militant workers really are flocking to join a revolutionary grouping, why not dispense with the halfway house? His answer was that, yes, the DSM is "the answer", but in South Africa there is "no mass

workers' party" and in that country a "broader socialist programme" than in Britain is possible. Ironically he meant something more leftwing.

In my contribution I stressed the key role of the SACP - a contradictory party whose government ministers implement neoliberal policies, while its union leaders lead militant strikes and its leadership spouts Marxist jargon. I said that the SACP was the ruling class's biggest weapon to neutralise the working class, and revolutionaries should adopt a serious approach towards it. It is indeed a "mass workers' party".

Comrade Thraves had talked about the annual "protest season", of which the miners' strikes are a part. But the yearly bout of industrial action is led by SACP-dominated unions, which the CWI is in danger of writing off as working class bodies and sites for struggle, just as it has

long since written off the SACP. Comrades from the floor wondered about the possibility of other Amcu-type breakaways being created. To be fair, comrade Thraves pointed out that Amcu could just as easily be dominated by bureaucrats, but he did not insist that as a principle revolutionaries must aim to work within existing working class bodies.

How likely is a DSM-led "mass workers' party"? Not very. Take a look at the DSM website (www.socialistsouthafrica.co.za) - last updated the day after Marikana. Or its publication, *Izwi Labasebenzi* - last edition dated May-July. But its recent high profile leaves its comrades in the firing line - from both the state and SACP provocations. We must defend the DSM, while at the same time urging it to orientate towards existing mass working class bodies ●

Peter Manson

SWP

An anatomical investigation

A minority of SWP comrades are taking advantage of their right to put their views before the membership once a year. **Peter Manson** reviews the latest *Pre-conference Bulletin*

The second Socialist Workers Party *Pre-conference Bulletin* came out at the end of last week. Known as *Internal Bulletins* (IBs), the three documents represent the one chance ordinary SWP comrades have each year of putting forward their point of view, including criticisms, before the whole membership.

Unfortunately, however, such is the culture of the organisation that only a tiny proportion actually avail themselves of the opportunity. For instance, there were only eight contributions from individual members or groups of members in *IB* No1 (October), and there are just 11 in *IB* No2 (November). Just over half of the second bulletin's 36 pages are taken up by statements/proposals from the central committee or CC-backed bodies/representatives, and several other submissions from rank-and-file members are undoubtedly of the type the leadership approves: descriptions of how the official line is being implemented locally, for example.

There are, however, three contributions in *IB* No2 from what appear to be committed SWP members who are at the same time highly critical of the organisation and make useful and constructive proposals for establishing a democratic culture and practice.

But, before we turn to these critiques, let us start by examining the leadership's own proposals and perspectives. First of all, there is to be a change in personnel at the top, including, significantly, the departure from the CC of former national secretary Martin Smith. A year ago comrade Smith was replaced in that post by current incumbent Charlie Kimber amid rumours, among other things, that Smith had been accused of sexual harassment. The leadership offered to the membership no explanation for his demotion, apart from how invaluable he would be in his new responsibility for industrial work in addition to running Unite Against Fascism.

It is the same this year: the membership is not told the real reason for his exclusion from the CC-recommended slate beyond the fact that he has "decided to stand down". In the absence of any explanation it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that this longstanding SWP leader has been forced off against his wishes. Another departee is comrade "Dan" (whose surname is not given, presumably for security reasons, although he was named last year). Dan had been given responsibility, among other things, for Marxism and the fundraising appeal, but he had not exactly been prominent in those roles.

So the new CC is to be reduced from 14 comrades to 12 and will consist of Weyman Bennett, Mark Bergfeld, Michael Bradley, Alex Callinicos, Esme Choonara, Joseph Choonara, Hannah Dee, Charlie Kimber, Amy Leather, Ray Marral, Judith Orr and Mark Thomas. I say "will consist", since the slate recommended by the outgoing CC is *always* elected in its entirety. That is because voting is not for individuals, but for the whole slate - take it or leave it (see below for rank-and-file criticisms of this self-perpetuating system) - and only once in the SWP era has a rival slate been nominated: that proposed by 'loyal oppositionist' John Molyneux for the January 2006 conference. Even allowing for the current bureaucratic method,

it is remarkable that CC members are unable or unwilling to find new blood to replace Martin Smith and comrade Dan. Perhaps there is no-one considered trustworthy enough.

Building 'the party'

It goes without saying that the CC considers the SWP, under its own leadership, to be embryo of the revolutionary party needed in Britain. No other left group is worth a mention in this regard, not even as a potential partner.

In a passage repeated from a similar perspectives document last year, the CC states: "The growth and development of the revolutionary socialist party is not an optional add-on. It has to be consciously built and strengthened in the course of struggle. We face a ruthless, centralised and brutal ruling class. The working class needs its own organisation." Which is, of course, the Socialist Workers Party.

The CC notes in its 'Building the party' document that "The SWP is the biggest organisation on the revolutionary left", and adds modestly: "... but is still much too small for the tasks we set ourselves." The key task is described in this way: "We have to get the Con-Dems out - and replace them with something much better than Ed Miliband's politics!" Exactly what that "something better" will be is not outlined, but the membership is left in no doubt that achieving it will most certainly depend on what the SWP does.

In another CC perspectives document (there are four in *IB* No2 and three in *IB* No1) - this one titled 'Industrial perspectives' - the leadership insists that "Building the Unite the Resistance national conference on November 17" is the absolutely central priority (note, by the way, that the *IB*s are supposed to inform the debate at the January 4-6 2013 conference, yet they are full of leadership proposals and exhortations that will obviously be out of date by then).

Last year, the CC explains, despite the efforts of UTR, the unions retreated on public service pensions: "Two important gatherings of activists - one called by the PCS United Left, the other by Unite the Resistance - debated the way forwards, but were not sufficiently powerful to stop the retreat." The idea that a meeting of a few hundred SWP comrades and their contacts, plus a handful of other leftwingers, could actually be so influential as to either force the union bureaucracies to adopt a different strategy or construct a rank-and-file alternative is totally absurd, but the CC seems to believe that its membership is stupid enough to accept it.

