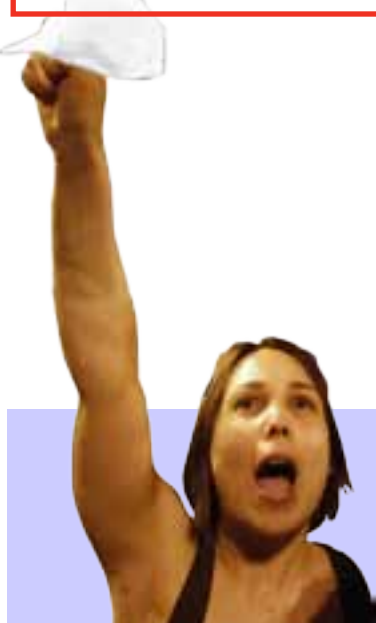


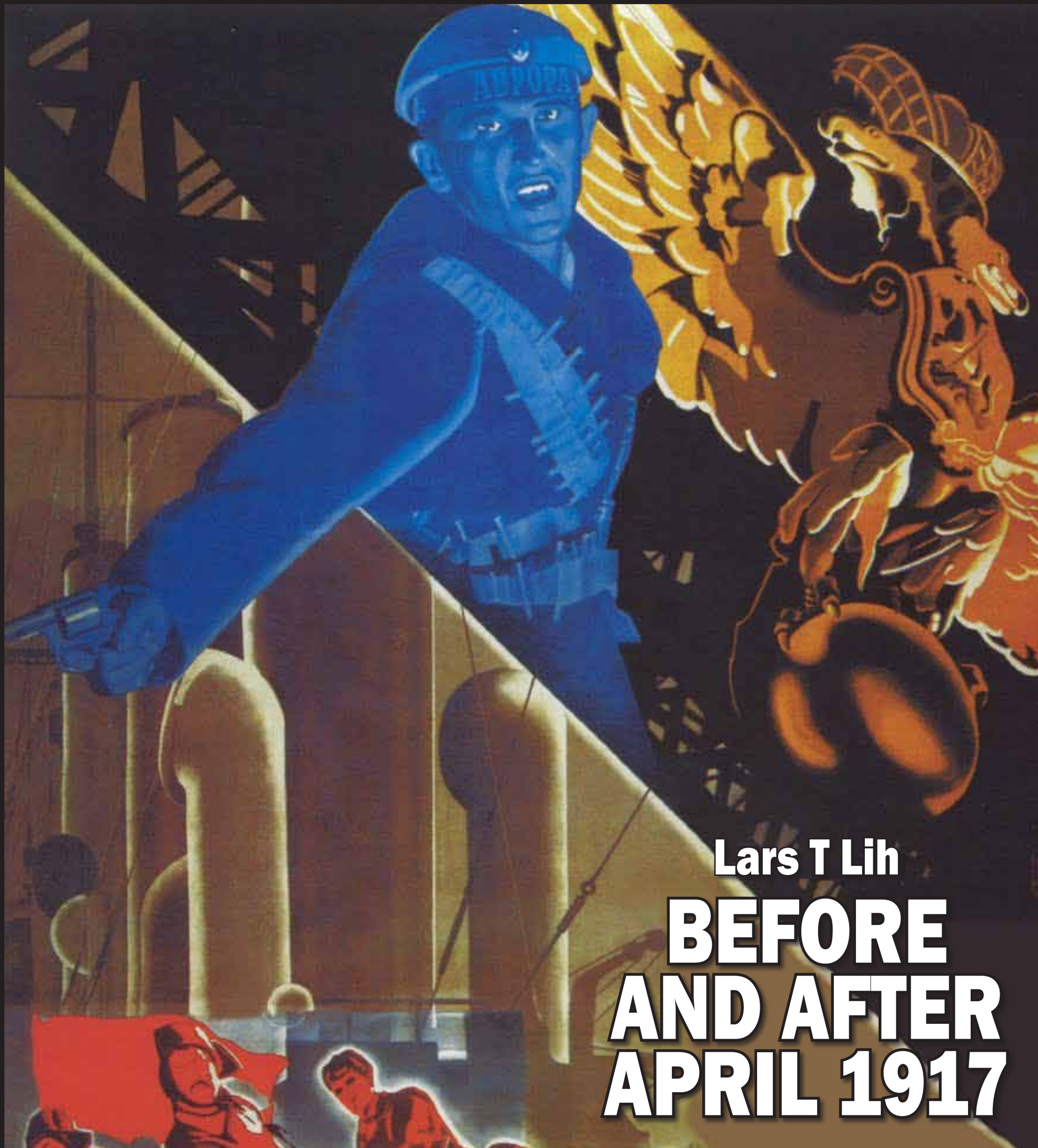
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Lars T Lih
**BEFORE
AND AFTER
APRIL 1917**

LETTERS



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

Left unity

Applying glue to separate objects rarely forms parts as strong as a single, unbroken object, and so it is with the parties.

Marx indeed argued: "The communists do not form a separate party opposed to other working class parties ... by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement" (which could be interpreted as early attempts at anti-substitutionism rather than anything else). However, Engels once observed: "One must not allow oneself to be misled by the cry for 'unity'. Those who have this word most often on their lips are the ones who sow the most discord ... [Those] who have provoked all the splits shout for nothing so much as for unity ... the biggest sectarians and the biggest brawlers and rogues shout loudest for unity at certain times."

To their credit, the CPGB actually address the flipside of sectarianism: namely liquidationism. Mike Macnair's identification of the Anti-Capitalist Initiative with anarchist, anti-party liquidationism ('Liquidationism and "broad front" masks', June 28) could prove correct, but the ACI also seems to involve another kind of liquidationism.

As Eugene Debs once said, "It is better to vote for what you want and not get it than to vote for what you don't want and get it." The liquidationist sentiment guiding broad fronts is catastrophic for ideas. Macnair's statement that "the two topics, liquidationism and 'broad frontism', are distinct, but nonetheless related to one another" is reminiscent of two types of a single Socialist Workers Party tactic. It would be more accurate to say the anti-party liquidationism 'of the left' is distinct from the anti-ideas liquidationism 'of the right'. Broad fronts are SWP-style proposals to members of larger organisations, whilst arguing that smaller organisations are sectarian unless they liquidate their ideas. The effect of both is poisonous to independent thinking and is best termed 'anti-ideas liquidationism'.

Macnair's identification of liquidationism of the right with Bernstein makes rather puzzling the concluding praise for the 1875 Gotha unification of the Lassallean ADAV and Eisenacher SDP. Regarding practical unity as more important than socialist ideas is a dangerous road to go down.

Parties should be able to accommodate different opinions. Tolerance in a movement (as opposed to party) and anti-substitutionism (in relation to society) are among the key characteristics of the Occupy movement overlooked by the left. This is encapsulated in its question, 'What is our one demand?', and its refusal to answer it except that the 99% have one interest in common.

When it comes to my own organisation, there have been various splits from the Socialist Party of Great Britain - almost all of which have been reformist, or at least not attempts to narrow support. Generally this has meant trading principles for the prospect of increasing support. The most interesting have been the only two exceptions, the Socialist Propaganda League (1911-51) and *Socialist Studies* (www.socialiststudies.org.uk).

Socialist Studies has some degree of sterility - although their answer to charges of sectarianism against the SPGB tradition is worth quoting: "How they can regard an appeal to a whole class to emancipate itself as sectarian can be explained only by an understanding of political illiteracy." And: "To be politically small does not mean to be 'sectarian'. What it does

mean is that the vast majority of the working class still support capitalism."

Anti-substitutionism is something that seems to elude most parties. While *Socialist Studies* claim to share the same SPGB object, they were expelled for undemocratic means. Ends determine means and theory determines practice. William Morris's last ever public lecture was for unity, but he was also vigilant against the liquidationism of socialist principles.

Jon D White
SPGB

Live in a field

Brent Council has issued yet another eviction notice against the Counihan family - threatened with homelessness directly as a result of the council's own benefit cuts.

Anthony Counihan and Isabel Counihan-Sanchez live with their five children in Kilburn. Anthony, a bus driver, inherited a small piece of land in Ireland, which he declared to the relevant agencies. This resulted in progressive cuts to the family's benefits, far exceeding the £18 per week income the land brought in. The council then claimed the Counihans owed £46,000 in overpaid housing benefit!

Unable to afford the rent on Anthony's £400 weekly wage, they were evicted from their flat. The council found them temporary housing in Ealing - despite all the children attending school in Brent. The council claims that the family made themselves intentionally homeless when they moved temporarily to Ireland to look after Anthony's sick dad.

On November 7, an order to evict and change the locks was issued on the authority of housing officer Rose McIntosh. It was McIntosh who had 'advised' the family that the way to resolve their housing problems would be to move to Ireland, where they could live on their property in Galway - an empty field! They could live in a caravan (which they don't possess), from where Anthony could 'commute' to work in Cricklewood.

If the resolution of the Counihan homelessness question were as simple as some have suggested, it would have been resolved last January, when the Counihans offered to give the field to Brent to retain their housing benefit. The council refused because they said that this would be a "dispersal of assets to gain a means-tested benefit" and therefore illegal.

Previously council leader Muhammed Butt had suggested (during the occupation of the council chamber by the Counihan Family Campaign on September 10) that if they were to make an attempt to sell the land then housing benefit would be restored and all would be well. Isabel asked if putting an advertisement in the Galway papers would be sufficient and he replied, "Yes". But a letter from the council a few days later contradicted this. The land is for sale with an auctioneer now, but still the case is not resolved.

Labour councillor Colum Moloney says there are 100 families in a similar position and the situation will get considerably worse in April 2013, when housing benefits are capped. So the council's real problem is that if they accommodate the Counihans they will be under pressure to yield to everyone else, and that is just too much to contemplate. Even if they restored housing benefit to the Counihans now, what will happen in April 2013?

The real crisis is the absence of affordable social housing, dissipated under the pernicious 'right to buy' scheme. Until that is addressed, no resolution is possible. Hence the contradictory 'advice', the partial retreat under pressure of a campaign stressing this very human story and

the harsh front once more following legal advice. But this legal advice is also rightwing, establishment-protecting, *political* advice. Until Brent council and other like them set needs budgets, they will have cases like the Counihans, and maybe even worse, on their consciences.

Here are excerpts from a letter sent by the Counihans to Brent council on November 11:

"May and June was a very distressing time, as Aiden (our second youngest, seven-year-old) wasn't coping with the travel [from south Ealing to Kilburn for school] and was admitted to the Royal Free hospital via Ealing A&E with exhaustion. He was chewing his clothes with stress and still is. Over June and July he lost a lot of weight

"Anthony took unpaid leave from work due to stress. He returned to work on September 26, but still wasn't 100%. Aiden had eye surgery in July, but was re-admitted to the Royal Free with risk of losing his eye, because it developed an infection. We were at panic stations, back and forth between the two hospitals. Aiden was discharged on August 7, but was re-admitted the next day and finally discharged on the 10th. But because he was so low, he found it hard to cope with the children over the summer period.

"On a human level we have acted in good faith. We moved into Rose Gardens with a weekly rent of £500. Housing were fully aware we couldn't receive HB, but Mr Babalola still had us fill out the forms. Would not this have been the time for him to say this land needs to go on the market and we will reinstate HB?

"This is a three-bedroom house - one double room and two singles (we have five children: three boys and two girls, ages from 15 to five). The living room is a bedroom for the two girls. So we have no living space. It was only on Thursday November 8 that a Brent officer came to inspect the house.

"We left a council tenancy in July 2007 to move to Ireland to care for Anthony's dying father and were not advised when leaving that we had an option to retain the tenancy. We say we are not intentionally homeless - Brent council have made our family homeless."

Gerry Downing
Counihan Family Campaign

G4S occupied

More than 50 campaigners for Palestinian human rights occupied the central London offices of G4S on November 20 in protest over the British-Danish security company's supply of equipment used to maintain Israel's illegal siege on Gaza. The protestors entered the building in Victoria at 4pm and staged a sit-in protest, while four people locked themselves together. Police removed them after an hour.

By providing equipment and services to the checkpoints that enforce the closure of Gaza, which includes severe restrictions on the movement of people and basic goods, G4S is helping Israel to engineer a humanitarian crisis for Palestinians. G4S is an active accomplice to Israel's collective punishment of Palestinians in Gaza.

As I write, more than 105 Palestinians, including 23 children, have been killed since Israel launched its assault last week, and more than 800 have been injured. The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights has accused Israel of war crimes, including the direct targeting of civilians and civilian buildings, and indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks.

G4S, which gained notoriety over its failure to provide security personnel to the Olympics, provides body scanners to the Erez checkpoint in Gaza, which serves as part of the Israeli

closure policy over the Gaza Strip. G4S announced the deal on the front page of the website of its Israeli subsidiary.

The Israeli government has been proven to have purposefully restricted food deliveries to Gaza in order to, as one Israeli official put it, "put the Palestinians on a diet, but not to make them die of hunger". Why is G4S participating in these gross human rights violations? It has contracts with various Israeli agencies to provide equipment and services to Israeli checkpoints, and to businesses in illegal Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian territory.

G4S also has a contract with the Israeli Prison Service to provide services and equipment to prisons to which Palestinian political prisoners, including children, are held in violation of international law and subjected to mistreatment and torture. Israel is forbidden to transfer Palestinian prisoners from occupied territories to prisons inside Israel under article 76 of the fourth Geneva Convention. Despite this, thousands of Palestinian prisoners are unlawfully held in prisons inside Israel that are supplied by G4S.

Campaigners have also raised concerns with G4S's track record of human rights abuses in the UK. The company lost its contract to deport people from the UK last September after 773 complaints of abuse were made against it following the death of Jimmy Mubenga, an Angolan asylum-seeker who died after being 'restrained' by G4S guards.

