

weekly **worker**



**Lawrence Parker's book:
Illuminating the factional
struggles of the CPGB 1945-91**

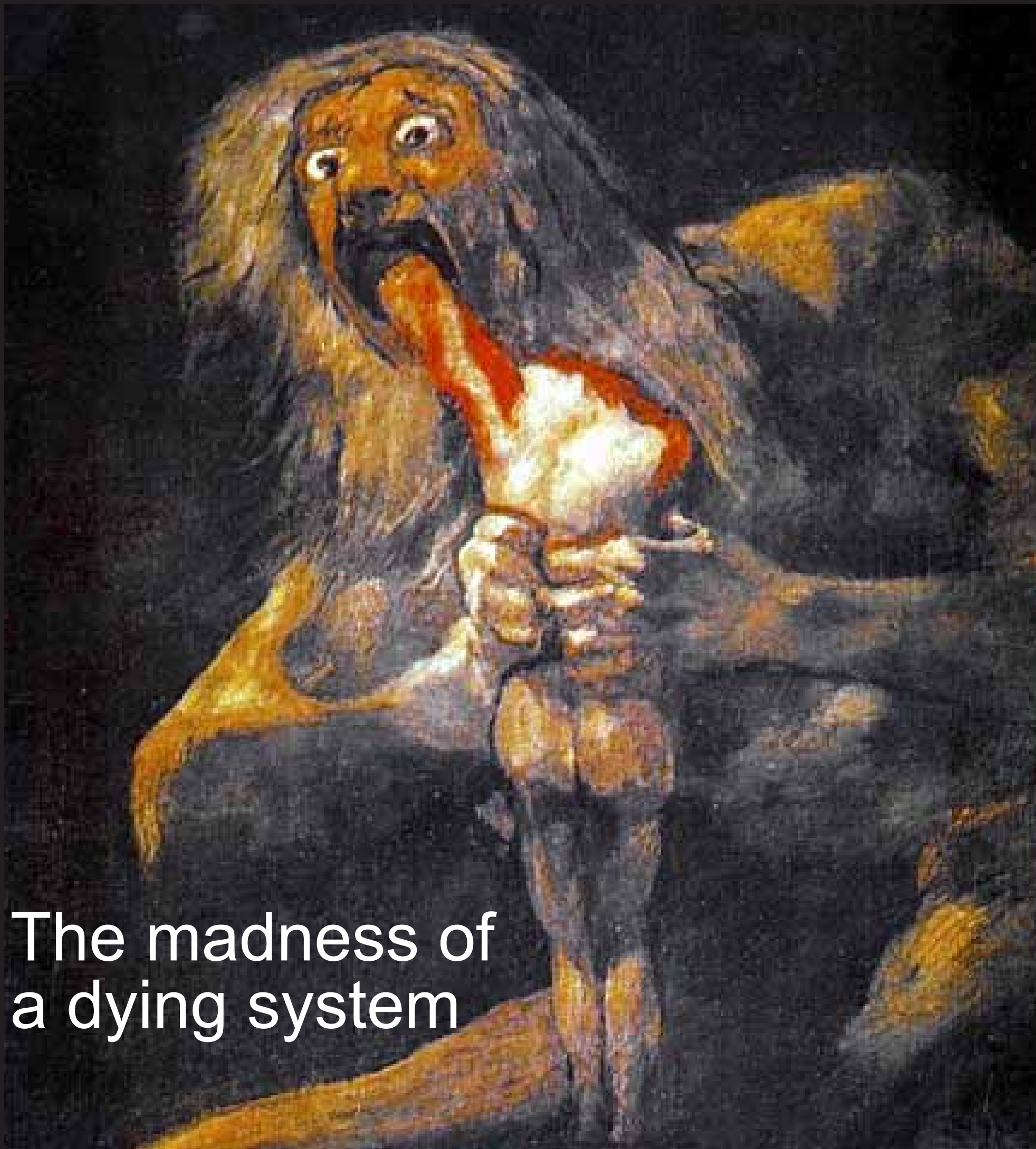
- Letters and debate
- Pharaoh Mursi
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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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The madness of
a dying system

LETTERS



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

SPGB enigma

I was pleased to see Jon D White's quite reflective letter about the Socialist Party of Great Britain, and his comments about sectarianism and its twin, liquidationism (Letters, November 22).

To its credit, the SPGB is the longest lasting genuinely socialist party in Britain, and has pretty consistently advocated socialism as the only alternative to capitalism and the only remedy to its ills. As part of this, it has consistently defined socialism in the most clear and simple terms, and which do not allow for any ambiguity or compromise. It has, remarkably, published the monthly *Socialist Standard* for virtually every year of its existence.

Although relatively small, the SPGB in my view consistently adds value to the labour and progressive movement by being a clear and consistent advocate of socialism and expressing a straight-talking and straightforward language most people can understand.