The CC elaborates: "We need a broad movement in the unions, a 'middle cog' between socialists and the whole working class that can pull together the many thousands who want action. Unite the Resistance (UTR) is our answer to this." And, while the SWP is, of course, for a united fightback, UTR's rivals are just not up to the job: "Debates inside UTR have to take up the thorny issue of the trade union bureaucracy - something groups such as the Coalition of Resistance avoid. Unite the Resistance is an attempt to create a genuine network of working class militants, not a 'party front'. The Socialist Party



Most 'members' are dead to the SWP

forced independent elements out of its National Shop Stewards Network."

Leaving aside the rather tendentious nature of the final sentence above, does the CC seriously expect us to believe that UTR alone - which is "our answer", yet is somehow "not a 'party front'" - can "pull together the many thousands who want action"? In actual fact a real party - a genuine part of the working class - would be able to play such a role. A real party would have roots in the whole class and militants in every key workplace. It would be able to unite different revolutionary tendencies around a Marxist programme on the basis of democratic centralism, not the SWP's bureaucratic impostor.

In reality the leadership knows full well that neither it nor UTR can exert such influence. Its aim is to retain and inspire current members and recruit new ones by posing as the most militant, the most revolutionary group. Although its short-lived slogan from a year ago, "All out, stay out", was thankfully dropped (without explanation, obviously), the SWP will not hear of anything less than the demand for immediate strike action in every union, irrespective of the support (or lack of it) for such action amongst the rank and file, and irrespective of the need for coordination.

The CC criticises the rest of the left in these terms: "The slogan, 'Strike together', was transformed from a call for united action into one that said nobody could move without the others." It goes on: "Leading members of left groups in the NUT, such as the Socialist Teachers Alliance (which we are part of) and the softer left Campaign for a Democratic and Fighting Union, believe that talk of striking with non-teaching unions or even alone is adventurism. Even those at the centre of the ... Local Associations Network that grew out of rows at the NUT conference have balked at arguing for the NUT to 'name a day' for action or to seek

strikes with unions such as the PCS. We won precisely two votes for this position at the NUT executive pre-meeting with the left - those of our two comrades." And it adds: "Even our members on the national executives of unions are subject to the pressure to go along with the rest of the left and to accept 'realistic' options."

The problem with the SWP, however, is that it is not at all concerned with what is "realistic" - ie, what strike action can actually be delivered, given the weakness of our class and, in particular, the total absence of a rank-and-file movement worthy of the name. I do not mean to excuse any timidity or accommodation with the right on the part of other groups, but it is rather convenient for the SWP that it does not control any powerful union body and so its posturing slogans are never put to the test.

Open recruitment

Alongside such posturing is the illusion that the leadership constantly seeks to reinforce that "the party" is continually growing in size. There is only one way the membership figure is allowed to go - up.

So in *IB* No2 information is provided showing that every year since 2008 the total membership has increased. Back then there were 6,155 "registered members", but now there are 7,597 (a rise of over 1,400). Strangely though, according to a table showing recruitment figures for the same period, over 1,000 have joined the SWP every single year since 2008 - no fewer than 5,193 signed up between January 2008 and October 2012. So, even allowing for other comrades dropping out, how come the total membership has only gone up by a fraction of that figure?

This anomaly is explained by the fact that "registered membership" is not the same thing as actual membership. The first category includes everyone who has filled in an application form over the last

two years, irrespective of whether they have ever been in contact since. But, of course, under the SWP's "open recruitment" policy, there are no membership requirements - anyone can join without committing themselves to anything at all. For example, "The membership that pays a regular sub to the organisation stands at 32%, slightly down on last year's figure." I make that 2,431 dues-payers - a much more accurate approximation of the *actual* SWP membership.

In another passage copied from last year, the CC notes: "There are some comrades who doubt whether people who haven't met us before but join on demonstrations or sales are 'real members'." That's because they're not real members! But the leadership pretends they are, squaring the circle in this way: "It's a battle to win them fully, and sometimes we are successful and sometimes we are not. But if we hold a good number of those we recruit in this way it's worth it."

One of the 'doubters' is "Paris (Leeds and West Yorkshire)", who comments: "It is well known that the majority of people on the lists are not members (many never were), and that it is easier to squeeze blood from a stone than getting people taken off. These lists are then used as a basis for an assessment of our organisation's size, which is clearly going to be completely distorted."

Paris (only the first names of contributors are published) continues: "I was told recently that Leeds had 153 members. If this is the case, the district must have 10 more branches that I'm not aware of (maybe I've just stumbled across our underground membership?), or we are employing the age-old method of kidology?"

S/he concludes: "What is most worrying about this situation is that very few comrades are actually willing to raise this with the centre, despite it being the consensus in branches and districts." In other words, according to Paris, it is not just "some" comrades who "doubt" whether most names

on the lists are “real members”. The majority of activists *know* they are not. But at least the CC can claim to have reinvigorated the existing structure: “More branches are also having regular meetings. If you look at page 12 of *Socialist Worker* you can see that it is barely able to contain the details of all our branch meetings. That wasn’t true a few years ago.” And such branches are found in the most unlikely of places - “We also have an SWP branch in Palestine,” declares the CC! What? Selling *Socialist Worker* outside Sainsbury’s in Ramallah?

Democracy

Comrade Paris is one of the three critical contributors mentioned above, alongside “Ruth (South London)” and “Justin (Cambridge)”. As I have said, these comrades make clear their partisan commitment and are prepared to recognise recent improvements in SWP culture (however marginal, you might comment), while urging the leadership to go much further.

For example, Paris, in his/her contribution entitled ‘Political engagement and party democracy’, writes: “The worst elements of previous bad practice have been left behind; certainly the party feels more open than it once did.” And Ruth (‘Democratic centralism and accountability’) states: “... we have to acknowledge that the party has taken significant steps forwards in the last few years in terms of raising the level of political openness and discussion.”