G4S also runs huge parts of the Lincolnshire police force and hopes to win government contracts to run police, immigration, welfare and prisons services in the coming months. How can the UK government give lucrative public contracts to a company that shows such disregard for basic human rights standards across all of its business activities?

Michael Deas
email

War is great

War is inevitable, war is development. War won't be erased in this oppressed and class-divided world. Rather it is a central part of this decaying system. The rationale of the system is if you can't oppress others, if you can't kill others, you have no right to survive. So war is good for this type of society. War is its motor.

A warless world means a communist world. But that also must come through another war - that is, a people's war against the oppressing class. If you have to survive in capitalism and are fighting for communism, you have to love war. Without war nothing is possible.

So we, the world proletariat, should prepare ourselves for this sacred people's war. Hail the war to end war! War is great!

Sanjib Sinha
Kolkata

No joke

A Swiss comrade recently sent me a web link to the memoirs, in German, of a leading Bolshevik activist, entitled *Hans O Pjatnizki: Aufzeichnungen eines Bolschewiks*. Initially I planned to just skim the contents to look for anything of particular interest, but ended up reading most of the short book online in one go. The memoirs, written in 1925, chronicle his life - most of which was spent in exile in Europe, where he became acquainted with German social democracy in particular. Rather tantalisingly, the German version online draws to a close with the arrival of the February revolution in 1917, when he ceased to be an 'out-cast' and returned to Russia to take part in the revolution.

His memoirs also shed some light on the 1912 'anti-liquidationist'

Prague conference of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party. This conference is historically significant because it is often seen as a 'turning point', where the Bolsheviks supposedly organised their own conference, finally broke with the Mensheviks and created a completely separate 'Bolshevik party'. This interpretation is particularly pronounced in the Stalinist tradition, but it is also present in the standard Trotskyist interpretation too, such as in the writings of Tony Cliff. But the recent work by Lars T Lih in particular has challenged this understanding (see 'Falling out over a Cliff' *Weekly Worker* February 16).

Anyway, Hans O Pjatnizki (or Piatnitsky, as his name is spelled in the Anglicised transliteration) was charged with organising this conference, and he describes in intriguing detail how it was organised and prepared. This includes a rather John le Carré-esque account of how he arranged for delegates to get across the Prussian-Russian border on their way to Prague. Fears of being met in Germany by a spy and arrested abounded at that time. And with good reason: it was later revealed that two police spies attended the (very small) Prague conference: Roman Malinovsky and Georg Romanov.

Of interest to the 1912 debate is the following passage, which I have translated from the German: "When I arrived in Prague the conference had already begun, and I walked in during the debate on the organising commission's report, which had proposed to the delegates that they constitute themselves as the All-Russian party conference, with the right to elect the party's central bodies. Indeed, the commission had taken every measure to ensure that representatives of all groups and tendencies were present. It had invited Plekhanov, Gorky, the Vpered group, the social democratic parties of Lithuania and Poland, and other anti-liquidationist groupings" (emphasis added).

This is another blow in the struggle to destroy the myths surrounding the 1912 conference: Lenin and the Bolsheviks were seeking to unite all the 'pro-party' - that is, "anti-liquidationist" - factions and groupings in the RSDLP. They were not out to create a distinctly 'Bolshevik' party.

It turns out that Lars had actually referred to these memoirs in the article on 1912 cited above, and there is good news for those who do not speak Russian or German: the book is available to buy in English under the title of *Osip Piatnitsky: memoirs of a Bolshevik*. It might be a nice Christmas present, as it is full of little anecdotes, like the following one.

At the Prague conference, Piatnitsky recalls reading aloud an (unsigned) article from the party press that he found offensive and alienating. Indeed, so rude was the offending passage that the chair (a pro-party Menshevik, remember) felt compelled to interrupt Piatnitsky: he erroneously thought that Piatnitsky was not quoting an article, but expressing his own views. Such a tone was not welcome at the conference, the chair reminded him. Lenin then stood up and immediately cleared up any confusion: Piatnitsky was actually quoting an article of which he, Lenin, was the author!

The chair became rather embarrassed, but the momentary awkward silence was broken by the raucous laughter of the conference delegates. Good to see our comrades had a sense of humour. If only they had known just how significant this gathering was going to be for our subsequent understanding of Bolshevik history ...

Ben Lewis
London

GAZA

Masters of the Goebbels lie



We all know who the military Goliath is

“Hague, Obama and the BBC applaud Israel’s ‘retaliation’,” Ali Abunimah points out in his timeline to Israel’s latest attack on Gaza’s Palestinians.¹ Egypt brokered a ceasefire on November 11, only for Israel to assassinate Hamas military chief Ahmed al-Jabari three days later.

Exactly the same situation occurred four years ago when Israel waged a one-sided war against Gaza that killed 1,400 people, including 400 children. Then Israel used white phosphorous bombs against civilian targets, including a United Nations school. Although the Israelis insist they are doing everything in their power to ‘protect innocent civilians’, as they target residential areas, the actual logic is that babies and children grow into ‘terrorists’, so it is better to get them young. Which was, of course, the excuse that the Nazis used for murdering Jewish children. The numbers are, of course, different, but the principle remains the same.

And, just as with Operation Cast Lead, so Israel’s new Operation Pillar of Defence seeks to cast the victims of the bombing, killing and destruction as the aggressor, and the perpetrator as the victim. As Nazi Germany’s propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels, is alleged to have stated, “If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it. The lie can be maintained only for such time as the state can shield the people from the political, economic and/or military consequences of the lie. It thus becomes vitally important for the state to use all of its powers to repress dissent, for the truth is the mortal enemy of the lie, and thus by extension the truth is the greatest enemy of the state.”

For months Israel has been conducting bombing raids on Gaza and shooting civilians who stray near the border, as well as the odd fisherman. Unsurprisingly most of the rockets sent over in retaliation killed no-one, but were used as the excuse for further aggression.

And the BBC with its usual ‘balance’, takes Israel’s propaganda at face value and portrays the struggle between David and Goliath as the actions of a sorely provoked Zionist state. But it was always thus. The victims of colonialism and imperialism have always been the aggressor in the eyes of this mouthpiece of the

British establishment. Of course, when it comes to Syria, then the BBC abandons such impartiality and balance and has no compunction about coming down on one side.

The question is, why now? Why do Israel’s leaders act like vampires, eager to shed yet more Palestinian blood? One reason, though not the only one, is the holding of elections in Israel in the new year. Prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu, ‘defence’ minister Ehud Barak and his fascist foreign minister, Avigdor Lieberman, want to be seen to be strong. But this is not the whole story. From the Zionist right and left there is a chorus of approval. Shelly Yachimovich of Israel’s Labour Party is an equally enthusiastic supporter of Israel’s latest war.

A key reason is that Israel, as a settler colonial state, is incapable of coming to terms with the indigenous Palestinian population. Zionism by its very nature is an expansionist ideology and movement. The idea of ‘two states’, which apologists for imperialism like the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty never cease to parrot, has only ever been for foreign consumption. The goal of all Zionist parties is either the confining of the Palestinians into a series of tiny Bantustans or, even better, their expulsion over the river Jordan. Transfer is certainly the goal of the present far-right Israeli government and it fervently hopes that it will once again have the means to effect it.

In the meantime the only good Palestinian leader is someone like Mahmoud Abbas, the quisling ‘president’ of the Ramallah canton. Abbas’s only political purpose is to (eventually) acquiesce in whatever Israel demands of him, while pretending to oppose it. The problem with the Hamas leadership in Gaza, despite its reactionary religious ideology, is that it still retains its independence. The same was true, to a lesser extent of the former leader of Fatah, Yasser Arafat, which is why he was murdered by Israel - using radioactive polonium, it is believed.

Western imperialism would generally be content for there to be a viable Palestinian state in which Abbas’s American trained security forces kept the people under tight control. But Israel’s leaders will not countenance even the most subservient of Palestinian states. And yet they know they cannot forever

perpetuate a system of apartheid, where Israel’s Jews rule over a majority of Palestinians (Israeli Jews now constitute less than 50% of what was mandate Palestine). Hence ‘transfer’ is the preferred option.

But the Middle East is not the same as it was before the Arab spring. Despite closing down many of the tunnels in Rafah between Egypt and Gaza,² Egyptian president Mohamed Mursi sent his prime minister to Gaza. This followed the visit of the emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani. This in itself, combined with the prospect of further visits by international leaders and the gradual recognition of Palestinian sovereignty, was enough to cause apoplexy amongst Israel’s leaders, who have maintained a blockade against Gaza for the past seven years.

The oppression of the Palestinians is symbolic of the oppression of Arabs in the Middle East and undoubtedly it was an astute move by Hamad, one of the few intelligent Gulf rulers, to visit Gaza. Israel’s blockade, which itself has been relaxed in certain respects since the murder of nine Turkish activists on board the Mavi Marmara in 2010, has become a political liability. The need to reassert the blockade and make it clear that Gaza is intended to be an open prison, not an independent state, is vital to Zionist plans. There is also a very good economic reason: the discovery of gas in the Mediterranean sea opposite Gaza. Energy independence is something close to Zionist hearts.

It is unlikely that Israel, even if it invades Gaza, will attempt to impose the rule of Abbas on the people. Hamas, which Israel helped create in the 1980s when secular Palestinian nationalism was the main enemy, is necessary to keep order, not least against the growing Salafist movement. The primary purpose of the Israel’s attack and possible invasion of Gaza is to make sure that the Palestinians in Gaza do not start getting ideas of independence. The present bombing is there to remind them who is master of the region ●

Tony Greenstein

Notes

1. <http://electronicintifada.net/blogs/ali-abunimah/how-israel-shattered-gaza-truce-leading-escalating-death-and-tragedy-timeline>.
2. See ‘Gaza tunnel trade squeezed by Egypt “crackdown”’: www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-19320135.

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 25, 5pm: Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by discussion and *Capital* reading group. Caxton House, 129 St John’s Way, London N19. This meeting: Vol 1, chapter 9, ‘The rate of surplus value’. Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesday November 27, 6.15pm: ‘Woman’s biggest husband is the moon’. Speaker: Jerome Lewis. St Martin’s Community Centre, 43 Carol Street, London NW1 (Camden Town tube). £10 waged, £5 low-waged, £3 unwaged. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: www.radicalanthropologygroup.org.

Stop Israel’s war on Gaza

Saturday November 24, 12 noon: National demonstration, Downing Street, London SW1, for march to Israeli embassy. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.palestinecampaign.org.

Save Lewisham Hospital

Saturday November 24, 2pm: Demonstration, Lewisham High Street/Rennell Street, London SE13. Organised by Lewisham Keep Our NHS Public: www.lewishamkonp.org.

Campaign Against Arms Trade

Saturday November 24 10.30am to 5pm: Student gathering, University of Sheffield Students Union, Western Bank, Sheffield S10. Organised by CAAT: www.caat.org.uk.

Stop Israeli demolitions

Monday November 26, 7pm: Brent and Harrow Palestine Solidarity Campaign AGM, followed by talk on Israeli army village demolitions. Rumi’s Cave, 26 Willesden Lane, London NW6. Speaker: Leah Levane, back from her visit to the West Bank. Organised by Brent and Harrow PSC: <http://brentpsc.blogspot.co.uk>.

Queers Against the Cuts

Thursday November 29, 7pm: AGM, Vida Walsh Centre, 2b Saltoun Road, Brixton, London SW2. Organised by Queers Against the Cuts: www.queersagainstthecuts.wordpress.com.

Up the anti

Saturday December 1: Anti-austerity conference, Mile End campus, Queen Mary University, Mile End Road, London E1. Speakers include: David Graeber, Mark Fisher, Ewa Jasiewicz, Hillel Ticktin.

Coalition of Resistance

Sunday December 2, 10:30am to 4:30pm: National conference, Regent High School (formerly South Camden Community School), Charrington Street, London NW1. Organised by Coalition of Resistance: www.coalitionofresistance.org.uk.

No attack on Iran

Tuesday December 4, 7pm: Public meeting, Room GO2, Leeds Metropolitan University, Broadcasting Place, Woodhouse Lane, Leeds LS2. ‘The looming Israel-Iran war and Palestine’ with Moshé Machover. Organised by Leeds PSC and Leeds Coalition Against the War: leedsagainstawar@gmail.com.

Manchester against austerity

Saturday December 8, 12.30pm: Protest march and demonstration. Assemble All Saints, Oxford Road, Manchester M13, for march to rally at Manchester Cathedral Gardens. Organised by Greater Manchester Association of Trade Union Councils: www.gmatuc.org.uk.

Socialist films

Sunday December 9, 11am: Screening, Renoir Cinema, Brunswick Square, London WC1. UK premiere of Eran Torbiner’s *Bunda ’im* (Israel, 48 minutes); and Adela Peeva’s *Whose is this song?* (Belgium/Bulgaria, 70 minutes). Organised by London Socialist Film Co-op: www.socialistfilm.blogspot.com.

End violence against sex workers

Monday December 17, 7.30pm: Talks and film showing, Old Hairdressers, 20-28 Renfield Lane, Glasgow G2. See www.facebook.com/events/170089976468366.

Socialist theory

Thursday December 20, 6pm: Study group, Social Centre, Next from Nowhere, Bold Street, Liverpool L1. ‘The nature of the transitional epoch’ (continued). Organised by Socialist Theory Study Group: teachingandlearning4socialism@gmail.com.

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.

KURDISTAN



Kurdish peshmerga: young lining up

Victory, but no solution

Despite the ending of the prisoners' hunger-strikes, the Kurdish question remains unresolved, writes **Esen Uslu**

The mass hunger-strike staged by hundreds of Kurdish prisoners ended on the 68th day of the campaign, on November 18, when committees in 37 prisons decided to end the strike on the basis of the call issued by Abdullah Öcalan, jailed leader of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), that reached the prisons the night before.