Those of us who believe in a strategy to develop and unite the struggles against the effects of capitalism, and to develop these into a struggle against capitalism itself, are forced by the SPGB to consider whether or not we risk tipping into reformism and preservation of the capitalist system.

I would like, however, to question two elements of the SPGB's case and practice. One, the SPGB is of the view that capitalism will of itself generate the political and socialist consciousness required to take the necessary revolutionary action to establish socialism. Yet its principal yardstick, membership and support remains microscopic. Given several hundred years of capitalism (and over a hundred years in its decaying, decadent phase), why is socialist consciousness as defined by the SPGB not very much more widespread?

Two, Jon refers to the fact that the SPGB expelled the Socialist Studies Group in 1991. Both the SPGB and SSG call themselves the SPGB, both adhere to exactly the same declaration and principles, and both put forward exactly the same political arguments. Given that the number of SPGB-type socialists remains minuscule, is it not ridiculous to have two separate parties, claiming the same name and politics, but apparently viscerally hostile to each other?

I think the real problem with the SPGB is that, despite its claims, it is inherently sectarian and inveterately hostile to any struggle against capitalism which does not adhere to its dogmatic schemas. It opposed and rejected the first sustained breach in world imperialism represented by the 1917 Great October Socialist Revolution. Indeed on the back of complete hostility to Lenin and the Bolsheviks it even rejects any analysis of the evolution of capitalism into its decadent phase of imperialism.

It therefore continues to advocate strategies and tactics appropriate and relevant to the ascendant phase of capitalism in the late 19th century, and which are by definition over 100 years out of date and largely ineffectual today.

If the British road to socialism is to come via the SPGB, just how long do they think it will actually take for the majority of the working class to be imbued by their socialist consciousness and carry out their

version of socialist revolution? Not only will we all be dead by then: the human race itself is likely to have become extinct as well.

Andrew Northall
email

Sort it out

I must thank Heather Downs for correcting my error (Letters, November 15). She is correct: the women in the Assange case asked for an HIV test, not a paternity test. However, it makes no difference to my argument that the real concerns of the two women were ignored by the law. If the women were concerned that they may have contracted Aids it would be difficult for them to practice their chosen lifestyle responsibly.

As for Chris Knight's "just so" stories on the human revolution, the speculation is based on the best evidence available. I will stick with his view that females were the driving force behind the creation of modern humanity. That sex was the fundamental relation between males and females, and that human culture was the outcome of our female ancestors' struggle for the right to choose their own mates. And that the outcome of this process produced communistic social relations that lasted everywhere until the coming of agricultural societies, which reintroduced minority control over society.

Admittedly this argument is convenient for a communist because it implies that to be human is to be communist. But hunter-gatherer societies still exist. What lessons can we learn from them?

Firstly that the mode of production is not just a matter of economics, but its long-term existence depends on the cultural superstructure of society, including myths and rituals. The power of women comes from their role in society, which they jealously guard by active social solidarity. For example, control of food preparation and childbirth make them both essential and central to the social whole - unlike in class society, where they are condemned to a second-class status.

Lesson: women need a new economic role. A political struggle which includes positioning and building alliances and the creation of new cultural mores. This process is already happening. It does not include relying on bourgeois courts, which reduces people to those that are controlled.

Secondly, hunter-gatherers tend to be extremely egalitarian. You cannot tell anyone what to do - not even children. One outcome of this is that people are expected to sort out their own differences.

Others will express opinions, but not intervene unless things get out of hand. Very different to the Swedish rape law, where trivial disagreements between consenting adults excuses state intervention. From a hunter-gatherer viewpoint punishment is irrational and morally unacceptable.

Phil Kent
Haringey

Student split

Whilst the student demonstration on Wednesday November 21 did not exactly shake national politics, it was a scene of a political struggle between elements of the student left (led to some extent by the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts) and the careerist bureaucracy of the National Union of Students.

Most of the media has reported that around 10,000 students were there - as part of either the main procession or the NCAFC feeder march. The route, a subject of controversy

beforehand, avoided buildings of political significance and proceeded down almost empty streets, as it meandered away from central London south of the river Thames. The rally in Kennington Park did not go as the NUS would have hoped. President Liam Burns was heckled and forced to leave the stage. Liam will be counting on a continued ebbing of the student movement, the active elements of which are beginning to show their disillusionment. Unless there is a significant resurgence in political activity on campus, and the students see their supposed leadership as a fetter upon their struggle, he will avoid the fate of Aaron Porter, who was barracked during the 2011 protests and subsequently declined to stand for re-election as NUS president.

An article on the NUS website entitled 'Demo 2012 - what's next?' gives an outline of NUS plans for 2013 and attempts to offer a narrative to students who were probably asking themselves what the point of 'Demo 2012' was. This excerpt reads like the PR material of a faceless corporation: "The demo should act as the beginning, and at NUS we've been busy putting together a calendar of campaigns for students to get involved in."