But both comrades demand far more. Ruth writes: “... it is vital that our party is capable of vigorous debate and decisive action, swift changes of tack and honest analysis of our successes and failures we need to be capable of constant reflection and analysis of how effective the strategy is, in order to correct it swiftly if it is wrong or generalise from successes.

“All this means we need three things: maximum debate and discussion, all the time, at all levels of the party; a high level of theoretical clarity and confidence in all members; and unity in action guaranteed by accountability of all members, whether in elected positions or not.”

To ensure this happens, CC comrades must “admit mistakes or even be removed from leading positions if they are not effectively leading”. In fact, “The full-time apparatus is very large and operates in an unnecessarily substitutionist way. There are 50 full-time party workers, which seems far too large for an organisation of our size.”

Ruth continues: “Hiding mistakes from the rest of the party, or failing to analyse what went wrong and why, can only lead to even bigger errors. This is exemplified by Unite the Resistance - the CC and centre are pushing a strategy, but not effectively winning over large sections of the membership, so we end up with the party neither applying it wholeheartedly nor raising any serious alternative to it.”

Paris also cites problems with UTR, stating: “It is clear that many comrades have completely switched off from the party’s national work, many not attempting to follow the latest twist or turn. It is doubtful how many comrades could give you a meaningful explanation as to the difference between Right to Work and Unite the Resistance; it is even more doubtful how many could explain why one was all but dropped from the party’s activities.”

The comrade is right to say that the relegation of RTW was never properly explained. It was proclaimed initially as an anti-cuts campaign despite the fact that it had a name that was completely unsuitable. So it was replaced in that role by UTR and is now held in reserve for actions relating to threatened job losses and unemployment. So comrade Ruth’s

criticism is rather apt: the leadership cannot even admit it got the name wrong.

Turning to another democratic failing, Ruth states: “... as well as being unused to being held to account by the party through sharp debates, the CC in particular are unused to being held to account through elections.

“The last challenge to the CC slate was in 2005, when John M proposed himself (precisely in order to raise the question of CC accountability). The slate system ... discourages members from challenging the leadership in elections, because any challenger has to take on the entire CC, rather than just one member of it, and the CC have almost always presented a united front to conference, even when there are disagreements within it.”

On the CC’s objections to a more democratic means of electing a leadership, she writes: “... if an open election is a popularity contest [a phrase used to decry voting for individual candidates] in which the membership takes part, the slate system is a popularity contest in which only the current CC takes part. It is contradictory in the extreme to argue that limiting the number of people who take part in a decision makes it more democratic.”

Paris hopes to change this through a motion s/he hopes will get onto the conference agenda, which demands the “removal of the ‘slate system’ as it is currently practised. The right of comrades to propose slates should remain, but the election of comrades to the central committee should be on an individual basis.” Excellent!

Revolution

Paris’s motion includes a proposal which, if implemented, would represent a revolution in SWP culture: “Political differences should be openly acknowledged, with the debates open to the party. Different political tendencies should be represented on the CC, not suppressed behind a veil of ‘unity’. This would be an important step to fostering a culture of open and honest debate within the party.”

In Paris’s view, “the democratic aspect of a revolutionary party is not an added extra, but an absolutely integral element ... The complete freedom of exchange of ideas and criticism in the first instance, and the absolute unity in action once a decision has been reached, remains the clearest and best way of organising a revolutionary working class organisation.”

Paris goes on to talk about “the lack of *critical* engagement from the active core of the party; where it does exist, it is often dropped, for fear of alienating less experienced members or seeming disloyal This also is clearly a hangover from the last 20 years, where political disagreement was dealt with through suppression of ideas and people being shouted down. Nevertheless, it still exists throughout the party.”

S/he gives a recent example of the treatment of dissent, which occurred at a party council - the branch delegate body which “normally meets once a year”, although “additional meetings may be called in case of need by the CC” (SWP constitution). Comrade Paris recalls: “The one time a comrade did raise a disagreement with the CC, she was cut off (despite CC members going well over their time) and the CC member summing up spent 10 of his 15 minutes responding to her point. This being the case, it is little wonder that comrades are not engaged with the party’s democracy.”

Because party council is seen as a mere “rubber stamp for the central committee”, comrades are hardly enthusiastic about attending, claims Paris: “I have never known a branch vote on its delegates, and arguments tend to revolve around why people shouldn’t have to go, rather than why they should.”

Paris concludes: “Taken overall, far from the organisation being one of controversy and debate, most comrades are politically under-confident to raise criticism, unused to the rigour of constructive debate and argument, and the overall political level remains very low.”

Many of comrade Paris’s criticisms are backed up “Justin (Cambridge)”, who, in a piece entitled ‘Opposition to bureaucratic centralism’, tells a horror story relating to his own treatment:

“Three years back, when I joined the Socialist Workers Party, I had no idea that to disagree, question or think differently would be counted as a disciplinary offence. Nor did I expect to see the central committee attempt to intimidate, bully, exclude and silence me.

“Using the excuse that I voted the ‘wrong’ way at a routine Unite branch meeting, I find myself reduced to being a ‘national’ member of the party. I am barred from attending Cambridge branch meetings. Indeed, national secretary Charlie Kimber actually wrote to me urging me to resign from the SWP. Instead of offering political solutions to political problems, almost instinctively he turned to organisational (bureaucratic) methods.”

Comrade Justin fully concurs with Paris over the meaning of genuine democratic centralism: “Complementing the duty to unite in *agreed* actions, there must be the constitutionally enshrined right to *openly* disagree.” In my view this position is unanswerable in a working class organisation that claims to be democratic-centralist.

But Justin does not leave it at that. He insists that the SWP must have “a fully developed Marxist programme”. In its absence, “The central committee is left free to pursue almost any will-of-the-wisp policies. Certainly, the members have no commonly agreed point of reference with which to judge, assess and hold the leadership to account.”