On the penultimate day the infamously mishap-prone shuttle ship from the mainland to the island prison of İmralı finally managed the passage, and the usual 'unfavourable weather and sea conditions' suddenly disappeared too, allowing comrade Öcalan's brother to visit him for the first time in months. Öcalan was expecting a visit from the solicitor representing him, as previously agreed during the negotiations. However, after a protest against the government's last-minute tricks, he agreed to see his brother and hand over to him his handwritten note calling on the prisoners to end their strike.

Comrade Öcalan appealed to the prisoners in these terms:

Those who staged the hunger-strike undertook the tasks and responsibilities of those who are free. Those who are free should not shift the burden of their own tasks and responsibilities onto the shoulders of prisoners who have been suffering under very difficult conditions for a long time, who are sick and weakened behind those thick walls. While I do not consider the hunger-strike as an appropriate type of action, I believe if such a course of action becomes inevitable it should be carried out by those who are free, and should not be left to the prisoners.

As an action the hunger-strike is extremely powerful. It has reached

its target and achieved its main aim. They should end the hunger-strike at once without any hesitation.

From here I extend my personal greetings to each of the hunger-strikers, particularly to those who started the action in the first and second groups.

That appeal was supported by the speeches of the prominent figures of the BDP (Peace and Democracy Party), who had themselves started hunger-strikes in front of the prisons in support of the prisoners' action. The guerrilla command based in the Qandil mountains echoed comrade Öcalan's call as their own. Overnight prisoners considered the appeal and ended the strike, issuing the following statement:

We regard our leadership's call - "it has reached its target and achieved its main aim. They should end the hunger-strike at once without any hesitation" - as our base line, and end our action on November 18 2012. We will carefully observe any approach to our leadership, and the concrete outcome of the process of negotiations.

Afterwards immediate medical treatment was administered to the first and second group of hunger strikers - two of the protestors were by now in a critical condition. However, the hunger-strike has ended without loss of life - although two fatalities have resulted from the interventions of police or fascist gangs against the support actions organised in almost every province of Turkey.

As may be remembered, the prisoners launched their hunger strike on the basis of three demands: end the isolation imposed on comrade Öcalan; end the ban on prisoners speaking Kurdish at their trials; and end the ban

on mother-tongue education.

The first step towards resolving the impasse came from the government, which hastily introduced a bill removing the discretionary power of judges to prevent defendants using Kurdish in their own defence. Through this bill the state was conceding to one of the demands of the Kurdish prisoners, while maintaining to the end that it would not give in to their 'blackmail'.

The government then opened up talks with comrade Öcalan after a break of a year, combining this with bitter denunciation of the so-called Oslo process, where it had maintained separate talks with comrade Öcalan, as well as the guerrilla leadership. But when a family visit was arranged, comrade Öcalan was adamant that members of his family were not the appropriate people to convey messages to his organisation. He was determined to maintain contact through a solicitor. The government side conceded, but argued that the solicitor should be one it deemed acceptable. In the end an interim solution was found.

It was agreed that the third demand, on mother-tongue education, would be considered in forthcoming discussions over the new constitution. But the main demand - that is, an end to the isolation imposed on comrade Öcalan - was won through the sheer determination of the Kurdish prisoners.

Regional battles

However, we should not consider the outcome as a victory pure and simple, as if it was a question of who blinked first. In the Middle East a period of two months can be quite a long time - and the period of more than a year, during which comrade Öcalan's isolation was maintained, was indeed a long time.

While the players in the region remain the same, their relative strength

and positioning have changed. A year ago, the so-called Arab spring was expected to sweep the Middle East, and the regimes of Syria and Jordan were not expected to survive.

Despite a bloody civil war, the Syrian Ba'athist regime is yet to be toppled, and is still able to manoeuvre between the various communities. The Assad regime has conceded a swathe of land along the Turkish border to the control of Kurdish groups. But it was able to regroup against the Free Syrian Army, while maintaining a relative peace in Kurdish areas. Of course, it is realistic enough not to attempt to hold onto those areas if it can stay in power while a prolonged process of reform agreed with the 'international community' is implemented.

On the other hand, the Assad regime knows that, given the opportunity, FSO forces and the local Kurdish administration would become involved in a power struggle that would inevitably escalate into armed conflict. The first salvos of these future battles were heard just as the hunger-strike was ending.

Turkey has issued an ultimatum to Damascus, warning it that any Syrian air force flight towards the Turkish border would be considered hostile once it reached a certain zone and would be met with the appropriate response. However, Syria has bombed the border towns held by Kurdish forces with impunity, even though the attacks were so close to Turkish territory that people just over the border have been killed and maimed too. So Turkey's warning is designed to placate its own majority population, while Kurds are left to suffer.

While, for its part, the Iraqi Kurdish regional government has come face to face with Syrian forces on the border, the Baghdad government has tried to impose its own line to end the conflict,

and has attempted to occupy some border posts.

But more dangerously, acting in response to Iranian instigations, the Shia-dominated government is preparing new constitutional arrangements. Consequently the Kurdish president of Iraq has left his post and sought safety within the Kurdish zone. The dispute is allegedly over who controls the oilfields of Kirkuk and Mosul, but the Iraqis are in reality desperately trying to link up with coastal Shia communities in Syria and Lebanon. Under such conditions the only viable option for the Kurdish regional government is to maintain a good or working relationship with Turkey. The destabilisation of Lebanon and Jordan, as well as the Israeli attack on Gaza, are also part of the rapidly changing mix in the region.

During the spring and summer the PKK adopted a new, rather strange stance for a guerrilla movement: instead of hit and run tactics, they decided to occupy liberated zones within Turkey. During the increased military action and air raids following the collapse of the Oslo process, while the hunger-strikes were going on, almost 900 guerrillas were killed. That is an extremely heavy toll, but it has not ended the will and determination of Kurdish youth to answer the call from the mountains.

The strengthened will and morale resulting from the hunger-strike victory and the successful mass mobilisation in support of that action will be put to the test in negotiations over the coming months - nothing will be easily gained by the Kurds nor easily conceded by the Turkish government. The recent period has produced a victory for the Kurdish hunger-strikers and Abdullah Öcalan, but still sterner tests are awaiting all of us in the Middle East ●

EUROPE

Europe unites to resist austerity

As the EU slips into recession, November 14 gave us a taste of what is possible, argues Eddie Ford

On November 14 millions of workers responded to the European Confederation of Trade Unions call for a “day of action and solidarity”. There were a whole series of demonstrations, strikes, protests, etc against the austerity blitzkrieg launched by individual European Union states and the Eurocrats, who are intent on offloading the economic crisis onto the backs of the working class.

In city after city along the continent’s debt-encrusted Mediterranean rim and beyond, militant workers marched and waved banners declaring, ‘Austerity kills’. More than 25 million Europeans are unemployed and about one in every eight people in the euro zone is jobless. Meanwhile youth unemployment in Greece and Spain respectively stands at 55% and 53%. In the words of Bernadette Ségol, ECTU secretary general, “There is a social emergency in the south.”

For the first time in its history, an ETUC action included simultaneous strikes in four countries - most notably general strikes in Spain and Portugal, both of which find themselves on the austerity frontline, along with Greece. Some 40 trade union organisations from 23 countries were involved in the event, a celebration of resistance. The Italian CGIL union led a four-hour national strike against labour ‘reforms’ introduced by the Mario Monti government making it easier for the bosses to hire and fire at will - as well as against rising unemployment, austerity-driven spending cuts and tax hikes which are hitting ordinary families so hard.

France’s five main unions organised around 100 protests across the country against the ‘shock treatment’ meted out to workers. Encouragingly, Germany’s DGB union federation organised several thousand protestors across the country to demonstrate their solidarity with strikers in southern Europe - a token but it does cut against the chauvinist grain. London saw a symbolic protest too.

Various demonstrations were also held in Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Romania. Naturally, there were protests in Greece too - which has already had innumerable national/general strikes, of course. Greek workers, who on average have seen their purchasing power decrease by 35%, are demanding that pay and pension cuts be revoked and that collective work agreements be reinstated. They are also voicing bitter opposition to the sacking of 150,000 civil servants by 2015 - a central condition of the €13.5 billion austerity package passed by last week by parliament - with the first tranche due to be laid off before the end of the year. Furthermore, the labour movement is also demanding that all unpaid pensions and wages (sometimes going back months) be paid and that the programme of mass privatisations be immediately dropped.

As for the ETUC itself, it is demanding a “social compact” (or contract) “aimed at putting growth, employment and social justice at the top of the European agenda”. This should consist of the following elements: “collective bargaining and social dialogue”; “economic governance for sustainable growth and employment”; and “economic and social justice”. Keynesian vagueness, yes, but an indication that the bureaucracy is being driven to act by the intensity of the assault,

combined with the pressure from below.

Recession

The CPGB, of course, emphasises the total bankruptcy of the capitalist system as a whole and the necessity of mass working class political resistance - which inevitably would bring it into sharp confrontation with Europe’s ruling class.

We need a European-wide political strategy and vision to show that there is a working class alternative to ‘fiscal consolidation’ and ‘book balancing’. But the very fact that there was *some sort* of continent-wide coordination and resistance was a highly positive development which should be welcomed and encouraged - a powerful symbol of the potential power of the working class. It was also a living rebuttal to the *Morning Star*-type nonsense about ‘pulling out’ of Europe, etc. Why on earth separate yourself from your proletarian brothers and sisters? Albanianisation is not the answer. In fact, it is a plainly suicidal approach - just when more attacks are on its way, especially in view of the latest economic statistics.

On November 15 the Eurostat agency declared that the euro zone was officially in recession. So, if the European Commission-International Monetary Fund-European Central Bank medicine is working so well, why not continue with the same treatment? Euro area GDP fell by 0.1% in the third quarter of 2012, as austerity economics and the weakening global economy hit demand. This contraction followed a 0.2% drop in gross domestic product in the second quarter. For the whole of the European Union, the economy grew by 0.2% in the quarter after having contracted 0.2% in the previous three months. The UK economy, for example, grew by just 1% in the third quarter of the year - almost entirely due to one-off factors such as the Olympic Games and the golden jubilee ‘bounce-back’.

Now there seems little doubt that the European economy is in a drawn-out period of stagnation. Germany and France, the two biggest economies in the euro zone, posted extremely modest ‘growth’ of 0.2% in the third quarter, but this was more than offset by the sharp decline - economic catastrophe - engulfing Greece, Spain and Portugal. Ominously, Germany’s growth rate has slowed since the start of 2012, when it was expanding at a quarterly rate of 0.5%. But most economists expect Germany to contract in the fourth quarter for the first time since the end of 2011, given that its growth is mainly driven by foreign demand. And where Germany goes France is likely to follow.

But perhaps the biggest shock was the sharp 1.1% quarterly fall in triple-A rated Netherlands, which was more than five times as large as the expected 0.2% drop. It is not difficult to discern the reasons though. Like the stinging Dutch austerity programme, with the new coalition government recently announcing €16 billion of new measures on top of already significant cuts. The rise in VAT from 19% to 21% is particularly punishing household budgets already stretched to their limit. Wages fell 1% in real terms last year, while unemployment has been rising since the middle of last year and is at a 15-year high. Austria as well posted a 0.1% decline in output.

Taken as a whole then, the most generous thing you can say about the European economy is that it is bottom-

lining - ditto for the UK, with the mighty United States not doing that much better (its economy grew by 0.5% in the third quarter). Or, to put it another way, the crisis in the southern ‘periphery’ is - quite inevitably - creeping into the northern ‘core’.

Alarmed, Mario Draghi, head of the ECB, has warned (not the first time, it has to be said) that time is running out for the crisis is to be resolved. He might not be wrong. Financial analysts expect to see a decline of about 0.7% in the fourth quarter and maybe 2.5% for 2013 as a whole, as Germany and France start to go backwards - or at the very least come to a shuddering halt. Greece has just signed up to another batch of economy-destroying spending cuts, the Spanish economy is in free-fall, with Portugal not far behind, Germany will continue to struggle while world trade remains weak, and the UK is facing a *triple-dip* recession, despite the fiscal genius of George Osborne. European banks remain in a parlous state and would go under without life support from the ECB and national governments. Short of divine intervention, 2013 looks set to be grim indeed. Just imagine the situation if the US falls off the ‘fiscal cliff’ in January.

Of course, the continuing Greek drama over the next batch of EU bailout money is feeding into the wider sense of crisis. Late on November 21, euro zone finance ministers admitted they had failed to reach a deal - with the chairman of the Euro group, Jean-Claude Juncker, saying they will meet again on November 26. “Technical verifications” and “financial calculations” have still to be made, he said slightly cryptically. However, the main areas of disagreement are fairly clear. Euro zone ministers favour giving Greece an extra two years, until 2022, to bring its debt down to 120% of GDP, but the IMF is hostile to such an extension - the original deadline, and target, must be kept. Which can only mean, of course, that euro zone governments and institutions must take losses - just as the private creditors did. Angela Merkel, however, has ruled out the possibility that European governments would accept ‘haircuts’ on their holdings of Greek bonds. Stalemate.

A 15-page document circulated at the meeting of EU finance ministers spelt things out in stark terms. Without any “corrective measures”, the document stated, the Greek debt at the very best would be 144% of GDP in 2020. The spectre of Greek exit and euro collapse remains.

Budget battle

Making matters even more fraught, we have the looming battle over the budget at the November 22 EU summit. This has intensified the row between, on the one side, those (ie, Germany) who want to freeze or limit the EU’s budget to one percent of member-states’ GDP - meaning that the EC’s proposed budget would have to be slashed by as much as €130 billion. And, on the other side, those such as the ‘net receiver’ countries in eastern Europe, which want to increase it by 5% or more. If no compromise is reached, there will be

an *automatic* 2% increase each year for inflation. Europe’s very own ‘fiscal cliff’ perhaps.