Students are invited to enter student politics on the terms of the NUS leadership, within the parameters of events and campaigns they have organised and control. The events listed include "shareholder activism training" (if only the capitalist class understood the importance of responsible investment) and a national constituency lobby (a bankrupt tactic adopted by successive NUS leaderships as a substitute for serious collective action) for January in protest against reforms in further education for adults. The NUS claimed the march was about setting the higher education agenda, but it is clear the leadership is looking to return to business as usual.

NCAFC is more and more trying to assert itself as a rival to the NUS bureaucracy. Its supporters marched under the slogan encouraging reformist illusions - "Tax the rich to fund education" - that was adopted at the NUS conference, but was later dropped by the leadership. Like much of the student left, NCAFC is taking hope from the victory of students in Quebec, led by a leftwing student union, against a proposed fees hike. The problem is that without a proper understanding of why that struggle was successful, the wrong lessons are learned and it becomes a justification for the student left to continue what it has been doing for years, but simply trying to be louder and more 'militant'.

An alternative to the treachery of the NUS leadership, on the one hand, and the endless, fruitless 'actions' of the left, on the other, is needed. Patient building and education is what is required in what looks likely to be a period of reduced activity. The student movement needs to get itself into a shape where it can actually resist future attacks and go onto the offensive. Democratisation and politicisation will be key.

The forces driving the changes within higher education today can only be understood through an analysis of capitalist development and the power of capital within society. The fight around education must be one that raises the question of who should own and control it; and one which is based on the assertion that the key task of revolutionary students in universities is to fight the influence of capital within these institutions. The unity

of revolutionaries on campus would be an important step in this direction.

Callum Williamson
London

Loopy

The Socialist Workers Party's habit of bending in the wind to every passing screech of liberal outrage really does land it in some contorted positions.

And so it is that the good comrades found themselves yesterday in the peculiar position of calling for a Labour vote over Respect's Lee Jasper in the Croydon North by-election. The reasoning was summed up succinctly: "Respect's Lee Jasper has tapped into anger around police racism in the Croydon run-off. But *Socialist Worker* is not calling for a vote for him, following Respect leader George Galloway's disgraceful and well-publicised comments on rape. Instead we encourage supporters to vote for Labour in this instance" (*Socialist Worker* December 1).

There you have it - Lee Jasper represents yesterday's hot-button issue (police racism); but the publicity afforded to Galloway's infamous comments on the Assange case makes not only him, but any Respect candidate, too embarrassing to touch. It is almost Workers' Liberty-esque.

How do we deal with this loopy reasoning? Perhaps we should take it at face value, and this gets to the core of how the SWP makes political decisions. A while ago, the Catholic church came up with an ingenious ranking system for sins of the flesh. It has achieved a certain degree of infamy for putting masturbation higher in the sinfulness stakes than rape - because, after all, rape can plausibly lead to conception, unlike spreading one's seed on the dry earth.

The SWP, in the absence of any meaningful political calculus for taking such decisions, also seems to maintain a grand list of Bad Things, ordered according to their Badness. Making an off-colour comment about alleged sexual assault registers higher on the list than police racism - this month, at least.

On the other hand, there is the small matter that the SWP has announced a general *volte-face* on the issue of voting Labour these past few years, reheating the tired old business of placing oneself alongside those who have 'illusions' in Labour as a patronising step towards peeling the scales from their eyes. One almost hoped that cynical motivations were behind this latest odd twist, rather than the utterly incoherent ostensible reasons given.

Too incoherent by half, in the end - by the end of Wednesday, the clause about voting Labour had disappeared, to be replaced by a short note in square brackets. "An earlier version of this article called for a vote for Labour in the Croydon North by-election. This was an editorial error. *Socialist Worker* is not endorsing any of the candidates in the Croydon North by-election." In other words, the SWP leadership has spun on a sixpence quicker than Joe Stalin could manage in his prime. Top marks, comrades!

Harley Filben
London

Earthquake

We are on the edge of a political earthquake in British politics. In polling conducted at the weekend, the Respect candidate in the November 29 Rotherham by-election, Yvonne Ridley, has the lead over Labour. Labour has panicked and launched a vicious and negative campaign of dirty tricks against

Respect, but this has been sidelined by our magnificent, positive campaign with the Respect battle bus, advertising truck and campaign groups in every ward.

Polling conducted in the Croydon North by-election suggests that Lee Jasper, the Respect candidate, is now neck and neck with the Labour Party to win the constituency. This overturns a Labour majority of over 16,000 at the last general election. This is nothing short of astounding and is testament to the excellent campaign team, candidate and brilliant policies we have.

If Respect wins one of these constituencies, it will make headlines across the world. If we win both, we will deliver the biggest blow to the squalid political consensus that has suffocated British politics since the 1970s. It will mark the transformation of our party into the fourth force in British politics and the most sustained challenge to three-party politics since it developed in the 1980s.

For Respect, this is like a general election. We can deliver a damning verdict on the path of British politics and society in the last two years. We can deliver a challenge that shows what real Labour means and what real communities need. Please help us deliver Yvonne Ridley and Lee Jasper to parliament to make a formidable team with George Galloway.