Acting as a poor man’s substitute for such a “fully developed Marxist programme” is the ‘Where we stand’ column, carried each week in *Socialist Worker*. Justin takes issue with some of the points it contains and argues: “The stipulation that to be a party member one must ‘agree’ with the ‘Where we stand’ column must be struck out.” Instead, we must “follow Lenin and the Bolsheviks and replace ‘agree’ with ‘accept’, I would suggest.”

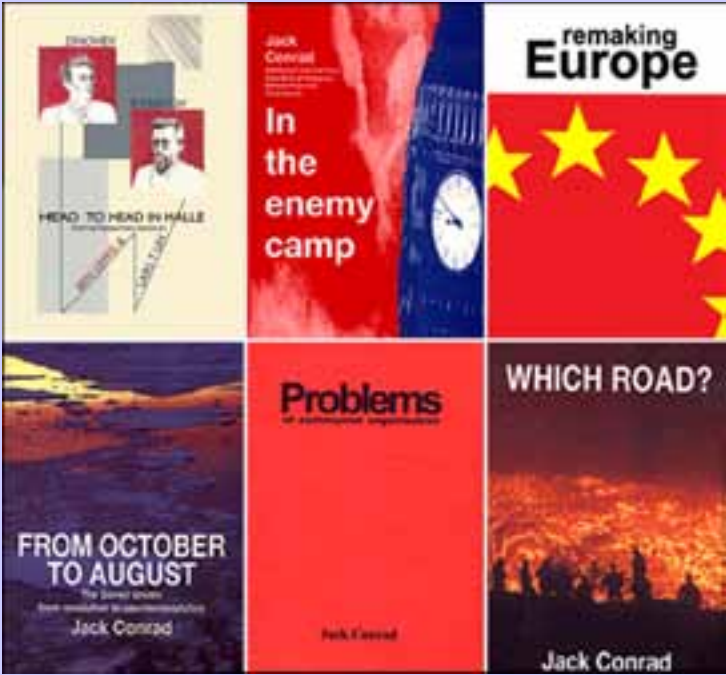
But the paragraph that struck me the most about Justin’s contribution was his contention that the SWP alone is not *the* answer - a contention that goes very much against the grain of SWP wisdom. He states: “We should be fighting for a mass, working class party solidly based on Marxism. As a first step, the much-divided Marxist left needs to be united into a single organisation. Given our weight, connections, history, etc, the SWP can play a pivotal role here.”

It is most encouraging that these three comrades, like “Ian” in *IB* No1 (see ‘SWP: Annual show of “democracy”’ *Weekly Worker* October 11), are clear-sighted and courageous enough to make such far-reaching proposals - proposals aimed at transforming the SWP into a genuinely democratic-centralist force, capable of playing a leading role in the struggle for the mass party we so desperately need.

It remains to be seen for how long they would be tolerated if their ideas began to make headway. And here the treatment meted out to Justin (assuming there is even a hint of substance in his allegations) should serve as a warning to SWP members wanting to assert their right to speak out and to criticise ●

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EUROPE

‘Official communists’ welcome Miliband’s conversion to austerity

Europhobes of all political hues have tasted blood following the coalition government’s defeat over the EU budget, writes **Eddie Ford**

The parliamentary defeat suffered by David Cameron over the European Union budget on October 31 provided us with another glimpse of the Tories’ internal contradictions. Fifty-three Conservative MPs joined forces with Labour to defeat the government by 307 votes to 294. The successful amendment demanded that the next EU budget, for 2014-20, which as currently proposed will exceed €1 trillion, should be “reduced in real terms”. Ed Miliband and Ed Balls imposed a three-line whip on Labour MPs to vote with the Tory Eurosceptics led by Mark Reckless, many of whom are committed to total withdrawal from the EU.

In a hurried damage-limitation exercise, foreign secretary William Hague said the government would “take note” of the non-binding vote. Senior Tory MPs, who stopped short of joining the 53 Eurosceptics in the division lobbies, warned they too will rebel if spending is not frozen (cut in real terms) at the November 23 EU summit. But for the moment they are keeping their powder dry, given that any eventual deal agreed by EU leaders would have to be approved by parliament.

Cameron’s bargaining position, insofar as you can call it that, is to insist on retaining the full annual UK rebate first negotiated by Margaret Thatcher in 1984, whilst threatening to veto any budget increase that exceeds inflation - as opposed to the 5% or more envisaged by some in the European Commission. Cameron, of course, argues that any freeze is effectively a reduction. His Tory and now Labour critics, however, say that this does not go far enough, as it would still cost British taxpayers hundreds of millions of pounds in a time of domestic austerity. If we have to cut at home, then we should cut in Europe.

Reckless told MPs during the debate that Cameron’s plan would increase the UK’s net contribution to the EU from £9.2 billion last year to £13.6 billion in 2020 - “we simply cannot afford that,” he said. Mark Pritchard, another Tory rebel, portrayed himself as the noble defender of ordinary, cash-strapped, British families - “Are we going to continue to ask families up and down this country to stop putting new shoes on their children’s feet, while we fill the very large Mercedes fleet of Brussels?” As for Peter Bone, the Tory MP for Wellingborough, he triumphantly declared that on October 31 parliament - for once - “spoke for the people” and that MPs can now “face their constituents” without shame. Patriotically united against the Brussels bureaucrats.

Naturally, Nigel Farage, leader of the UK Independence Party, was also cock-a-hoop. Perhaps Ukip’s time has come. He thundered in Churchillian style that the house had “voted with the country rather than with the government whips”, adding it was “outrageous” that Cameron was prepared to go to Brussels later in the month and “argue for what he would call a freeze” but what “the rest of us would call an increase in the amount of money removed from British taxpayers to be spent by the distant EU bureaucrats”.

Squabbling

Within the EU itself, squabbling over the draft budget is intensifying. Germany, in particular, is unhappy

with the latest proposal by Cyprus - which holds the EU’s current rotating presidency - to reduce spending by €50 billion. This suggestion, sternly noted a prominent German official, “falls markedly short of those that are necessary”. Indeed, the figures named in the budget proposals are “still very far” from the targets being sought by Germany and the other net contributors in the EU - ie, those countries that pay more into the EU’s coffers than they get in return. Germany and other net contributors want to limit the EU’s budget to one percent of the member-states’ GDP - meaning that the EC’s proposed budget would have to be slashed by as much as €130 billion.