This budgetary tussle in Brussels has had a direct impact on British politics. David Cameron, of course, is under intense pressure to negotiate a tough-looking deal on the EU budget after Labour opportunistically teamed up on October 31 with 53 Conservative Eurosceptic MPs to defeat the government: an unholy alliance if ever there was one. The successful amendment demanded that the next EU budget should be reduced in “real terms”. If not, then Cameron - or whoever happens to be the British prime minister - should exercise a veto. Previously, whether Jesuitically or not, Cameron argued that any freeze is effectively a reduction. Not enough, it need hardly be said, to silence the barking dogs that have tasted blood and now want more - like, for instance, an in-out referendum on the EU.

Mark Reckless, who led the Eurosceptic revolt of Tory MPs, has predicted - not without reason - an even bigger rebellion if Cameron returns from Brussels without having negotiated a real-terms cut in EU spending or wielded his veto. He

added that if Labour stood firm then Cameron would be defeated - “He is between a rock and

a hard place”. Hard to disagree. Labour has yet to say whether it will repeat its pro-cuts stance if European lawmakers vote to increase the budget.

Yet the reality is that a veto would be an essentially meaningless gesture, merely angering European leaders and further isolating Britain. Indeed, even if Cameron wins a freeze in overall Brussels spending - which seems unlikely - Britain “accepts it will end up paying more”, as *The Guardian* provocatively comments (November 21). Firstly, Tony Blair agreed in 2005 that the rebate should be reduced over time to compensate for the arrival of the

relatively poor new EU members from eastern Europe. Without any reform, contributions to the rebate from the likes of Poland would have made Britain one of the largest net beneficiaries. Secondly, Britain’s net contributions to the EU have been increasing over the last 10 years because agricultural subsidies have declined in relative terms. Under these circumstances, how exactly is Cameron going to ‘battle for Britain’ and ‘defend the taxpayer’?

All this against the backdrop of the latest *Opinium/Observer* poll which finds, to no-one’s great astonishment, that 56% would ‘probably’ or ‘definitely’ vote for the UK to go it alone, if they were offered the choice in a referendum. About 68% of Conservative voters want to leave the EU, against 24% who want to remain; 44% of Labour voters would probably choose to get out, against 39% who would back staying in - while some 39% of Liberal Democrats would probably or definitely vote to get out, compared with 47% who would prefer to remain in the EU. Hang on, aren’t they supposed to be ardent ‘pro-Europeans’? Someone call Nick Clegg right now.

These findings should make sobering reading for the mainstream parties, which are in danger of losing further support to the UK Independence Party - now not far behind the Liberal Democrats (Ukip is on 8%, as against 13% for the Lib Dems, according to the latest *Guardian/ICM* poll). Overall just 28% of likely voters think the EU is a “good thing”, while 45% think it is a “bad thing”. Interestingly, the 18-34 age group is the only one in which there is a clear majority backing the EU - with 44% approving of membership, as opposed to 25% against.

Adding to the heat in the kitchen, the *Daily Express* screamed on November 21 about the “secret EU plot to stitch up Britain”, while London mayor Boris Johnson ranted in *The Daily Telegraph* that there should not be “a single penny more for the EU’s begging bowl” (November 19). Rather, he explained, Cameron should “put on that pineapple-coloured wig and powder-blue suit, whirl his handbag round his head and bring it crashing to the table with the words ‘no, non, nein, neen, nee, ne, ei and ochi’, until they get the message”. Obviously a man with an eye on replacing Cameron as Tory leader ●

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Portugal: protest general strike

HISTORY

Before and after April 1917

The April theses represented Bolshevik continuity rather than a break, argues **Lars T Lih**. This is an edited version of a speech given to a London Communist Forum

As a provisional title for this talk I put forward something like 'Bringing back Bolshevism to the Bolshevik revolution', and I am going to try to explain what I mean by that. I must say that preparing this talk has been very good for me, in that it has helped me put my thoughts in order - and express them in a positive way rather than in the form of a polemic.

My ideas on the subject can be traced back to an insight I had long ago. On the one hand, there is the Bolshevik scenario of a workers' revolution supported by the peasants, and an alliance in which the peasants support the workers against the counterrevolution; on the other hand, the reality of a civil war in which the Bolsheviks put together a Red Army mostly made up of peasants. It looks like they put the scenario into practice - they won because they did what they said they would from the beginning.

That was my insight, which I stand by today, and I have since expanded upon it in more extensive terms. But I find it surprising that this idea of continuity between old Bolshevism and the October revolution has been largely neglected by both the academics and the activists - indeed it is regarded as somewhat scandalous in some camps.

Five obstacles

What are the obstacles that prevent people seeing something that seems obvious? I can think of five, but perhaps people can think of others too. The first, especially among academics, is that they are not particularly aware of the old Bolshevik scenario of revolution and worker-peasant power. For them Lenin means party organisation, authoritarianism, intellectuals running things and so forth. They think they have understood the essence of Lenin by their wrong reading of *What is to be done?* and so there is very little written about him post-1905. And, of course, this scenario of a vast workers' revolution supported by the peasantry is not going to appeal or make sense to someone who thinks that Lenin had a low opinion of the capacities of the workers, and an even lower opinion of the peasants.

The second obstacle can be seen amongst left writers, who are actually familiar with this scenario of worker-peasant revolution - you can find a good account of it in some books. But they nevertheless choose to emphasise *discontinuity* in 1917. It is important to them and their narrative that there is discontinuity between old Bolshevism and October, and there are many reasons for this.

I will name two. One is a hostility to Lenin's main lieutenants: that is, Stalin, Zinoviev and Bukharin. They all turn out to be villains later on in the left or in Trotskyist narratives, and they are not going to be given a break. The other, substantial, reason that needs to be considered is that they are hung up, I think, on the juxtaposition between democratic revolution and socialist revolution. In my view there is certainly a shift, but the discontinuity has been overstated.

Some of the other obstacles are really based on no more than myths. For example, one widespread idea is that a break occurred in 1914, when Lenin supposedly read Hegel, discovered Kautsky was a bounder and rethought everything. I do not think this happened. In fact the opposite is the case, as Lenin really

reaffirmed his beliefs. In Lenin's view, it was Kautsky, not himself, who had changed tack.

Thirdly, there is the episode I call 'April in Petrograd', where we have one of the most famous historical narratives. It goes like this: Lenin arrives, and the Bolshevik leaders are baffled by his new vision. But he faces them down, there is a debate for about a month or so, and then everyone gets on board the new line.

Now this story constitutes a genuine objection to the idea of continuity, as there is a lot of material out there that seems to confirm the narrative, but I have been one of the first to genuinely research this - there has not been an independent study in western literature that I know of, and everyone is dependent on this or that quote from secondary sources. What is interesting about it is that activists and academics alike are reliant for their information on Soviet historians, who otherwise they would not think of trusting.

Fourthly, there is a connection with a Lenin cult, which we are all part of, as it is a little hard to escape, where everything Lenin does is always right. So if there is any disagreement between him and the others, then obviously the others are wrong. However, even from a methodological point of view, we have to leave open the possibility that, say, Kamenev was right and Lenin was wrong on this or that question.

I want to stress here that, though this story is strongly supported by the Trotskyist tradition, everybody likes it for their own particular reasons: the academics, the Stalinists, the anti-Stalinists, the post-Soviets - everyone has a reason for liking this story. It all goes back to a Nikolai Sukhanov, a memoirist who was on the left, but an anti-Bolshevik. I think it was Sukhanov and his extremely vivid account that really got the story going.

Finally, there is the Bolshevik-peasant conflict during the civil war, something that is very much stressed by academic historians. But it seems people on the left also look at that in order to conclude that the worker-peasant alliance did not work out.

So, those are the obstacles that are out there - common assumptions, genuine problems - and I have been attempting to take these on one by one: examine them and get them out of the way. But that takes polemics - pointing out that a certain quote does not fit the narrative and so on, and I am going to skip that as much as I can, so as to present the narrative in positive terms, as if no-one was disputing what I was saying. You can dispute it after I am finished!

Bolshevik scenario

The first stage to this story, then, is the original Bolshevik scenario back in 1905-07, and I am going to give you an idea of what I think the heart of this scenario was. But first let me say something about my sources. I think I am just about the only one who has not only examined Lenin, but the writings of other Bolsheviks; and the two Bolsheviks whose writings are most easily available, having been republished for various reasons, are Stalin and Kamenev. Both were in Petrograd in the weeks before Lenin arrived, so they are a very good source for our purposes. I also should point out, however, that when Stalin and Kamenev (and other Bolshevik



Made through worker-peasant alliance

writers) rehash the Bolshevik scenario for propaganda purposes, they simplify it, which is good in one sense. For my purpose it is historically more important what the 'second-tier' Bolsheviks were saying than what Lenin himself was saying, as he may have been on his own on certain things. What these lower-level people were saying was what Bolshevism actually was on the ground.

Essentially, the Bolshevik scenario for what the next revolution was going to look like was a bigger and better version of the 1905 revolution. The *narod* - the people, the workers and the peasants (because it includes the peasants it cannot be assumed to be a socialist term), led by the socialist proletariat and its party, Russian Social Democracy, would establish a provisional revolutionary government, thwart the various liberal attempts to put brakes on the revolution, and carry out a vast democratic transformation of Russia. I am trying to avoid some of the catchphrases we use on the left - 'democratic dictatorship' and so on, and just look at what is really happening objectively. The essence of it is a worker-peasant *vlast* - 'power' or 'sovereignty' - that is going to carry through the revolution to the end. It will carry out the so-called minimum programme - which is in fact the

maximum that can be achieved under capitalism, and is extremely vast and ambitious.

I said *provisional* revolutionary government, because at the end of this process there is to be a constituent assembly. With the winning of the constituent assembly at the end of this revolutionary transformation, the Bolsheviks - that is, the party of the socialist proletariat - no longer feels it can be in power and it retires for the time being. So its rule is provisional, and that represents a real difference in comparison to 1917.

Secondly, this scenario did envision a period of bourgeois class rule after this revolution, but it is very important not to add what is often said when this point is being made. There is nothing in the Bolshevik scenario about a *long* period, nothing about a *stable* period of bourgeois rule. Actually, the Bolsheviks did not expect this period to be very peaceful. In fact they thought it would be very unpeaceful, and not be very long - everyone thought the world was in a period of war and revolution, after all. They expected this period to be short, with socialist revolutions breaking out in western Europe. They hoped the successful democratic revolution in Russia would spark this off, and it would rebound back into Russia and change the situation. That

was common currency, not just Trotsky.

Why were limits set? Why did the Bolsheviks say they could not go all the way to socialism? I think the essential reason for that is what I call the 'axiom of the class ally': you can only go as far as the interests of your class ally will allow. And who is the class ally in this case? It is the peasants, of course, and peasants, which account for the majority of the country, are in this scenario deemed not to be ready for socialism.

I should say here that Trotsky, in his own scenario of 1905-06, certainly did not deny this axiom of the class ally - the empirical fact (as they thought it was) that the peasants would not go to socialism. However, he thought that for various reasons the workers' government could keep moving ahead to socialism, even though the peasants were not on board, even though the majority of the country was against them, and so the two class forces would end up in a civil war at some point. But the Bolsheviks and everyone else said, 'Well, if the peasants are against us, then we've got to wait until we can win over the majority.' That is the old scenario that leads up to 1917.

Pre-April

To make the story plausible here, we have to look at what the old Bolsheviks

were doing in Petrograd before Lenin showed up. This is a much misunderstood, understudied episode, and we are all paying too much attention to very partisan historians, including both Soviet historians and others, who are focussing on little snippets and ignoring the big picture. I think from the get-go the Bolsheviks in Petrograd assumed that the embryo of a new *vlast* would carry the revolution through to the end. They assumed that there were the soviets on one side, the provisional government, representing the bourgeois, reformist, liberal elite, on the other, and the soviets would eventually take over.

But if we look at the old-Bolshevik scenario, then what would we predict? That they would thwart any attempt by liberal bourgeois forces to put brakes on the revolution, and would put in a worker-peasant power to carry the revolution through. That is what we would predict, and that is what happened.

Now, let me try and clear up some misunderstandings. First, in April 1917 the Bolshevik leaders said that the immediate overthrow of the provisional government was not possible - we don't have enough force, we don't have a basis in the soviets - and so to go out and call for its overthrow now is silly and adventurist. No doubt they were correct, and Lenin did not disagree with them when he showed up.

Secondly, it is not correct that this caution represented a long-distance perspective; that the Bolsheviks had the idea of a soviet *vlast*, but they did not have Lenin's urgency. No, I do not think this is a real contrast. The Bolsheviks were fairly confident that the provisional government would not be able to handle the problems that were arising from the revolution, the war, the economy and the carrying out of land reforms, and that it would rapidly wear out its welcome and would be tossed out. So the replacement of the provisional government was an active, near-future perspective.

Thirdly, I think from the beginning the Bolsheviks were fairly anti-*soglashenie*. *Soglashenie* is sometimes translated as 'compromise', and was used to describe the strategy of the 'moderate socialists', the Socialist Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks. Their gut reaction was not to use the soviets as the embryo of a new *vlast*, but to make some sort of compromise or class-collaboration, because the country needed some sort of agreement between reformist forces, both liberal and socialist. They could make a good case for this, and I do not think we should dismiss them, but I believe the Bolshevik leaders were always against it.

Finally, I would like to draw attention to a very common and important misunderstanding. One of the debates focussed on the question, 'Is the democratic revolution over yet?' The Bolshevik leaders claimed, sometimes in opposition to Lenin, that the democratic revolution was not over. The misunderstanding arises when this is equated with saying that we are not yet at the stage of socialist revolution and *therefore* we must tolerate, not throw out, the provisional government. Trotsky was one of the first to make this supposedly logical implication in 1924. But, no: if you actually understand the overall scenario as I have outlined it, to say that the democratic revolution has not been carried out to the end means therefore we have to *overthrow* the provisional government as soon as possible, so that we - the only ones capable of carrying out the democratic revolution to the end - are in power.