Chris Chilvers

National secretary, Respect

Terry Liddle

I knew Terry Liddle, who died on November 15, very well. He was a friend and comrade, someone I had known since the early days of the Socialist Alliance in the 1990s, when he was the secretary of Greenwich SA. He regularly attended national meetings once they started to take off around 1996, and was on the SA national council and other national bodies.

I was always impressed by Terry's complete lack of sectarianism and his determination to build left unity. He always spoke in a most positive way to move the Socialist Alliance project forward. He was committed to his work in Greenwich, where he was a tower of strength to those within his community that he helped empower. He was a genuine libertarian, environmentalist socialist - but a socialist first and foremost.

Terry became part of the campaign to try and save the original SA from being closed down by the then leadership of the Socialist Workers Party in the early part of this century. He remained a member after it was closed down, and when it was relaunched in 2005.

He was treasurer of the relaunched SA in its early years, and, until very recently, I still received stuff from the Electoral Commission in his name! Indeed, he remained a member until the end, being fully paid up, even though deteriorating health meant he could no longer attend meetings. We would correspond regularly - by phone, and more recently by email. He was a true friend and a committed socialist.

Terry was a great asset to the movement and he will be sorely missed. My thoughts are with his family and close friends at this very sad time.

Terry Liddle's funeral will take place on Monday December 10 at 3.30pm at Eltham Crematorium, Crown Woods Way, Eltham, London SE9. I would like to pay my respects on behalf of the Socialist Alliance - and all socialists generally.

Pete McLaren
email

EGYPT

Showing his true colours



Mursi/Mubarak

The huge mistake of the Socialist Workers Party in urging a vote for Mohammed Mursi and the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party in the second round of the Egyptian presidential election has been clearly exposed by the events of the last week.

On November 27 around 200,000 demonstrators poured into Tahrir Square in Cairo. They were, of course, protesting against Mursi's assumption of sweeping new powers on November 22. He is now free to take any measures he says are necessary to "protect the revolution". He has decreed that no presidential decision can be challenged by the courts until a new constitution is established. The same applies to the constitutional assembly, dominated by Islamists, which will be free to write in as many reactionary religious clauses as it chooses.

This has enraged thousands who voted for Mursi in the June 16-17 second round of the election. They say he is Egypt's "new pharaoh", who has carried out a "constitutional coup" and "betrayed the revolution". Although for a time he seemed to be ready to retreat in face of the mass protests, stating that he would only employ his new powers in relation to "matters of sovereignty", in reality he has not renounced any of them.

Mursi has implied that the protestors are paid supporters of the old regime - a ridiculous charge. While the backers of former president Hosni Mubarak continue to condemn his Muslim Brotherhood successor, they would certainly not be shouting slogans accusing Mursi of 'betraying' the movement they opposed - the movement which toppled Mubarak in February 2011. In fact the demonstrators seem to be a mixture of religious and secular, including leftwing, opponents of Mursi. Many of them would have voted for Hamdeen Sabbahi, the leftwing Nasserite and opponent of Mubarak who finished third in the May 23-24 first round of the presidential elections - not Ahmad Shafiq, Mubarak's last prime minister and effectively the candidate of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. It is likely that in the second round most of the demonstrators would either have voted for Mursi or boycotted the ballot, along with thousands of others who could not stomach choosing between two anti-democratic reactionaries.

The SWP's co-thinkers in Egypt, the Revolutionary Socialists, report that people whom they call *feloul* - supporters of the Mubarak regime - tried to join some of the demonstrations that have been reported in Cairo, Port Said, Suez and Alexandria. In the capital "We drove them out of the square", claims Hatem Tallima of the

RS (*Socialist Worker* December 1).

Mursi, of course, was riding on a wave of national, regional and western acclaim after he helped broker a ceasefire in Gaza. And he has definitely gone up in imperialism's estimation - he has now been confirmed as someone you can do business with.

According to Jane Kinnimont of Chatham House, a "world-leading source" for "independent thinking on foreign affairs", western governments have been "pleasantly surprised" by the Muslim Brotherhood: "... the first impressions of many westerners is that the articulate, suited and often US-educated businessmen they meet are easier to talk to than many expected. This honeymoon has been largely sweetened by the discovery that the leaders of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood seem largely centre-right on the economy" (*The Daily Telegraph* November 23).

On last week's presidential decree, Kinnimont says: "The timing will convince his critics that he has had a US green light to take on more power in return for brokering the ceasefire." For its part, the International Monetary Fund has implied that Mursi's "constitutional coup" will "have no bearing" on the approval of a pending \$4.8 billion IMF loan to Egypt.

The views of the imperialists can hardly be ignored by revolutionaries. If it is true that the US gave Mursi the "green light", then that ought to mark him out as an *opponent* of "the revolution" just like Mubarak. So it is gratifying that the Revolutionary Socialists' November 23 statement on the new situation correctly describes the MB and supporters of the fallen regime as "two sides of the same coin". They both represent "tyranny and enmity towards the people".