But the European parliament, on the other hand, has criticised the EC’s spending plans as being too meagre. And, hardly surprisingly, the putative budget is also backed by the net receivers, which are primarily eastern European countries. They want more Brussels gold, not less. Donald Tusk, the Polish prime minister, is adamant that the current budget proposals should remain in force - and will continue trying to persuade Britain that a “smart compromise” would end up being a much “cheaper” option. Otherwise, if no compromise is reached, there will be an *automatic* 2% increase each year for inflation.

Apart from Britain, Denmark and France have also been talking of vetoing a deal unless their priorities are met, while Hungary - which would be one of the biggest losers if the budget was actually slashed - could also balk. Diplomats in Brussels involved in the pre-summit negotiations expect that the scheduled two days will have to be extended, with the odds against securing an agreement - in which case, the European leaders will have to return to the fraught topic early next year.

Talking tough and Eurosceptical, Cameron is promising to draw a “red line” at the EU summit. Speaking in Abu Dhabi on November 6 - in between defending the “legitimate” right of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain to “self-defence” - he explained how he would make a “robust” argument for limiting the budget, lambasting the “completely ludicrous” €100 billion increase wanted by some. The next day Angela Merkel met Cameron in Downing Street for further discussions on the matter. Germany has indicated that it is “sympathetic” to the UK’s concerns, but is extremely keen that Cameron shows some “flexibility” at the summit. Only last week, Merkel warned that “veto threats” would not help the EU’s budget negotiations - expecting or hoping that Cameron will back down.

Yet the Eurosceptics have tasted blood - again. Last October they mounted a backbench rebellion, with 81 Tory MPs voting for a motion calling for a referendum on Britain’s relationship with the EU - despite the fact that Cameron had ordered his party to oppose it. Two months later, in a bid to placate “the bastards” (as John Major memorably called them), Cameron went like St George to slay the Brussels dragon, vetoing an EU treaty change to enforce stricter fiscal rules in the euro zone - even though the UK would have been totally unaffected by the changes. Courageous. In the end, all the other member-states except the Czech



Euro crisis continues

Republic signed a separate treaty instead to get round Cameron’s pathetic manoeuvre, but he returned to Britain like a conquering hero anyway.

Now there is talk once more of an ‘in-out’ referendum on the EU. For the Tory Europhobes, morale is rising and undoubtedly they intend to step up the fight for the ultimate prize - British withdrawal from the hated EU.

Labour hypocrisy

Exchanging parliamentary insults on October 31, Ed Balls pontificated about how “weak and out of touch” David Cameron had become - apparently, he was “failing to convince other European leaders”. A curious assertion, when you consider that only hours later he would vote for an amendment effectively calling upon Cameron to give the finger to other EU leaders - ie, veto the budget and then stomp off into the sunset waving the union jack. How would that, apart from pleasing the *Daily Mail* readership, help to “convince” European leaders as to the legitimacy of Britain’s position?

The plain truth of the matter is that Ed Miliband is guilty of total hypocrisy. It was the previous Labour government, after all, which agreed a big increase in Britain’s net contribution from £3 billion in 2008 to more than £7 billion last year. For once, Cameron was quite right when he condemned Labour for its “rank opportunism”. Labour is guilty of “rank opportunism” and a lot worse besides - putting cynical expediency before anything even vaguely resembling a principled or consistent position on the EU. Just for the sake of enjoying a schoolboy smirk at Cameron’s discomfort, Labour was prepared to align itself with the most reactionary forces inside the Tory Party.

Inevitably, there were immediate grumblings of bitter discontent - a backlash even - from Blairites, Brownites and others, who could not help but agree with Cameron’s assessment of the Labour leadership’s tactics on October 31. For instance, Margaret Hodge - the Blairite former minister who chairs the parliamentary public accounts committee - was heard to describe the Labour vote as “hateful” as she prepared for a meeting of her committee. One former Labour cabinet minister, wanting to remain unnamed for obvious reasons, expressed the worry that

Miliband and Balls - whatever their exact intentions on the day - were “stroking a dangerous underbelly of Euroscepticism”.

And what was that about Labour standing for slower, shallower cuts than the Tories? Airports, highways, bridges, railway tracks and other infrastructure projects account for about 35% of the EU budget, according to Reuters. The very sort of spending that Labour is demanding should be protected in the UK in order to create jobs and boost demand. But that is only for good old Blighty, it appears, not Johnny Foreigner. In that sense, and on this particular occasion, Labour - for its own opportunistic reasons - was actually pushing for ‘quicker, deeper’ cuts than those advocated by David Cameron or George Osborne.

Overlap

Responding to the vote, Nick Clegg said that in an “ideal world” he would prefer a reduction in the EU budget. But regrettably the government could not wave a “magic wand” and get everything it wants. A “grand, unilateral repatriation of powers might sound appealing”, Clegg remarked, but in reality it is a “false promise wrapped in a union jack” - one that could possibly trigger a British exit from the EU with “catastrophic” results.

Clegg’s warning about a “false promise wrapped in a union jack” could equally apply to the *Morning Star*’s Communist Party of Britain. Not for the first time, nor sadly for the last, the Tories’ Europhobia has overlapped with the CPB’s left nationalism - or national socialism - as shown by the November 2 edition of the *Morning Star*. Needless to say, it thoroughly approves of the Labour decision to support the Tory rebels’ ‘anti-EU’ amendment.