I cannot resist saying that I have just been looking at Tony Cliff's book, *Lenin*, and noticed that he quoted a certain Bagdatev, a "left extremist secretary of the Bolshevik

committee of the Putilov works". Bagdatev says that the democratic revolution is not over, and *also* that the provisional government should be overthrown as quickly as possible, and Tony Cliff's first reaction is: "What muddled thinking!"¹ So, yes, it is muddled thinking, but not on the part of Bagdatev. Anyway, I do not want to pick on Tony Cliff, because it is a very common misunderstanding.

Lenin returns

Again, I would love to get down into who said what and when, but I think we need to look at the big picture instead. First of all, we should consider the situation when Lenin arrives in Russia. Here was Lenin, back from exile after 10 years and very likely to be out of touch on this or that question. There would have been issues he was not aware of, even though he would have quickly picked things up, while those who greeted him probably would have known the intricacies of the situation in much more detail. So I think we should assume that what resulted was largely a mutually respectful interaction.

We should bear in mind the possibility that these people had something significant to say to Lenin. I shall give a straightforward example of this. Stalin, who was a fairly high-up Bolshevik at this time - one of the top ten leaders at least - is recorded as saying in a meeting with Lenin and others that the April theses were too schematic and that they overlooked the question of small nations. Often, that is used as evidence that Stalin did not know what was going on, but the fact is that the April theses did *not* mention the national question. Why is that? Because Lenin forgot to include it. He wrote the document on a train and he simply forgot to put in anything on the national question. And I am sure that when Stalin brought it up Lenin would have said he was right and that he should write up a report about it, which is what happened. And that provoked a genuine debate, more so than on some other questions, at the party conference in April, where Lenin sided with Stalin.

There are three categories of things going on in the disputes between Lenin and the so-called old Bolsheviks. One is that there were genuine misunderstandings - between Lenin and Kamenev, for example. In the debates in April, both of them say they have cleared up some misunderstandings - hardly surprising when people had not met for so long. Otherwise it is very difficult to explain why Kamenev, who was one of those saying Lenin was wrong, was in the core of five or six people at the top of the party.

Secondly, there *are* issues on which Lenin was wrong, and we tend to forget some of these for obvious reasons, when we look at the overall situation. Lenin wanted to focus on agricultural wage workers, and he thought the party should be sceptical about the regular peasants and focus most of its attention on these wage workers when it came to soviets in the villages. He thought the Bolsheviks should push for communal farming and these people should run it. Everyone else thought this was crazy, and there was something wrong with Lenin for suggesting it. And in this case the local people were right: this was not a viable policy in the short and medium run, and it eventually disappeared.

Thirdly, we get to the more constructive part. What was actually new in what Lenin brought for consideration? There were two new perspectives, which were adopted by the Bolsheviks. First, 'steps toward socialism'. This was a metaphor Lenin used a lot, but it is not in the one-and-a-half-page canonical April theses, unfortunately. However, 'steps toward socialism' were at the heart of

everything else he said during that month, and through the year really. He would say, 'We want steps *toward* socialism'. In other words, we don't want to *introduce* socialism, and anyone that said they did was wrong. I am still not quite sure what he meant by 'introduce socialism', and why it was so wrong, but he said it many, many times.

But we have to understand this metaphor as the key to understanding Lenin's Bolshevism. What they thought was that they would set up a government based on worker-peasant power, and they would be on the path to socialism. They would be taking steps along that path - sometimes they might be forced into a detour, but what was essential is that they would be on the path. What that means is that class power was 'digital': it is either-or; but the question of socialist transformation is 'analogue': it is more or less. So we have gradual, more or less, measures of socialist transformation, while on the issue of class power it is all or nothing: either there is proletarian power or bourgeois power, according to the Bolsheviks' way of viewing things.

So in 1917, to go back to 'steps toward socialism', Lenin had a fairly specific rationale for this. The place to see this is in an important pamphlet he wrote in September called *The threatening catastrophe and how to deal with it*, which for some reason is not given enough attention.

The argument is this: there are policies that are needed to respond to the crisis, which have been drawn up not by the Bolsheviks, who are not economic experts, but rather experts in class politics, but by, for example, people in Germany, or by the old tsarist regime, or by the moderate socialists in Russia. Everyone knows what needs to be done, but it is not being done because the bourgeoisie is in power. Lenin stresses again and again that only - and he means it - *only* the question of class power is preventing this from happening. Therefore, even though these policies are not socialist, in order to get them done we will need to have worker-peasant *vlast*. And, if worker-peasant power brings in policies such as regulation of the banks and so on, then they will be steps toward socialism because they are carried out by a popular democratic *narodnaya vlast* (people's power).

It is an interesting argument and to a certain extent you can sum it up like this: 'There are things that those now in power should be doing which they are not, but when we do them they will be steps toward socialism'. So it is not a question of a socialist revolution - Lenin is not saying he is going to do anything different or claiming that specifically socialist policies that no-one else wants are the way out of the crisis. The policies that everyone wants are the way out - but *only* a worker-peasant government will actually put the policies into effect.

The second thing which was new in Lenin's mind was to see soviet power not just as a vehicle for class power. That is to say, in the old Bolshevik scenario, there is worker-peasant power and soviets are seen as the best way of achieving it, but they are not the essential thing: they are just the form that class power will take. What Lenin added to this was to say - and we know this from all the reading he was doing of Marx and Engels, and on the Paris Commune - that the soviets were a higher form of democracy than the old parliamentary system, an argument that we are all familiar with.

The point is that there are two different kinds of reasons for wanting soviet power: one is that the soviet form itself - direct election, instant recall - is a good way for the proletarian dictatorship to work; and the other is just another name or alias

for worker-peasant power. These are interesting and important ideas, but we are mistaken if we say that they are in any way necessary for the Bolsheviks to do what they did in 1917.

Message

What was the actual message being broadcast to the workers by Bolshevik Party? It is easy to pick up *The state and revolution*, but what was a local Bolshevik agitator actually saying when he got down to talking to workers?

I have looked at what Lenin was saying, as well as the arguments in pamphlets written by others. I am basing what I am saying here on such documents. The message was something like this: 'The country is going to go to hell in a hand basket unless you get rid of these guys. The reason they can't get us out of the mess is because they're bourgeois, they're the elite, they're the landowners. So get rid of them and put in a worker-peasant *vlast* that is going to take the measures everyone knows is necessary.'

That was the message - protect the revolution, respond to the national crisis, carry out the basic programme of the revolution. If you want all of those things, then get rid of the current regime and introduce soviet power, which represents workers and peasants. One leaflet put it well, saying something like, 'You can't expect a government of bankers to carry out bank nationalisation. You can't expect a government of landowners to carry out land reform. You can't expect a government of generals to carry out peace negotiations.' Good points - and that was the central message.

This could be summed up as *Vsya vlast' sovyetam* ('All power to the soviets'), but I actually found more often - and I think this is the more underlying message - *Vsya vlast' narodu* ('All power to the people'), and this slogan actually meant something back then. But something I found to be surprising was that in the months leading up to the revolution, socialism was downplayed. 'Socialist revolution' was hardly mentioned, which is quite astounding really. There was an article, for example, by Lenin entitled 'Paths to the revolution', published in late September or October, and it does not mention socialism or socialist revolution, although it does include all sorts of things like bank reform and peace negotiations. But after October the rhetoric shifted very drastically, and 'steps toward socialism' was very prominent.

So why did they downplay socialism before? I am sure it was a conscious decision, made to try and convince people to carry out the revolution. Because they were close to the people, if they thought socialist revolution would appeal to them, then they would have called for it. They must have known that it would not appeal.

Who actually carried out the revolution? Well, the workers of Petrograd. The Bolshevik message that was being relayed to them is the best clue as to what they thought they were doing. They thought they were putting in worker-peasant power to defend the revolution, and to respond to a national crisis that was spiralling out of control. Why do we not think of things in the same way?

After October

To summarise, then, after October the Bolsheviks set up popular, worker-peasant power, and they adopted the phrase, 'gradual but firm and undeviating steps toward socialism'. The first time I came across that was in Bukharin, but from more recent research I think that Lenin was the first to use that exact phrase. The new regime had

the will for socialism, but did not promise any particular, concrete step toward it, because that depended on circumstances. Throughout the civil war especially there were only infrequent opportunities for actual socialist measures.

Secondly, it was considered essential to keep the peasants on board, because socialism had to have their support. This was part of the regime's outlook from the beginning, and this is why I think it is a bit misleading to say that the Bolsheviks adopted Trotsky's perspective, because he did not have this perspective back in 1905-06. But Lenin thought there were going to be rapid steps to a communal form of agriculture very quickly - right away even - because of the crisis. That was one of his pet ideas.

In my short biography, *Lenin*, I set out his progressive disillusionment with both communes and state farms. They were pretty pathetic during the civil war, and Lenin was perfectly aware of this and he got more and more exasperated. Not with the peasants - he did not think it was their fault - but with the people sent to run them. One thing he emphasised was that there was to be absolutely no use of force whatsoever. At the height of the civil war he says any use of force to make peasants adopt any form of collective farming would be a most unBolshevik thing.

So, when it looked like the peasants were not going towards communal forms of agriculture, what was the answer? The Bolsheviks decided they would have to wait and try to convince the peasants through other means. Rather different from Stalin in 1931, who may have started by having a great campaign for collectivisation to convince everybody, but as soon as the peasants stopped being convinced he just kept on going. During the civil war, there were peasant uprisings in response to harsh policies that extracted resources such as grain from the villages. Under Lenin there was misunderstanding and violence. However, this was in Bolshevik eyes - and I think correctly so - seen as an inevitable cost of carrying out policies which were in the peasants' direct interest. Namely, defending the revolution against counterrevolutionary landowners, keeping the economy going and getting in a new governmental system that would work.

Finally, the civil war was won, because ultimately, after swinging back and forth, the peasants supported the reds more than the whites. And you have to remember that the Red Army was a peasant army. If in 1910 someone had said that this urban radical party was going to create a great peasant army staffed by tsarist officers that would win a civil war, it would have sounded like the craziest thing ever. It is amazing that this actually happened and we need to bear that in mind. And the Bolsheviks learnt this lesson. The traditional historiography really gets things wrong when it claims that the Bolsheviks ruthlessly imposed their policies on the peasants, where in reality it was seen as very important to keep them on board - with the peasants you could win, without them, you were doomed.

In fact, the original Bolshevik scenario of a proletarian revolution with peasant support - or, to put another way, a worker-peasant revolution in which the workers are giving political leadership to the peasants - does account for both the actual occurrence of the October revolution and its successful defence against counterrevolution ●

Notes

1. T Cliff *Lenin* Vol 2, chapter 7: www.marxists.org/archive/cliff/works/1976/lenin2/07-rearm2.htm.

UTR

Sectarian and philistine

The SWP's fear of genuine debate was on grisly display throughout the day. Peter Manson reports on the Unite the Resistance conference

The Unite the Resistance conference saw around 1,000 people fill London's huge Emmanuel Centre," claims *Socialist Worker*.

Well, not quite. The centre's website states that the conference room "seats up to 1,000" and no more than three-quarters of the places were occupied (despite the impression created by the carefully angled shots taken by the Socialist Workers Party's Guy Smallman).

Everyone knows that UTR is the SWP's baby, but it was difficult to accurately assess what proportion of those assembled at the November 17 event were actually SWP members. No doubt they formed a large majority, but no SWP top leader was called to speak and the organisation's name was mentioned only once, by a comrade from the floor - a rather naive member presumably.

Three SWP comrades featured on the platform - Sara Bennett (a Unite executive member) chaired the morning plenary session, for which Gill George (also Unite NEC) was a speaker, while Sean Vernell (UCU NEC) spoke in the afternoon plenary. While it would have been astounding if they had announced their own political affiliation, this diplomatic silence crossed the line into sheer bad taste when it was applied on one occasion right at the beginning of the day.

Comrade Bennett asked us to stand in a minute's silence to commemorate the passing of Julie Waterson, a leading SWP comrade in her early 50s who had finally lost her battle against cancer the previous day. But what would she have made of the brief tributes from comrade Bennett and later comrade Vernell that made no mention of the organisation to which she had dedicated her entire adult life? It was as though she was just a plain old union militant, just like the rest of us were supposed to be. It really was taking the pretence too far.

Not that there was not a sizeable non-SWP contingent. The targeting of leading union figures had obviously paid off, with a few other executive members speaking from the floor in addition to those on the platform. But the SWP's problem is that it wants to pretend that UTR is the kernel of the militant resistance, the beginning of the rank-and-file fightback.

For example, the SWP's internal bulletin explained to members beforehand that "all those who want a fightback ... need to organise. That's what the conference is for - to bring together the union officials who are ready to fight, the rank-and-file activists, campaigners, students, disabled activists, pensioners, unemployed - everyone."

It went on: "Unite the Resistance can act as a centre for local, national and international solidarity. It will be a place to debate the way forward, and to assess what's gone right and what's gone wrong. The workshops are a particularly important part of the day. For example, the NHS one will be a chance for campaigners and trade unionists to hammer out a strategy to coordinate the local fightbacks and to learn from each other" (*Party Notes* November 12).

Unity?

So *this* 'conference' - as opposed to similar events run by Counterfire's Coalition of Resistance or the National Shop Stewards' Network (Socialist

Party in England and Wales) - can become the "centre for local, national and international solidarity", with the potential to "coordinate the local fightbacks".

Of course, there were the usual noises from the UTR steering committee about the need for unity. According to the statement it proposed, which was agreed by acclamation of those present, "Our movement needs the greatest possible unity in action, while engaging in democratic debate and decision-making regarding strategy and tactics." Absolutely correct, of course.