In relation to Mursi, the statement declares: "... you and your organisation are the real threat to the revolution, as you embrace Mubarak's businessmen, run panting after loans from the IMF, trade in religion, threaten national unity and sell the revolution." But "we will not accept remnants of the old regime returning to the revolutionary scene under the pretext that 'we are all against the Brotherhood'. We will not work with anyone who worked hand in glove with the deposed dictator. We call on our comrades in the revolutionary march to step back from this game of shuffling the decks of cards" (www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=30081).

Unfortunately the idea that the MB and the old regime are "two sides of the same coin" was not quite the position the comrades adopted before the presidential second round. In a statement published in *Socialist Worker* the RS talked only of its "opposition on principle" to "the candidate of the Military Council, the

dissolved National Democratic Party and the forces of the counterrevolution, Ahmad Shafiq".

Without specifically urging a Mursi vote, it declared: "We therefore call on all the reformist and revolutionary forces and the remainder of the revolutionary candidates to form a national front which stands against the candidate of counterrevolution". It noted the "magnitude of the error in failure to discriminate between the reformism of the Muslim Brotherhood and the 'fascism' of Shafiq" and pledged to "join in the widest possible struggle among the masses of our people against the candidate of the old regime" (*Socialist Worker* May 28).

Worse, instead of rejecting lesser evilism, and joining a clear majority in a 'pox on both sides' boycott, the RS pleaded for Mursi and MB to declare themselves in favour of a "national front" government, which would include representatives from "across the whole political spectrum". In other words, a grand coalition uniting all classes, all interests, all parties - excepting only the "fascists" of the "old regime".

Speaking at the SWP's Marxism school earlier this year, RS leader Hossam al-Hamalawy did not explain why his organisation did no more than *imply* that Egyptian workers should vote for the MB candidate. In fact he did not mention the RS position at all. But he was not so reticent on the "reactionary" nature of the MB leadership (seemingly in contradiction to RS talk of MB "reformism" just two months earlier).

The truth is that the RS, which is not actually affiliated to the SWP's International Socialist Tendency, had been divided over its position on the election between, on the one side, those who were for the current "two sides of the same coin" line and, on the other, those who were prepared to vote for the so-called 'lesser evil'.

For the SWP itself, however, the choice had been immediately "clear": "A vote for Mursi is a vote against the legacy of Mubarak and for continuing change in Egypt. Now it is time to put Mursi to the test - and to continue struggles over jobs, wages, union rights and for radical political change" (*Socialist Worker* June 2). In justification, Mursi was presented as a vacillating reformer, a reed willing to bend before mass pressure. By contrast, to vote for Ahmed Safiq would be a vote to finally snuff out the revolution.

While the SWP continues to give space to its Egyptian comrades, it has clearly not yet renounced its identification of the MB as a (perhaps reluctant) contingent of "the revolution". The latest *Socialist Worker* contends: "In fact, the show of strength by the revolutionary movement in the streets suggests that the Muslim Brotherhood remains under immense pressure from below" (December 1). Implying that Egyptians had been correct to vote for Mursi, and not for "a president cloned from the dictator they overthrew last year" (June 2).

In contrast to this, the *Weekly Worker* had from the start upheld the independent interests of Egyptian workers. We declared our opposition to "any form of political rule that denies us the light and air we need to turn the situation to our advantage. The ... second-round Hobson's choice ... lines up two prospective presidents who can *both* be expected to impose draconian rule, if allowed to get their way. Heads I win, tails you lose" (*Weekly Worker* June 7) ●

Peter Manson

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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 December 2, 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, section 2: 'Representation of the components of the value of the product'. Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Tuesday December 4, 6.15pm: 'Did the Neanderthals have art and language?' Speaker: Camilla Power, St Martin's Community Centre, 43 Carol Street, London NW1 (two minutes from Camden Town tube). £10 waged, £5 low-waged, £3 unwaged.

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

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.

Cinema Palestino

Friday November 30 to Sunday December 2: Films from and about Palestine, Showroom Cinema, 15 Paternoster Row, Sheffield S1. For details and tickets: www.showroomworkstation.org.uk.

Organised by YPCE: www.ypce.org.uk.

Speak out for justice

Friday November 30, 8pm: Palestine solidarity event, SOAS, Thornhaugh Street, London WC1.

Organised by SOAS Palestine Society: www.facebook.com/events/167930716683701.

Get Brons out

Saturday December 1, 10am to 2pm: Meeting, Swarthmore Centre, Leeds LS3. Begin mobilising to prevent Andrew Brons from being re-elected to the European parliament in 2014.

Organised by Yorkshire and the Humber UAF: www.yhuaf.org.uk.

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.

Organised by Anti-Capitalist Initiative: <http://uptheanti.org.uk>.

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.