Hence in an article entitled, ‘Pressure rises for in-out vote on EU’, we read a typically bland piece of *Morning Star* reportage. Yawn and move on, you could say. But, of course, what is really being presented to the readership is the CPB ‘line’ on the EU and the European question in general. So Roger Bagley *approvingly* writes how Labour’s “changed stance” was “welcomed by campaigners for an in-out referendum” on Britain’s EU membership. We further read that People’s Pledge spokesman Mark Seddon declared that the “tectonic plates are shifting” and how wonderful it is that Ed Miliband is “moving with them”. Good old ‘Red’ Ed. We also discover that Seddon thinks the global economic crisis caused by the “greed and stupidity of unfettered market forces” has been “compounded by the response” of the EC - determined as it is, according to comrade Bagley, to “heap insult on injury by demanding substantial budget increases”. Presumably we are meant to be heartened that this outrageous slight upon the British nation “was too much for Labour”, which thus did the honourable thing by voting with rightwing Tory Eurosceptics against Cameron.

The article continues by quoting Brian Denny, the convenor of No2EU, fulminating against the “admission” by “arch-Europhile” Nick Clegg that there is “no hope” of reducing the EU budget - which only reveals, says Denny, “how undemocratic it all is”.

For Denny, notes the *Morning Star*, it shows the “need for a complete reassessment of Britain’s relationship to the EU by the labour movement in order to bring down this Con-Dem government”.

The *Star*’s editorial in the same issue (‘Double-speak over the EU’) makes its myopic nationalist stance even clearer: “Despite rhetoric about fighting for the best deal for Britain and hinting at a veto,” it laments, David Cameron has “already sold the pass” to the Brussels bureaucrats. As for the “Eurocentralist” Clegg, his rejection of “any possibility of a real contributions freeze” to the EU budget means he is “suggesting that the government cannot wave a ‘magic wand’ and that denying the unelected commission its way could result in annual budgets that Britain would have no alternative but to accept.” This indicates, the “contempt” Clegg has for democracy and “why he has gone cold on his previous support” for an in-out EU referendum. He would have this country “locked into the euro zone” and on the “way to the European superstate that dare not speak its name, but continues to solidify”.

Anticipating some of the objections to its left nationalism, the editorial rhetorically asks: “Critics of the *Morning Star* line on the EU ask: why concentrate on the role of the EU, when Britain’s conservative coalition is committed to a similar agenda, dictated by the City of London?” An excellent question, it does have to be said. Unfortunately, the answer is less admirable: “It’s because voters in Britain still have the power - albeit hitherto unused - to vote out this bunch of bankers’ valets and elect a government committed to public ownership of the banks, rail and public utilities, support for manufacturing and public services, decent pensions and transferring the onus of taxation from working people to big business and wealthy tax dodgers. The finance-sector stranglehold is institutionalised within the euro zone, making any such programme unrealisable under the iron grip of the ECB, EU Commission and European Court of Justice. The labour movement should welcome this parliamentary defeat for the coalition and resist all efforts to impose continent-wide austerity”.

That’s a new one - you resist austerity by demanding cuts. Of course, we in the CPGB are unequivocally opposed to austerity - whether in the UK or the EU. However, our answer to the capitalist crisis gripping Europe is *proletarian internationalism* on a continent-wide basis, not the CPB’s “magic wand” of left nationalism and isolationism. The 20th century was scarred by the disastrous and barbaric Stalinist experiment of socialism in one country, which must not be repeated - that would be a real catastrophe for the working class. Unlike the CPB and Tory Eurosceptics - an unholy alliance if ever there was one - genuine communists do not want to ‘pull out’ of the EU any more than we want to withdraw from the UK. And go where - the moon? Instead, insofar as the EU represents a ‘superstate’ and to the extent that it objectively creates a single European working class, we want to organise, educate and agitate within and across it ●

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AUSTRALIA

Regroupment in a revolutionary party

Have the hard-line ‘Cliffite sectarians’ seen the light?

The article below, headed ‘A new kind of left unity’, is the editorial from the latest issue of the magazine, *Socialist Alternative*, published by the Australian organisation of the same name. *Socialist Alternative* - now the largest of the Australian far-left groups with around 300 members - split from the Socialist Workers Party’s International Socialist Tendency a decade ago, and has generally been regarded by the rest of the left as the most sectarian of all the revolutionary groups in Australia. A great deal of scepticism has been expressed about not only the call for Marxist unity made in the article, but about the proposed merger with the Revolutionary Socialist Party. While both SA and the RSP seem to reject standing in elections almost on principle, their world outlook is very different. The RSP is an ex-Fourth International grouping, which now places its hopes in Cuba, Vietnam and the Venezuela of Hugo Chávez. It has set up ‘Chávista’ clubs on a number of campuses, while SA retains its IST, state-capitalist viewpoint. What is more, it is pointed out that an SA merger with the RSP would represent no more than a *fait accompli* - many leading RSP members have already left to join SA.

As for the SA’s new-found understanding of democratic centralism, some say that its practice has been typically bureaucratic, with minority positions being denied publication and comrades being allegedly expelled for raising criticisms. It is also claimed that it has a very hostile attitude to the IST affiliate, Solidarity, which it seems, is one group “with whom it would be impossible to genuinely unite” (see below).

The *Weekly Worker* was told that SA would not respond to our approach, when we expressed an interest in republishing this article. And so far that has turned out to be the case. Nevertheless, even if all the allegations above are true, we believe the unity call should be welcomed. We should treat it as having been made in good faith until proved otherwise. We invite the views of others on the left, particularly in Australia.

This is an unusual edition of *Socialist Alternative* magazine. In most issues, our front page and lead article address some pressing issue of Australian or international politics from a socialist point of view: defending refugee rights, championing trade union struggles or attacking the capitalist system as a whole. But we do not publish this magazine just to draw attention to the injustices of the world, or provide a Marxist explanation for why society is the way it is. We want to contribute to building sustained resistance to the system, a fightback that can eventually become a revolutionary challenge to the existing order.

We share with many others on the socialist left the conviction that a crucial component of any effective challenge to capitalism will be the construction of revolutionary socialist organisations in every country that can challenge reformist forces like the Labor Party for leadership

of the workers’ movement, and organise militant workers and students into a force that can lead a sustained assault on the institutions of capitalist rule.