Continuing this theme, Bronwyn Handyside, who was called to speak from the floor on behalf of the COR, said: "Our movement of resistance must be united." She made the obvious point that at present we are running "separate conferences that feature the same speakers". George Binette of Permanent Revolution, who ("for some reason unbeknown to me", he said) was asked by the steering committee of which he is a member to propose the 'conference statement', declared that we have "got to overcome sectarian squabbling" - we must "try to set up a single campaign against austerity".

But the actual action agreed was merely: "To propose a meeting with national anti-cuts campaigns to discuss improved communication and coordination in action". Talk about paying lip service.

However, Workers Power had proposed an amendment to the statement (in reality a series of amendments, but they were to be proposed and voted on all together). WP wanted to delete the above sentence and replace it with: "To propose a unity conference with national and all other anti-cuts campaigns to end duplication of effort and division of forces." In its leaflet handed out on the day, the group had urged: "Let's really unite the resistance - in deeds, not just in name". And added: "Otherwise UTR will be seen as a front of the Socialist Workers Party, regardless of the breadth of its steering committee."

If this had been the totality of the amendment, proposed by Jeremy Dewar, then it would undoubtedly have put the SWP on the spot. But, as it was, it made up only one aspect. WP also wanted to replace "To provide a forum where activists can discuss and debate the way forward and organise action" with "To call for and organise councils of action where activists ...". If the SWP's own claims and ambitions relating to UTR can be described as pretentious, they are nothing compared to those of WP.

Alongside this leftist posturing, WP's 'transitional method' was also on display, with the call for "an emergency programme for jobs and growth" and "refusal to pay the debt" - alongside "nationalisation of the banks ... under workers' control" and "rolling back all cuts and privatisation". The idea that a capitalist Britain could opt out of its debts and then expect to smoothly implement a "programme for jobs and growth" is absurd, of course. But WP believes that the fight itself will take workers, step by spontaneous step, to the international workers' revolution.

The (non-SWP) chair for this session, Liz Lawrence of the UCU NEC, got slightly confused at this point when she called for one speaker in favour of the amendment and



Why lie about numbers?

one against. Some SWP comrades objected that we had just heard a speech in favour and everyone knows that "debate", SWP-style, ought to consist of just one brief intervention from each side. But WP was allowed a second speaker (not that it did them any good).

Opposing the motion for the SWP was Marianne Owens. She said that, although there was "enormous anger", there was "not necessarily confidence" amongst the class, and so "Slogans for councils of action are no substitute for organising on the ground." (The statement about working class confidence, by the way, was directly contradicted by both Gill George and Sean Vernell, who specifically stated that the problem was *not* "our members' confidence", but lack of leadership from the union bureaucracy.)

But comrade Owens was on very shaky ground when she opposed the unity call. At this stage we need to "talk to the other groups", she said. "If you just call a conference, who's going to turn up?" How about SWP, SPEW and Counterfire members for a start? But there was no need for a card vote when the chair called for a show of hands.

Debate?

Despite all the SWP talk about the need for "debate", this was the nearest we got to it. It was the only time comrades expressed disagreement with others on anything. I think I am safe in saying that everyone agreed that we need to resist the cuts through united strike action - a general strike in fact - but that was about as profound as it got. True, Matt Wrack of the FBU (one of only two of the usual 'big name' speakers, the other being John McDonnell MP) put forward a rather different "alternative to austerity". He said: "If their system can't afford it, let's start discussing a different system - a socialist society." This should be "put on the agenda as part of the battle against cuts". But it was most definitely not on the agenda of this 'conference'.

In reality, of course, it was more like a series of rallies than a conference. In between the two plenary sessions, you had a choice of six 'workshops' - on the international struggle against austerity, protest and the law, defending the NHS, austerity and equality, education, and benefits - where you could listen to another batch of platform speakers, together with a few people called from the floor.

As for the one actual "debate" (if you could call it that), it was crammed

into a few short minutes at the end of the day. In fact the organisers seemed intent right from the start on squeezing it into as short a time as possible. Early in the afternoon plenary comrade Lawrence pointed out that, although the day was due to end at 5pm, in view of the protest going on against the Israeli assault on Gaza, we should aim to finish soon after 4pm, so we could go and express our solidarity with the Palestinians.

Solidarity with Gaza was, rightly, a theme that came up throughout the day - a "Palestinian activist" (who sounded like an SWP member to me) was added to the platform speakers in the morning. She pointed out in her speech that "a working class movement from below is the best ally of the Palestinian people" and the "most important solidarity" we can give is to "continue to fight against austerity and bring the Tory government down". So obviously we should have stayed to the end rather than head off to the Gaza protest, don't you think?

Just to make sure that there was nothing approaching a genuine exchange of views, comrade Lawrence announced during the afternoon plenary that the speakers called from the floor were making for such a "lively debate" that the session should be extended - which meant the 45 minutes put aside for actually taking decisions - the election of a new steering committee and the vote on the 'conference statement' - would be further reduced.

In fact the election of the committee did not take long at all. The list of 40 names (including two WP comrades), plus another two added verbally by the chair, was approved in its entirety without dissent. Although, if last year is anything to go by, this year's committee will not be exactly

busy. I hear the outgoing steering committee was never officially convened.

But let us look on the positive side, as expressed by *Party Notes*: "A very impressive steering committee was elected, with a wide representation of key trade union activists from across the unions and across the country." The day had been a "big success", thanks to the presence of "over 1,000" "delegates". It not only "showed the potential to unite activists across the trade union movement" behind the call for a general strike, but "also showed how those activists can pull wider sections of the movement around them" (*Party Notes* November 19).

I do not mean to imply that the event was worthless. There were some good, militant speeches and by and large the final statement was sound. There were useful speeches not only from John McDonnell and Matt Wrack, but also from Owen Jones, Sheila Coleman of the Justice for Hillsborough campaign, a representative of Disabled People Against the Cuts, and Tumi Moloi from the Rustenberg miners' strike committee in South Africa. (It was a little disconcerting, however, to hear comrade Moloi address us as "ladies and gentlemen", having thanked the "chairlady".)

No, it was useful on one level. But the SWP's sectarian dishonesty and philistine disdain for genuine debate will ensure that UTR cannot become a real player in the working class struggle against austerity. Even if there had been 1,000 people present instead of 750, what difference would that make? The SWP may call them "delegates", but overwhelmingly they represented no-one but themselves ●

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Fighting fund

Paradox

Standing orders paid to the *Weekly Worker* are continuing to look very healthy. Last week, for example, a total of exactly £400 landed in our bank account that way. Thank you, one and all, for your excellent contributions, with special mention to SK and MM for their consistent and reliable generosity.

And I have just received two new SO commitments, both for £10 a month. Knowing that our paper depends on our readers' financial support to survive, comrade EO asked how much she should *really* pay for her *Weekly Worker*. Well, the cover price is £1 and a second-class stamp costs 50p, so £6 a month in theory covers it. But the truth is, it costs us far more than £1 to produce, print and collate each copy. Like all leftwing publications we run at a big loss.

But, of course, we are not in it to make a profit or even break even. We think our message is vitally important and our comrades make all kinds of sacrifices to make sure that message continues to go out. So it is gratifying when those like EO insist on doing their bit (the other new £10 donor is comrade

TK, by the way).

As well as those standing orders, I received two cheques in the post this week - thanks to FC (£25) and MN (£20). But there have been no PayPal donations over the last seven days - although I must say that paying for your subscription by that means is growing in popularity. So we've had two new PayPal subs this week - one of them from as far away as Japan!

It's a bit of a paradox really. These comrades pay online, but they want to read the print issue. Who said the internet will see off the outdated physical newspaper? And the total internet readership remains in five figures - last week we had 10,515 online readers. But I could definitely do with a few of them chipping in for our fighting fund.

That fund stands at £1,084 for November. Which means we need another £416 in just over a week. Please make sure we get there ●

Robbie Rix

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

LRC

No short cuts to rebuilding

The November 10 AGM of the Labour Representation Committee was on balance positive. But the left is still painfully weak both organisationally and politically. **Andy Gunton** of Labour Party Marxists gives his assessment

Those arriving at Conway Hall were met outside by Christine Shawcroft, Lizzy Ali and Richard Price - comrades from the minority who opposed the decision to offer the *Labour Briefing* journal to the LRC. Flogging their own "original" *LB*, they declined to stay for the meeting, leaving before LRC joint chair Pete Firmin opened proceedings.

Sadly, comrade Shawcroft also has resigned her LRC membership, thankfully taking very few comrades with her. Despite that, numbers were down. There were 160 comrades compared with 180 last year. Why the organisers are claiming 200 might owe something to wishful thinking. Or was it a factional pose? The only vote to be counted on the day involved a total of just 87 comrades (for and against - with no sea of abstentions in sight). Splits, such as has occurred in *LB* and the LRC, might help to clarify political lines. They can, however, lead to the weak, the inexperienced, the demoralised dropping away into inactivity. And that is what seems to have happened.

The Shawcroft-Ali-Price faction is clearly rightwing. They seek an alliance with the centre of the Labour Party, crucially those in parliament. As for comrade Shawcroft's journal, it is a vanity project for a bruised ego and exemplifies a sadly frivolous attitude to democracy and class discipline all too common on the left. That *LB* proper has seen subscriptions rise substantially can only but be good news. And unsurprisingly the AGM voted overwhelmingly to adopt it as the official journal of the LRC.

John McDonnell MP moved the national committee statement. He outlined the work of the LRC over the last 12 months, highlighting the LRC's role in helping to set up Squatters Action for Secure Home (Squash), and challenging the "suits" in the "larger, bureaucratic unions".

He lambasted the Labour leadership for its timidity: 85% of proposed cuts have yet to be implemented; we face a triple-dip recession; there are 3.5 million either unemployed or working part-time; and benefits are being slashed. So it is time to draw a "line in the sand" and for LRC members to set the terms of struggle in the Labour Party: "No cuts! Our class is not going to pay for their crisis."

Comrade McDonnell called on LRC members to build up campaigns in communities to support anti-cuts councillors. It was time to target so-called 'pay day loans' and "bullying bailiffs". He finished by calling for an "international struggle against capitalism" and for "systemic change".

Veteran campaigner Tony Benn then took the stand. "The Labour Party is not a socialist party," he told the audience. It is a "party with socialists in it". Very true; and something those comrades who wish to 'reclaim' the party, as well as those who now denounce it, would do well to note.

Our party has never been a vehicle for working class power; it was founded as a voice in parliament for the trade union bureaucracy. To transform it into a genuine 'party of labour' requires unremitting struggle against the bureaucratic and pro-capitalist right, within the party and within the trade unions. And that requires a combative and politically educated working class. As Stan



Tony Benn: Labour 'not socialist'

Keable of Labour Party Marxists said, moving our LPM motion, the struggle must be to "transform the Labour Party ... to fight for working class interests".

In truth, there were rather too many top-table speeches and not enough time for the real business. As a result movers of motions were restricted to three minutes, while those opposing had only two. One for and one against - that was the sum total of every debate (although the mover also had the right of reply).

Many comrades expressed frustration because amendments are not permitted at LRC conference, meaning that rather more often than not you are faced with either passing an unsatisfactory motion or leaving the LRC with no position on a pressing issue. Fortunately, however, a motion from Communist Students to accept amendments at future conferences was passed by a clear majority.

Trade union link

Moving motion 12 on the Labour Party-trade union link, Maria Exall complained that the relationship provided a transmission belt for poor Labour Party politics into the unions. The link "works in the wrong way", she said, calling instead for "political trade unionism".

Understandable sentiments, clearly born of frustration with the lack of democracy within the party. But the problem with our party historically was precisely that its politics bore the stamp of "political trade unionism", rather than the reverse. Blairism represented a clear break with this, symbolised by the formal abandonment of the old clause four. That some of the affiliated unions are now fighting back, picking on the openly pro-capitalist Progress faction, is, of course, to be welcomed. But clearly it is not enough if we want to see a socialist Labour Party.

The vision of a pure trade unionism free of party politics emerged again during the debate over motion 3, which sought to commit the LRC to democracy and grassroots organisation in the unions and to support various campaigns, such as the Grass Roots Alliance in Unite. Speaking in support of the motion, comrade Keable called for democracy in the workers' movement, while Steve Ballard demanded the "emancipation of the trade unions".

Jon Rogers fired the first shot in opposition. He was followed by Tony Lyons: apparently it is "not within the remit of the LRC to intervene in trade unions". A ridiculous position, which cedes control of these important bastions of working class defence to

the bureaucracy.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty's Vicky Morris regretted that, while she could support "the vast majority of what's in the motion", the LRC should not commit to support the Grass Roots Left in opposition to other groups in Unite. But pride of place went to Thomas Butler. He took the stand to oppose motion 10; not because of its content, but because of the organisation behind it. In what amounted to the call for its expulsion, he declared the LRC affiliation of the Stalinite New Communist Party a problem: a problem for him, and a problem for his union, Unite. Unite would not affiliate to the LRC while it played host to the likes of the NCP.

In the end motion 3 fell.

Fighting cuts

Jenny Lennox chaired the panel discussion involving Labour councillors, with Andrea Oates from Broxstowe opening. Describing herself as an "anti-cuts councillor", she told the meeting she had been personally affected by cutbacks and expressed her "frustration with the Labour Party passing on Tory cuts". Arguing also against rent rises, she had stood on an explicitly anti-cuts platform. But she felt isolated: "There's not a lot of support out there," she admitted.

Fellow Broxstowe councillor Greg Marshall told comrades that Labour councillors in nearby Nottingham were implementing cuts. However, he and comrade Oates had the support of their party branch and local trades council, and were holding regular stalls in the town.

Preston councillor Matthew Brown outlined his Proudhonist vision of council-owned, income-generating wind farms, cooperatives and worker-owned businesses creating "alternatives to capitalism locally". (While cooperatives are something our movement should seek to develop, in the process of forming our class into a future ruling class, municipal utopias are no response to the current crisis.)