Unite Against Fascism

Sunday December 2, 10.30am to 4.30pm: North-west conference, Unite regional office, Jack Jones House, 2 Churchill Way, Liverpool L3. £10 /£5 concessions.

Organised by UAF: www.uaf.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.

Stop the cuts

Wednesday December 5, 5.30pm: Anti-austerity protest coinciding with the government's autumn statement. March from King's College, The Strand to Downing Street.

Organised by Unite the Resistance: www.uniteresist.org.

Film from Palestine

Friday December 7 - Sunday December 16: Film festival, various locations. Programme: www.bristolpff.org.uk/festival-programme-2012.

Organised by Bristol Palestine Film Festival: www.bristolpff.org.uk.

Save adult education

Saturday December 8, 11am to 3.30pm: Second national delegate conference, Leicester Adult Education College, Leicester LE1.

Organised by Local Associations for National Action Campaign: www.nutlan.org.uk.

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.

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.

OUR HISTORY

Illuminating the factional struggles of the CPGB

Mark Fischer welcomes the second edition of a book which uncovers some long-hidden history



General secretary Harry Pollitt and his master

It is a pleasure to recommend the second, expanded edition of Lawrence Parker's *The kick inside*, which will be launched at a London meeting on December 8.

I do not agree with all of the author's political conclusions or the emphasis he puts on particular trends or developments. These are quibbles, however. Comrade Parker has provided a service to the workers' movement. He has raised to the surface something of the real history of the Communist Party of Great Britain, illustrating its life, colour and vitality in a way that the dull official histories do not.¹ He has thrown light on the factional struggles that started to disaggregate the party, particularly from the 1950s onwards, and also - crucially - shown why they still matter and what lessons

activists in the movement today can glean from them.

However, given the subject matter, I should really come clean from the outset. From the late 1970s I was an active soldier in the factional battles that eventually tore apart the CPGB and the Young Communist League. I became the national organiser of *The Leninist* faction some time in my early 20s (around 1984, so my wobbly, 50-year-old memory prompts me, probably unreliably). This is a position I have held, with some brief interruptions and evolutionary leaps in the name of the organisation, ever since.

It follows from this, and as the reader might expect, that I have a pretty firm set of opinions on the subject matter. For instance, in one of

my very first articles for *The Leninist*, I concluded a survey of the dismal state of the YCL with a passage of which, nigh on 30 years later, I am still rather proud, in a slightly embarrassed, parental sort of way:

"Previous left-oppositional forces within the YCL have been flawed by their inability to challenge the descent into liquidation on a political rather than an organisational level," I thundered. Then, more *sotto voce*, with resolve - and possibly with an 007-style raised eyebrow as I typed the words - I promised: "This time, it will be very different."²

Well, actually, yes and no. Of course, history records that the rather intense, confident young things grouped in *The Leninist* faction actually failed to stop "the descent into liquidation" - the

party was officially consigned to the history books in 1991. To be frank, we did not even come close. Parker is correct to write that we remained "a tiny group... confined to London and its immediate surrounds".⁴ However, unlike those previous left-opposition groups in the CPGB (such as the forerunners of the New Communist Party and those around Straight Left), who tried to defeat "today's reformist revisionism with yesterday's reformist revisionism",⁵ *The Leninist* comrades traced the degeneration far further back.

The author is spot on to describe us as a dialectical break and a continuation with the left party oppositions of the past: "... *The Leninist* was the inheritor of previous revolutionary oppositions, in that it

distilled positives and negatives of those groups and individuals into a strategy that avoided the sectarian wilderness inhabited by the 'Marxist-Leninist' sects, while not allowing its struggle to ... [to be] cooped up in the tiny space the CPGB allowed its dissidents."⁶

This is an important point and underlines the fact that the comrade's methodological approach to this aspect of the party's history is the correct one. His declared aim is to explain why the CPGB "continually threw up revolutionary militants and ideas in a period in which it had formally ditched a revolutionary programme". Comrade Parker treats these groups and individuals as "an organic product of the 'official' communist movement",⁷ a point I have made

about the nature of *The Leninist* faction on a number of occasions.

The tragedy was that almost all these oppositional trends worked within the sterile paradigm of Stalinism. In this they were, ironically, the mirror-image of the revolutionary sects and grouplets that worked outside the party, hampered by a rigidity of thought moulded by adherence to particular versions of ‘official’ Trotskyism.

Quite apart from the broader programmatic problems associated with the Trotskyist alternative, it was also posed with a tricky political conundrum when *The Leninist* emerged: how to characterise it? I recall a founding member of Workers Power (a comrade now sadly no longer with us) telling a me on a late-night Northern Line train in the capital, that he had never before encountered, in this country or internationally, an oppositional “Stalinist trend” such as *The Leninist* that had traced the political origins of the decay of ‘official’ communism as far back as we had.