We don’t deny we are a very long way from such an ambitious goal today. But even the most perfunctory look at the dire future facing the planet, and the crisis of world capitalism that is savaging working class living standards across the globe, indicates the urgency of building a challenge not just to aspects of capitalism, but to the system as a whole.

Over recent months, *Socialist Alternative* has embarked on a project that we hope will be an important step on the long road to building a serious revolutionary socialist force in Australian politics.

We have been in discussions with the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) about uniting our organisations, discussions which we are confident will lead to a successful merger early next year. The RSP comes from a different political tradition to us, and we have differences on important questions. But we agree about the key issues facing socialists in Australia, and on the basics of what a socialist organisation in Australia needs to stand for, as is outlined in the statements by both organisations.

The discussions with the RSP, and the fact that several long-term socialist activists from different political traditions to *Socialist Alternative* have joined us in the last few months, has led us to think more generally about how the socialist left in Australia can build.

The elements of the far left that exist in most western countries today are for the most part derived from currents that trace their heritage back to the struggle of Trotsky and the Left Opposition against Stalin in the 1920s. But for much of the subsequent history - particularly following World War II - these currents have been divided and sub-divided, often with great acrimony. Disputes about the class nature of the USSR and other ‘socialist’ states combined with arguments about tactical and strategic questions, leading to a far left that was deeply divided, sometimes to the point of parody.

We do not want to downplay the importance of these historic disputes, or pretend that we are renouncing our historic positions. We do not count ourselves among those who think citing *The life of Brian* is an incredibly witty and original response to anyone who makes an argument against another current on the left. Nor do we want to adopt a ‘Don’t mention the war’ approach to the issues of today that still divide us.

But the reality is not only that the far left agrees on much more than it disagrees, but also that historic positions are no necessary guide to contemporary political positions. For example, the ‘state capitalist’ tradition that *Socialist Alternative* comes from (which characterises the USSR and other ‘socialist’ countries as a statised version of capitalism, rather than socialist or ‘workers’ states’) has been divided over the two central debates on the international left in 2012 - the Syrian revolution and the rise of Syriza in Greece. These questions have also divided the other tendencies of Trotskyism internationally.

So what are we proposing? In simple terms, a regroupment of the revolutionary socialist left in Australia. In the period since the great struggles of the 1960s and 70s a great number of socialists have gone through the varied far-left organisations. Many of these organisations have come and gone, and when they went many revolutionaries went with them, not feeling there was another group they could join.

What we want to create is an organisation that does not start with the historic differences that divide the far left, but a socialist programme for Australia today: for revolution; for a Marxist party; against imperialism; against all oppression; against the capitalist state; for workers’ power.

We are not proposing a ‘broad party’ that tries to involve all kinds of non-socialist forces. We want a Marxist party, with a clear programme and principles. We want a political organisation that operates on the basis of majority decisions, but where minorities have the right to their opinions. We don’t want ‘unity’ for its own sake, but unity of the forces who want to fight for revolutionary change.

Members of *Socialist Alternative* who come from the International Socialist tradition are not about to abandon our views. But neither do we demand or expect that people from other traditions will abandon theirs. When and if these different traditions lead us to disagree on issues of practical policy, we will debate them out in a democratic manner, including in our publications.

We do not subscribe to the view that ‘Leninism’ demands a party publication that only puts the view of majorities. This caricature has nothing to do with anything Lenin or the Bolsheviks ever did or said. That is not to say that our magazine will become some broad left publication in which revolutionary and reformist views are both tolerated. But debates between revolutionaries? Absolutely.

We think this is a relatively new initiative on the left - not just in Australia, but internationally. There have, of course, been innumerable left-unity projects since the fall of the USSR, but almost all have been about abandoning a clear Marxist line or watering down political positions.

In certain countries - Greece is the most obvious - there is a serious space for revolutionaries to contribute to the construction of mass workers’ parties that can cohere the working class as a whole, or at least serious sections of the class. In those situations, it would be mad for revolutionaries to counterpose their own organisations to the mass of radicalising workers.

But this is not the situation we face in most countries, least of all Australia. Here we are laying the basis for the future. Confronting contemporary capitalism is not just a matter of building campaigns and movements, but of constructing a systematic ideological alternative, a counter to the hegemony of capitalist ideas. We want to build a clearly Marxist, revolutionary organisation, uncompromising in its struggle against reformism, determined to pursue a class-struggle line in word and deed.

We are very encouraged by the response we have received so far to our statements and approaches.

We are realists: there are inevitably some sectarian elements of the left with whom it would be impossible to genuinely unite, as if they did join our ranks it would only be with the purpose of creating discord and rancour.

But for anyone who is serious about building a revolutionary socialist organisation in Australia: we want to be a group you can make your own. The revolutionary left has been too small, too divided, and too sidelined for too long. We have a world to win. Let’s make a start ●

See http://sa.org.au/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=7547:a-new-kind-of-left-unity&Itemid=546.

What we fight for

■ Our central aim is the organisation of communists, revolutionary socialists and all politically advanced workers into a Communist Party. Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.

■ The Provisional Central Committee organises members of the Communist Party, but there exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called ‘parties’ on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed ‘line’ are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.

■ Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.

■ Communists oppose all imperialist wars and occupations but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question - ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.

■ Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, ‘One state, one party’. To the extent that the European Union becomes a state then that necessitates EU-wide trade unions and a Communist Party of the EU.

■ The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.

■ Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.

■ Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally. All forms of nationalist socialism are reactionary and anti-working class.

■ The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote. They will resist using every means at their disposal. Communists favour using parliament and winning the biggest possible working class representation. But workers must be ready to make revolution - peacefully if we can, forcibly if we must.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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weekly Worker

US election non-choice

Return of a rational reactionary

The absence of a viable working class alternative means American voters are treated as fools, argues
Paul Demarty

So the interminable US election process has finally ended with the re-election of Barack Obama. The electoral college numbers made it look rather more convincing than it actually was - Obama captured about 51% of the popular vote, which translated into 60% of the final score.