Unsurprisingly, the spectre of Eric Pickles loomed large. Council chamber colleagues of Gary Waring (Hull) warned him that, should they fail to make cuts, "Pickles will step in and do the job". Islington's Charlynn Pullen demanded we adopt a "realist position"; Labour councillors cannot "abdicate responsibility". Islington had brought services back in-house, implemented the Boris Johnston-touted living wage and set up a 'fairness commission'. "And made cuts," came a heckle from the audience.

The subsequent debate focused

on motion 1, with most calling on comrades to back it. Jackie Walker from Lewisham implored comrades to "support each other and not fight among ourselves". The AWL's Pete Radcliff said anti-cuts Labour councillors needed to be organised and visible, that councillors and trade unions must be brought together: "the LRC should take a lead in this".

Councillor George Barrett from Barking and Dagenham spoke of his expulsion from the Labour Party last year for standing up against cuts. We need an organisation of anti-cuts Labour councillors, he said. Dan Jeffery, a councillor from Southampton, expressed sympathy with those who called on individual councillors to make a stand, but organisation was needed. Pete Firmin recounted the experience of Lambeth councillor Kingsley Abrams, who had taken a public stance against cuts. He had reluctantly taken the whip and abandoned his opposition after pressure had been applied by Unite.

Opposition came from Ted Knight. "I do not find it difficult to vote against cuts," he told comrades. Labour councillors should "lock Pickles out of their town halls". There are "no two ways" to oppose cuts, he said.

Fire Brigades Union general secretary Matt Wrack opened the session on 'Fighting back industrially'. In a wide-ranging speech he gave an accurate and honest appraisal of where we are and what we need to do. "Workplace organisation has been thrown back in the last 20 to 30 years," he reckoned. It was not sufficient to make demands of union tops "without organisation on the ground". He castigated the left for its fragmentation, correctly calling for a single anti-cuts organisation. But to think austerity can be defeated in Britain alone is "naive", he warned. We require international organisation to defeat austerity, and we need to discuss what drives it. According to comrade Wrack, the "labour movement has been overly modest"; we are "failing in our task." The crisis raised questions about what sort of society we want to live in. We need to raise the demand for "a different sort of society."

Political weaknesses

Two motions taken during the session on internationalism brought the political weaknesses in the LRC into sharp relief.

Emergency motion 1 addressed events in South Africa surrounding the Marikana massacre, when striking miners were gunned down by police. Mike Phipps set the tone for the subsequent debate. While moving a separate motion, he took the opportunity to urge comrades to vote it down. He alleged that the emergency motion called for the splitting of the South African trade union centre, Cosatu. Not true.

The motion included a call for the break-up of the triple alliance, which subordinates the South African Communist Party and Cosatu to the African National Congress. It demanded that they, along with the Young Communist League and the South African Student Congress, must "fight for the political and organisational independence of the working class".

Moving the motion, Gerry Downing called on comrades to defend activists in the Democratic Socialist Movement. The DSM - the South African section of Peter Taaffe's Committee for a Workers' International - is campaigning in support of striking miners and has been targeted by elements within the SACP as a result. Accused of being linked to, or involved in, several apartheid-era atrocities, DSM details - names, addresses and photographs - have been posted on an internet forum associated with the SACP. This amounted to a hit-list and was "an invitation to assassinate DSM members", declared comrade Downing.

Opposing the motion, Robin Hanford reminded comrades that the ANC was a member of the Socialist International and therefore a fraternal organisation of the Labour Party. How could he, he demanded angrily, go to a meeting of the SI's youth organisation and denounce the ANC? And why not, comrade? Surely, it would be inexcusable if you did not. As one comrade correctly pointed out during the debate, the ANC government is "a capitalist government".

There was greater controversy with motion 4 from the Irish Republican Prisoners Support Group. It called for the release of political prisoners, highlighting Palestinians in Israel and Naxalites in India. However, it was the paragraphs dealing Irish republican prisoners which split the meeting.

Opposing motion 4, a comrade from Socialist Appeal warned, should we pass the motion, we would have to call for the release of those who had murdered prison officer David Black, shot while driving to work. Such actions were not part of working class tradition, he claimed. Presumably comrades from the AWL were of a similar opinion: they also voted against. Nevertheless, the motion was passed, by a margin of 52 to 35.

Broad church

The Labour Party Marxists motion was passed, almost unnoticed, it seems. Given the politics on display from the majority of comrades, this cannot be because Marxist ideas won out against reformism. The LRC majority has not abandoned its Labourite politics; it remains wedded to the forlorn hope that a Labour government, of whatever political stripe, is better than the Tories.

The LRC church is a broad one. It contains members, often councillors, who in times past would have been considered very much on the soft left of the party. They, alongside left Labourites masquerading as Marxists, and Marxists masquerading as left Labourites, form the core of the LRC.

Around Ted Knight, Graham Durham and Gerry Downing there exists an amorphous grouping of comrades whose ultimatum response to cuts - 'General strike now!' - is basically healthy in terms of class instincts, but refuses to acknowledge the parlous state of our class, politically and organisationally. We cannot call forth battalions which do not, as yet, exist, no matter how splendid our slogans sound. That is why our LPM motion specified that "Our key aim ... is to rebuild, democratise and re-educate the entire labour movement." There are no short cuts ●

POLICE



Arm of the state

Hundred-million facelift disaster

As expected, voters wanted nothing to do with last week's PCC elections, writes **Jim Moody**

David Cameron's attempt to make good his promise to install "more democratic", "crime-busting" police and crime commissioners was a £100 million exercise that ended in disaster.

Wiltshire, the first policing area to report a PCC result following the November 16 elections, set the tone for later results from the other 40 policing areas in the rest of the England and Wales. Fewer than 16% of registered electors turned out to vote in Wiltshire, resulting in the successful Tory candidate receiving less than 7% of the electorate's first-choice support before second-preference votes were added. But the worst of all in a series of uniformly bad results for the government's PCC plans was in Hampshire, where the independent victor received 3.27% support from the electorate, having gathered an abysmal 22.48% of first-choice votes in a 14.53% turnout (he managed to double his percentage after second-preference votes were added). Turnout ranged from 11.63% in Staffordshire to 19.5% in Northamptonshire - easily the lowest in any national election. The Metropolitan Police area was excluded from these elections, as London's mayor had previously been granted the powers of a PCC without asking any electors at all.

Some initial responses from the Conservative wing of the establishment were hilarious. Apparently, it was because the PCC posts were so much of a novelty that turnout was so bad and it would, magically, be very much better next time. Oh, and then there was the attempt to claim that the new PCCs definitely had a mandate ... by comparing them with the many MPs elected on a minority vote, who 'obviously' must be mandated. But that was even more definitely on a losing wicket. As if the longstanding voting system of 'first past the post' could somehow validate this fiasco. Despite desperate subsequent attempts, the overwhelming verdict is in: no PCC received a democratic mandate - not when over 80% of electors refused to participate in the farrago. Reported widely, too, were the large numbers of deliberately spoilt ballot papers: clearly a significant additional two fingers up

to Cameron's government.

Top Labour figures were naturally keen to attack what had been a Tory initiative, though their unbridled enthusiasm for law and order under the existing capitalist state merely led them to call for support for the existing police, including safeguarding funding. Indeed, it was all of a piece with last year's Labour Party conference in Liverpool, at which party hacks cravenly organised a standing ovation for a police representative who spoke at one of its many debate-free rally sessions.

Before the elections only a small number of Labour PCC candidates could be bothered to respond to questioning by this writer about democratising policing. Ruth Potter, runner-up in North Yorkshire, was one who certainly engaged with the issues. In response to my question, "Can you explain how your election manifesto and programme at this PCC election challenge the class role of the police force?", she said: "It ensures proper accountability to the people for the work of the police and ensures that the police safeguard all sections of the community - particularly the working class, who tend most likely to be victims of crime."

I asked: "Were you to be elected as a PCC, how would you avoid the charge of class-collaboration with our working class's enemy?" To which she replied: "I am no collaborator. I will fight for the most vulnerable!" And to the question, "What position do you take toward the call for the formation of democratic citizen militias as a replacement for the state's system of police forces?", she answered: "I have no objection in principle, so long as they don't end up being vigilantes. We all make history, but not always in circumstances of our own choosing."

Unsurprisingly, other responses tended toward somehow improving, if not democratising, the existing police. Bob Jones, who was elected PCC in West Midlands, replied: "In the short term our communities need the protection of the current police force, which is being attacked by the government, notably by the Winsor Report,¹ whose author wishes to root out working class culture."

Tal Michael, who was narrowly beaten by an independent, responded: "If I am elected as commissioner for North Wales, my priority will be to ensure that the police do see themselves as working for 'the public' rather than for 'the establishment'. From my dealings with officers at all levels, I have to say that most of them do see themselves as serving the public and therefore I will be pushing at an open door."

Robert Evans in Surrey stated: "I do believe that the class structure of the police needs to be challenged, as does the whole recruitment process. Finally, I am not sure I agree with you as regards people's militia as an alternative to the police! Improve the police certainly."

A previous article on this topic five months ago² raised several issues from a working class perspective, all still relevant now. Even though some Labour PCC candidates were prepared to discuss questions posed from the left, the rightwing leadership in all its manifestations down the decades has never stirred from a down-the-line commitment to the British state. This is unsurprising and to be expected, given the complaisant, constitutional role the Labour Party has played in fully accepting the monarchical, capitalist status quo.

What continues to be saddening, however, is the role of the left in all of this. In general, the left over the last few months merely reflected the general lack of interest of the masses in this piece of Tory tomfoolery. Indeed, a letter to this paper a couple of weeks ago pointed out how, apart from the article already mentioned, nowhere else in the British left had these elections been discussed.³

It would certainly be incorrect to suggest that these PCC elections should have been boycotted *in principle*. For example, nothing would have prevented a working class candidate standing for a PCC on a platform advocating a people's militia in opposition to attempts to tinker with capitalism's police forces. Of course, it would always be a tactical question whether or not to stand in any election - at least for a Marxist candidate with an organisation of the same stripe behind

her or him. But the principle remains: wherever a forum for revolutionary discourse, agitation and propaganda exists there is a *prima facie* reason to consider Marxist candidacy. Nowhere should be ruled out for working class political work.

Of course, the British left, especially in the Labour Party, is almost invisible these days. The Labour Representation Committee acts as a pole of attraction for the left that is fighting within and beyond the Labour Party. But even the LRC, according to such policy as it holds on the matter, has a way to go in accepting the true nature of the state in capitalist Britain and how we approach questions of law and order, policing, the armed forces and the penal system.

Although not recently aired by the LRC, these questions are surely open for discussion. As it stands, there is, after all, on the LRC website a 2005 New Left Policy Forum document on criminal justice,⁴ authored by Harry Fletcher, assistant general secretary of Napo, the trade union covering family court and probation staff. Its liberal aims sadly stand in contrast to a working class approach. The sum total of what it has to say on this issue is:

"Policing should be community-based and intelligence-led. Government targets set for the police should be realistic and not conflict with those of other criminal justice agencies. The number of priorities and targets need to be rationalised. There should be real local accountability to boroughs and local authority areas. Decisions to stop and search should be based on intelligence, the quality of the intervention and the outcome. Consideration should be given to encouraging all new police officers to spend a minimum period of time in community liaison. The introduction of identify cards is likely to lead the police into greater conflict with ethnic groups and should be scrapped. All contact with the same ethnic minority groups should be positively improved and indicators developed to maximise visible presence in the community."

A clear candidate for replacement by a policy document that stands four-square for citizen militias. For beyond what this lean paragraph deals with are much bigger questions - what is

the working class alternative to the capitalist state's policing and why do we need it? Comrade Fletcher does not mention this: but that is what working class partisans have to become adept at developing, especially just now, at a time when the pretence of democratic control of the police has been raised as an issue through these failed PCC elections. Part of that process must be to develop policy in this area, including tackling the mistaken ideas in such documents as that produced by the New Left Policy Forum.

Our class needs illusions in the role of the police like a hole in the head. For over 150 years we have known collectively as a class that the police do not exist to safeguard 'communities' in some neutral, classless way, but are there to uphold the current class order. That is why Chartism had the establishment of a well-ordered militia as one of the main planks of its programme. The police are part of what Engels was first to call a "public force ... of armed men"⁵ (nowadays armed women, too, of course), defining the state that is owned and controlled lock, stock, and barrel by the ruling capitalist class.

There is no getting around this fact and consciously to try to do so cannot but result in class-collaboration. And that is why, ever since Marxism identified citizen militias as a must-have feature, they have appeared in the programme of militant, working class organisations. Today, too, citizen militias have their place as a key element in the way that revolutionaries' extreme democracy challenges the bourgeois state, putting it on the back foot, and giving backbone to the organised force that will usher in socialism - the working class majority ●

Notes

1. Winsor report part 1 (March 8 2011) and part 2 (March 15 2012): <http://review.police.uk>.
2. 'Police commissioners or citizen militias' *Weekly Worker* June 21 2012.
3. Letter from John Masters, November 8.
4. *New Left Policy Forum: criminal justice* March 2005: http://l-r-c.org.uk/files/criminal_justice_policy_paper.pdf.
5. Frederick Engels *Origins of the family, private property and the state* chapter 9, 'Barbarism and civilisation': www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1884/origin-family/ch09.htm.

IRELAND

Scrap the eighth amendment

The current storm that has erupted over abortion rights shows no sign of abating, writes Anne Mc Shane

The death of Savita Halappanavar on October 28 at University Hospital Galway has produced huge outrage. A young woman died because she was refused an abortion, despite her increasingly desperate appeals. She had presented to the hospital in the throes of a miscarriage and the foetus was unviable. But she was told that she could not have a termination as long as the unviable foetus had a heartbeat. Doctors explained to the despairing woman that the constitution prohibited abortion unless her life was in immediate danger. They were confident she could survive during the time it would take for the foetus to die inside her. They were wrong. But by the time they acted it was too late.