I recall burling something in reply that certainly did not convince him; hell, it did not sound all that plausible to me. In fact, if I could relive that moment again I would tell the comrade that this was not something that I found particularly challenging; but it was a development that should perhaps prompt him to thoroughly re-interrogate the notion of Stalinism that was offered to him by his version of Trotskyism. Again, as comrade Parker in part refers to, here were ‘Stalinists’ that:

- rejected the ‘theory’ of ‘socialism in one country’;⁸
- critiqued the related opportunisms of both the ‘third period’ and the popular front;⁹
- advocated a version of democratic centralism that was qualitatively more ‘permissive’ than our Trotskyist comrades thought appropriate for their own organisations;
- came - towards the end of the Soviet Union’s life - to call for a political revolution to establish genuine socialist democracy.¹⁰

Over the 10 years of its factional struggle, *The Leninist* was able to show incontrovertibly that the CPGB had been politically liquidated as a revolutionary vanguard long before the final *coup de grâce* was dealt by a special congress convened by the Eurocommunist-dominated leadership - “death by a thousand opportunist cuts”, as *The Leninist* dubbed it. This is something that the majority of the factions and groups that comrade Parker discusses would have been unable to admit.

This is one reason why I welcome *The kick inside* as a service to the whole workers’ movement: whatever its other intentions, it addresses a specific aspect of the contemporary left’s general philistinism - its ignorance of the genuine history and political dynamics of the most important working class organisation we have so far created in the UK. The CPGB was always small in comparison to the mass parties in Europe. It was, however, a genuine party of the class, with a real influence in the workers’ movement and wider society. A haughty refusal to properly engage with its history implies a frivolous, light-minded and stupidly sectarian attitude to the actual history of our class in the 20th century.

For example, the revolutionary left outside the party took an extremely passive, intensely insular and - initially - factually inaccurate view when large-scale factional war in the CPGB broke out openly in the 1980s. If I were feeling charitable, I might say that this was at least partially explained by the troglodyte existence of the oppositional trends - with the exception of *The Leninist*, of course. However, I think the real reason was

the crude caricature of the CPGB and its internal life that most had lumbered themselves with. (The smarter soon got themselves up to speed courtesy of *The Leninist* and, with unseemly haste in some cases, dropped their view of the battle line being ‘tankies versus Euros’.)¹¹

As comrade Parker shows, the reality was much more complex and multi-layered. Essentially, the 1980s saw a split in the right opportunists (associated with the party apparatus), as this trends stability “became increasingly tenuous to the point where ... it is disintegrating as it becomes polarised between centrism [the pro-Soviet left of the party - MF] and Eurocommunism over the *Morning Star* crisis”.¹² The revolutionary left needs to be better informed about the history of the CPGB, even if in hindsight. More than that, it should have had an active, engaged interest in its internal battles at the time.

The crisis created fluidity and opened up possibilities for change. *The Leninist* faction issued ‘A call to all communists’, an editorial that explained the thinking behind the slogan that was to subsequently appear on the journal’s cover - ‘The place for all genuine communists is in the Communist Party of Great Britain’. (True, some of the revolutionary groups that ‘A call’ targeted were a tad obscure - for instance, does anyone know not simply what happened to the John MacLean Collective, but what on earth it was in the first place?)

The intention was clear, however. It was a message to the left that the crisis in the CPGB was not simply the proprietorial concern of its membership, but of vital importance for the whole advanced part of the class. It called for the revolutionary left to break “from their sectarianism” through “comradely discussion and debate” with the comrades of *The Leninist* and actually join the party as conscious fighters for revolutionary politics: “The revolutionary sectarian groups emphasise the importance of ‘ideological purity’ and point to the opportunism in our party today ... Merely pointing to a sin does not cure it, and in only doing this they commit the greatest sin for a revolutionary: that is, standing aloof from the workers’ movement.”¹³

That seems to me one of the core lessons to take from Lawrence Parker’s excellent book, especially for comrades who may find themselves in today’s revolutionary left - members of groups such as the Socialist Workers Party or the Socialist Party in England and Wales. The demise of the CPGB was celebrated by many of the revolutionary sects, as they held that, with the party out of the way, the time had come for their group at last. In the 1990s generally, a similarly sanguine view was common: the death of the ‘official’ world communist movement was not an ideological victory for imperialism, but, rather, their particular brand of Trotskyism - who can forget Peter Taaffe and his truly stupid “red 90s”? (A gaffe that, in recent years, the comrade has taken to airbrushing out of history.)¹⁴

All profoundly misplaced. Stalinism reinvents itself. Having once performed a limited historical service in dark political times by at least maintaining formal links to the earlier, healthy traditions of Bolshevism, we now see sections of the revolutionary left promoting versions of the degenerate politics for which they once (quite rightly) blasted the CPGB. From most, the response to the global economic crisis has been essentially Keynesian, nation-centred ‘solutions’ - in effect a recapitulation of the CPGB’s Alternative Economic Strategy. We have had the SWP take popular frontism a step beyond Stalinism when it actually tried to form a popular front party with the Muslim Association of Britain! And,

if anything, most groups have internal regimes more restrictive, more opaque and more bureaucratically suffocating than the CPGB of yesteryear.