His victory speech had, as all such occasions do, partly the character of a badly planned Oscar acceptance - thank you, Joe Biden! Thank you, Michelle! Thank you, *everyone!* Inasmuch as anything distinctively Obama came through, it was the paean to diversity that closed things out: black, white, Asian or Latino, rich or poor, gay or straight, you should be able to make it in America. That got the biggest cheer - the second biggest, tellingly, came when the president made a fleeting reference to a 'decade of war' coming to an end.

It all feels a bit canned at this point. Obama's carefully non-specific pitches at people's emotions had a messianic air in 2008; by now, he is clearly going through the motions. It does not matter on the morning after election night, but soon he will be confronted with a Republican-dominated lower house and a slender majority in the upper - and the task of keeping American capitalism on the rails. None of this will make him many friends.

The process of the election was, as ever, an extraordinary spectacle. Barely had we recovered from the Byzantine structure of the Republican primaries than we were confronted with the electoral college, which sees votes compartmentalised by state in a mathematically bewildering fashion.

Bewildering it truly is. It is no accident that the pollster-technocrat in this country - the key actor in Labour and Conservative campaigns today - was a US import. The American election is not a contest - it is an algorithm. That the election should, in popular vote terms, be such a knife-edge contest might, to the more naive, be taken as evidence of passions running high - of a deep, existential choice facing the American nation. Surely nobody can be naive enough to believe that this time around, however. The most striking thing about this election is the utter lack of enthusiasm among anyone for either of the two candidates.

Obama has to carry the disenchantment that almost inevitably hangs over the incumbent. In his case, it is hardly a mystery as to why. His entire political career has been based on a kind of outsider status. A barnstorming speech at the 2004 Democratic convention put him on the political map for many - but at that point he just seemed to come out of nowhere. As chatter built up mooring him as a potential head of state, it was his skin colour that put him out of the running.

Then came the primaries in 2007: Obama versus the Clintons, a well-rooted political clan, better connected than almost anyone else. What hope did he have against such establishment figures? When it became clear that Democrat voters were far more



Barack Obama: ruthless pragmatist

excited about this electrifying speaker than a machine woman of the Hillary Clinton type, he was duly selected. Then the race issue came back: was America *really* ready to vote for a black president?

Just about, it seems; and so America got the black president it deserved. The four years since have seen what everyone not blinded by the 'Hopey McChange' guff knew was coming - another commander-in-chief, from the same drawer as all the others, pursuing a capital-friendly consensus at home and brutal interventions abroad.

If Obama did Romney the favour of destroying his own grassroots base, then the Republican Party returned it in spades. If the narrative of the

2007 Democratic primaries was the emergence of a charismatic outsider against all the odds - the American dream itself! - the contest to see who would face Obama on November 6 was the exact reverse. A more unsavoury crew of demagogues, morons and spineless careerists would be difficult to arrange, even for legendary film crime boss Keyser Soze ("12 lunatics. One line-up. No coincidence").

Mitt Romney slid through because he was the only tenable piece of human capital the GOP could muster. He was not as bonkers as ranting pizza magnate Herman Cain. He was not as painfully establishment and widely reviled as Newt Gingrich. He was not much of anything, really,

and that was both his strength and his key weakness. The GOP faithful will pick stubborn idiocy over pragmatic inconsistency every time, and so Romney's flip-flop over Obamacare was unforgivable. Moderate voters, meanwhile, will have been dismayed by his unstatesmanlike demeanour on foreign trips and apparent ignorance of simple geographical facts.

Romney's selling point was that he is not Obama (who, the Teabagger faithful would have us believe, is about to institute a communist regime in the States). Obama's, conversely, was that he is not Romney - a bloodless vulture capitalist who likes to fire people.

Nobody won this election, and neither candidate imagined they would. The important thing was to make the other guy lose. Hence the 'super-PAC' attack ads on both sides; hence Republican efforts to gerrymander votes in key states, both literally (as in Texas, where the legislature and courts has redrawn electoral boundaries to dilute the Latino vote) and figuratively (the infamous 'voter fraud' laws).

So the most striking thing about this electoral cycle is simply how toxically constricted the American body politic has become. It is easy enough to shudder in horror at - and easier still to mock - the lunatic right wing, whether it be preachers blaming the two candidates' support for gay marriage for Hurricane Sandy, or the 'birther' conspiracy theories concerning Obama's supposedly foreign origins.

It also makes it easier to take sides: Obama may be a reactionary, after all, but he is at least a rational actor, and so - broadly speaking - are his supporters and appointed executive team. Yet, just as Obama ended up pursuing a late-Bush foreign policy, thanks to the brute imperatives of US imperial interests, Romney would equally be forced away from his more wild-eyed rantings on foreign policy if he had won. The practical difference is nil; only, under an Obama presidency, it is

liberals and progressives who become disillusioned, while under Romney it would be the Tea Party lunatic fringe.

The American constitution produces a legislature at the mercy of the president and a president at the mercy of the legislature, with both at the mercy of life-appointed supreme court judges. The object, as it always is with the 'separation of powers', is to minimise the actual power the people have to determine their own destiny. Soul-searching over who to vote for in presidential elections is all well and good; but democracy will not exist in America until the office of president is abolished, and the supreme court thrown out with it.

The Washington machine can only offer up grey men for election. The set-up is the very opposite of democracy. In response to that non-choice between McCain and Obama, and now Obama and Romney, irrationalism takes stubborn root.

Bourgeois politics gets the electors it deserves; by treating voters as an embarrassing nuisance to be negotiated every four years, by attempting to ensure they cannot 'damage' things too badly through voting for the 'wrong' candidates, by denying them the opportunity to meaningfully shape society, it infantilises them. The result is the Tea Party.

What do the next four glorious years have in store for the American population? The details are impossible to calculate. Obama is secretly a lot like Mitt Romney - a ruthless pragmatist, who will pursue US interests with the requisite degree of vigour. The "decade of war" is likely far from over. At home, there will be attacks on the working population - concealed, of course, under the convenient facade of political gridlock. The absence of a viable working class party, unfortunately, makes all this far too easy for the Obamas and Romneys of America ●

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