Her husband, Praveen Halappanavar, subsequently got in touch with Galway Pro-Choice and they advised him to contact the *Irish Times*. The publication of the story on November 14 immediately triggered a massive outpouring of disgust. Since then many thousands have joined demonstrations throughout the country. Every newspaper, news report and current affairs programme is dominated by the issue and the government's attempts to make the problem disappear.

Immediately, taoiseach Enda Kenny made clear that he was not going to be pushed into making any changes to the law. He has attempted to set up a private inquiry under the control of the health service executive (HSE), which actually runs the hospital. But Praveen Halappanavar has refused to cooperate and demanded instead a full public hearing into the events and issues surrounding the death of his wife. In a bid to undermine his objections the government axed three original members of the inquiry, who are consultants at Galway Hospital. But this is has not been enough. Parveen has demanded that the HSE should have no involvement, as not surprisingly he thinks they will try to cover up.

The doctors who told Savita that they could not legally end the pregnancy were correct. Under the constitution a woman can only have an abortion if her life is at immediate risk. The eighth amendment was introduced by a Fine Gael/Labour coalition in 1983 following a referendum dominated by the Catholic church. Article 40, as amended, "acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right of *life* of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect and ... to defend and vindicate that right" (my emphasis).¹ In other words, a foetus has priority over a woman unless her *life* is in immediate danger. As a foetus cannot express its wishes, the church, state and its pro-life supporters in the medical establishment take it upon themselves to fight for its 'rights' - which means a complete denial of the right of a woman to choose whether or not she wishes to give birth to a baby.

There was another huge controversy in 1992, when the attorney general sought an injunction from the high court preventing a suicidal 14-year-old rape victim, known as 'X', from travelling to Britain for an abortion. The injunction was initially granted, but was overturned on appeal by the supreme court. The court ruled that article 40 should be interpreted to include the threat to the life of the woman from suicide.

In the aftermath of this case there was a campaign to legislate for that decision. However, for 20 years successive governments have refused to do so. Indeed the last Fianna Fáil government unsuccessfully held a referendum in 2002 to specifically rule out potential suicide as a ground for abortion. Then in 2010 Ireland found itself before the European Court of Human Rights in a case brought by three women who were forced to travel for abortions in cases where their health was at risk. The court found the Irish state to be in breach of the Convention of Human

Rights and noted the "chilling effect" of Irish legislation on the lives of women. Following that decision the government set up an 'expert group' in November 2011 - which has yet to report. Of course, this was yet another attempt to evade change. United Left Alliance TDs Clare Daly and Joan Collins presented a private members bill in April to prevent a repetition of the 'X case'. They said they were doing so in order to put the government under pressure, and not because they believed the narrow change they proposed was in any way adequate.

Demanding such limited legislation is absolutely the wrong way for our movement to proceed. It in no way addresses the question of a woman's right to choose, leaving it up to psychiatrists to decide if a woman is *really* suicidal and 'deserving' of an abortion. But others are now jumping on the 'X case' bandwagon. The pro-life Sinn Féin is cynically trying to put itself at the head of the movement for such legislation. Meanwhile in the north of Ireland it has forcefully opposed abortion. Martin McGuinness recently stated that "Sinn Féin is not in favour of abortion" and has successfully resisted "any attempt to bring the British 1967 Abortion Act to the north". This is because Sinn Féin is motivated by "what we believe is good for our people".² Not, of course, what is "good" for the many hundreds of women who, like women from the south, travel abroad for abortions.

The church is very nervous of the strength of the current movement. Fianna Fáil leader Michael Martin wants everyone to calm down and wait until there is an inquiry. His opposite number, Enda Kenny, agrees. Both have stated clearly that they are against abortion and do not want to change the present law. Martin stated in July that "the suicide option" would create "an open-door situation, and it will be very difficult to hold back".³

The vile misogynist views of Irish politicians should not surprise us. They represent the deeply reactionary establishment that has happily ruled over a 'Catholic state' for many decades. Even today, with the church in disgrace over revelations of its systematic abuse of children in its care, we are told that Catholic doctrine should determine women's lives. The 1937 *Bunreacht na hÉireann* (constitution) is a deeply reactionary document, drafted by the equally

reactionary taoiseach, Éamonn de Valera. De Valera imposed a Catholic constitution on Irish women. A woman's place was in the home - literally, as she was forced to give up work when she got married, a ban which continued in the public sector right up to 1973. Article 41 stipulates that "the state pledges itself to guard with special care the institution of marriage" and that "by her life within the home the woman gives to the state a support without which the common good cannot be achieved".

The most important immediate call is for the eighth amendment to be revoked. Women in Ireland must have the right to choose - and now. The ULA has now accepted this demand, although the issue was omitted from the alliance's 2011 election material. When I raised it at a public meeting, I was told by Socialist Workers Party TD Richard Boyd-Barrett that the ULA did not have a position on abortion and there were very many different views in the organisation.

Now the ULA must push for the immediate removal of the eighth amendment. In addition sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 criminalise both women and doctors. These must be scrapped now. There is no other answer. 'X case' legislation would not have helped Savita. She was not suicidal. On the contrary, she had wanted her baby and was deeply distressed to learn she was miscarrying. Because the foetus could not survive she asked for an abortion in order to end what had become an intolerable situation mentally and physically. She was refused.

Such decisions must not be taken by doctors, lawyers or clerics. Women must have the right to choose for themselves. The ULA must go much further than 'X case' demands and fight for what is needed. It would be a serious dereliction of duty for the alliance to take an opportunist stance and call for 'X case' legislation as a 'stepping stone' to free and accessible abortion on demand. In reality it would set the movement back and leave Irish women stranded once more ●

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Notes

1. www.constitution.ie/constitution-of-ireland/default.asp.
2. www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-19930422.
3. www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/martin-disputes-need-for-law-on-abortion-201680.html.



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.

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weekly Worker

**Leveson
provokes
print media
offensive**

Child abuse and desperate diversions

Sections of the bourgeois press are attempting to conceal their own crisis by hammering the BBC, writes **Paul Demarty**

A few short months ago, the tabloid press (and some purportedly higher quality titles) were at the tail-end of a serious crisis of legitimacy - the phone-hacking scandal was bleeding out, via the Leveson inquiry, into a very public deconstruction of all the short cuts and lies necessary to keep a gutter rag going. All the creeps of Fleet Street - from egotistical pornographer Richard Desmond, to viceroys of the Murdoch empire, to the sociopathic *Daily Mail* editor, Paul Dacre - were dragged into the spotlight.

Just as that story bled almost imperceptibly outwards from a single conviction for a single crime at a single paper, so the story of Jimmy Savile's sexual pursuit of the young has grown into a wholesale crisis at the BBC. To be less charitable, the scandal has - in TV parlance - jumped the shark. It has long left behind what it was 'really' about (child abuse), and has instead become an excuse for allcomers to pile into the BBC.

This is terribly convenient for Dacre, Desmond and co. Remember the apologetics in the final *News of the World*? Yes, they admitted, we made some grave mistakes. But don't forget the good work we did, in exposing all those paedophiles! And so it remains: there is nothing like a good paedophile scare to suspend moral judgment on the scaremonger. That is the underlying story here: the Beeb-bashing from all quarters, besides being hardwired into Murdoch's and Dacre's political DNA, is in this context an enormous diversionary tactic.

Entwistle's exit

From their perspective, regrettably, it has thus far been a rip-roaring success.

Ironically, it was not the *Daily Mail* or *The Sun* that finally got the scalp they so desperately wanted - that of George Entwistle, the hapless erstwhile director general. It was *The Guardian*, whose thorough and sensational investigation into phone-hacking got the former into such deep trouble.

It was *The Guardian* that debunked a *Newsnight* investigation into a then-unnamed Tory grandee, for alleged acts of child abuse in north Wales decades earlier. It did not take the Twittersphere long to out Lord McAlpine as the subject of the allegations. Unfortunately for the BBC, the allegations are simply unsubstantiated.

In fact, the story is an old one; the journalist behind it, one Angus Stickler, had previously been buried away in BBC radio before decamping to the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, a relatively young news agency. Stickler had previously been chasing this story, but had found it a hard sell. His source, a now-adult man who had suffered sexual abuse as a teenager, had several times put McAlpine in the frame. But his story had been inconsistent on many details.

Given the psychological effects of sexual trauma, this by no means necessarily makes him a liar. It does, however, make the story extremely



For services rendered

shaky from a legal point of view. More to the point, it makes all the more necessary the patient work of corroboration - ie, actual *investigative* journalism. Whatever the reality of the allegations against McAlpine, the story, in that form, should never have been run.

So why was it? Simple - the BBC was cornered. If it had canned the whole thing, the press attack dogs would have hounded it for covering up for *another* establishment paedophile. The Savile scandal leaves the BBC open to all sorts of hysterical accusations and, while normally they would be taken with a grain of salt, now the flailing attacks of Dacre and co have a spurious ring of truth to them. So it broadcast the piece, hoping against hope that McAlpine's name would not be brought into it.

When it was, of course, Entwistle *could* have come out fighting. Having been on the back foot throughout the whole row, he could have counter-attacked, pointed out the scurrilous nature of the accusations against the BBC and the hidden agendas behind them, and reminded his opponents

in the press about their own casual disregard for the truth. Instead, he put in a bumbling, evasive performance on Radio 4's *Today* programme, which by all accounts lost him his job.

That it should be a wing of the BBC that did him in, finally, is no surprise. Entwistle sat at the head of a bloated, bureaucratic apparatus, the legacy most especially of his predecessor and management-consultancy-speak legend John Birt. As more newsroom jobs are lost, others exiled to Salford and management salaries beefed up, those involved in actually producing content are increasingly alienated from the Gormenghast-like superstructure that squats above them.

Precisely because this is *not* an effective, corporate-style governance structure, revenge is not only sweet, but quite possible for the journalists. The BBC often likes to trumpet its uniqueness - as a public-service broadcaster not *directly* under state control - but if there is one thing that marks it out, it is that it is apparently the only organisation in the world where shit rolls uphill.

Paedo-finder generals

An old BBC sketch show, *Monkey dust*, featured a recurring gag about a man emerging from the shadows in a Matthew Hopkins get-up, declaring himself the 'paedo-finder general' "by the power invested in me by the *Daily Mail*", and invariably whipping those around him into a lynch-mob frenzy despite the utter silliness of his accusations.

And, while the paedophile-baiting is transparently cynical in this particular instance, there is something like an objective psychology to the tabloids; no matter how self-serving their moral crusades, and no matter how utterly hypocritical (the prudish *Mail*'s habit of publishing neurotically titillating pictures of often young celebrities on its website, the *Daily Express*'s common owner with a bevy of cable porn channels, and so on),

they add up to something real.

That is, ultimately, the petty bourgeois obsession with what Americans call 'family values' - the absurd veneration of the (heterosexual) nuclear family. The reality of child abuse is that it, like charity, begins at home - the vast majority of cases see children abused by close family members. The paedophile is thus an intolerable reality for the *Mail*'s psychology - he is externalised from the family scene as the predatory sex offender, and thus anathematised.

The tabloids' hatred for the BBC is motivated, in part, by cynical business interests - this is especially true of the Murdoch papers. But, equally, *Mail* psychology comes into it, with its reactionary bluster about modernity (with its attendant plagues, such as multiculturalism and liberal values) eating away at the fabric of social authority that holds us together (again, the family first and foremost).

The BBC, in this connection, has undergone a remarkable transformation. Once it was an explicitly patrician, moralistic media institution. Yet both the changing nature of broadcast media as such and changes in the political and general culture of society have problematised that role. Once, the BBC was 'Auntie' (a benevolent, but stern authority figure). Today, it is a picture-postcard of Blairism.

We should not imagine it to be genuinely subversive in any consistent way. (The Beeb's coverage of the Gaza attacks is a timely reminder of what *really* guides its 'news values'.) Yet, for the *Mail* psychology, it is emblematic of the liberal nihilism that corrodes society. Thus, it is perfectly natural - to this paranoiac outlook - that the BBC should end up covering for paedophiles.

That is the 'honest' insanity of this scandal. What of the cynical point-scoring? It is worth asking whether or not it will actually work. There are surely only so many more paedophiles to be unearthed through this particular line of inquiry - and,

whatever approach the papers take to the Leveson report when it finally lands, they will find it difficult to bury the bad news. Indeed, as I write, four former News International employees - including Rebekah Brooks and Andy Coulson - have been formally charged by the police for corruption.

Murdoch's empire is, obviously, likely to come in for a storm of criticism - its corrupt relationships with the police and politicians, and its casual attitude to criminality, are what got us into this mess to begin with. Dacre, however, has also received advance notice of a vigorous judicial hairdryer treatment; and frayed relations with the *Mail*'s proprietors (Lady Rothermere, in particular, is supposed to be tiring of Dacre's ability to generate bad news).

As for the BBC, it has weathered fiercer storms than this (the David Kelly scandal, for instance), and it will lumber on. Once the outrage has died down, the BBC's critics will have to provide some kind of way to *fix* the alleged structural faults. Given that most of the institutional failings over Savile's sexual appetites took place decades ago, it would seem that the child protection angle has been covered.

As for the failure to broadcast the *Newsnight* Savile spot, and the failure to can the McAlpine one (and the accompanying, ludicrous expectation that the director general should find time to review every last bit of footage the corporation plans to broadcast), the institutional problems are a necessary excrescence of the BBC's 'unique', semi-detached relationship with the state: the accretion of a self-perpetuating, bureaucratic apparatus utterly unsure of its purpose makes nimble responses to crisis all but impossible. The BBC has no worse a record on truthful reporting than its critics; genuinely restoring some honour to the journalistic profession means a serious assault on the bourgeois media as a whole ●

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