Time to recycle the front-page headline from the first issue of *The Leninist* as a newspaper in April 1984; we told the CPGB membership of the time: ‘Comrades, rebel!’ We say the same thing today to comrades in the left groups that generally claim some sort of lineage from the Trotskyist tradition. We really could do with a few more rebels these days. Instead, a degenerate cultural norm has evolved which sees individuals or groups that develop differences with their comrades - be they serious or relatively trivial - simply leave and, if they set up yet another fragment, generally we see them presenting themselves as the product of some political immaculate conception, without history, antecedents or baggage.

At best, this is a frivolous attitude to the workers’ movement. Our call for CPGB members to rebel in 1984 was prompted by a loyal attitude to that important organisation in the movement. Today, we criticise the politics of the left; we call on comrades in the SWP, in Workers Power or SPEW to overthrow their organisations’ regimes of bureaucratic centralism; and we polemicise against this or that light-minded split.

We want the contradictions inherent in the contemporary revolutionary groups to be resolved positively: just as we did in the CPGB of yesteryear. And that means - when it is at all possible - staying in alongside your comrades and fighting to win. As comrade Parker puts it, as he surveys the admittedly peripheral, politically flawed, left-oppositional groups in the CPGB, his book “does not treat their struggles as inevitably doomed”.¹⁵ And quite right too, comrade ●

Notes

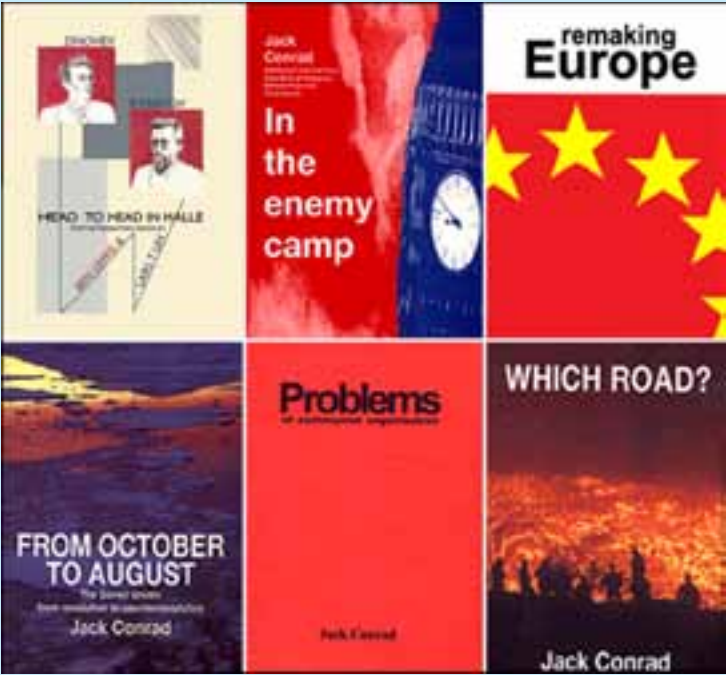
1. See, for example, J Klugmann *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain Vol 1: Formation and early years, 1919-1924* London 1969; Vol 2: *The General Strike 1925-1926* London 1969; and N Branson *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain 1927-1941* London 1985. See also pp12-14 of *The kick inside* itself for a review of more recent CPGB histories.
2. The majority of the left sects that litter the political landscape in today’s Britain claim some sort of lineage from Trotsky, the arch-enemy of Stalinism. Yet, almost without exception, they have internal regimes that are worse than that of the Stalinist CPGB. In recent years, we have seen the SWP create a Legoland-scale popular front in the form of Respect; we have also had the unedifying spectacle of SPEW effectively adapting to national chauvinism via No2EU. In my opinion, we have even had a rerun of the Eurocommunists in the Counterfire split from the SWP. After tragedy and farce, what comes next?
3. T Wright, ‘YCL congress’ *The Leninist* No4, April 1983.
4. See p99 of *The kick inside*.
5. *Ibid* p90.
6. *Ibid* p98.
7. *Ibid* p11.
8. See J Conrad *From October to August* London 1992, pp20, 53-54.
9. ‘Open the fight against liquidationism on all fronts’ *The Leninist* No5, August 1983 - available online, along with all issues of *TL*, at [www.cpgb.org.uk/assets/files/leninistpdf/The%20Leninist%20\(5\).pdf](http://www.cpgb.org.uk/assets/files/leninistpdf/The%20Leninist%20(5).pdf).
10. Parker quotes Jack Conrad on p101: “In our writings up to 1989 on the USSR, there was a lot of similarity between the orthodox Trotskyists and us.”
11. See pp13-14 of *The kick inside* for a more contemporary view of this misreading.
12. ‘Open the fight against liquidationism on all fronts’ (see note 9).
13. ‘A call to all communists’ *The Leninist* No3, September 1982.
14. See M Fischer, ‘Soviet “planning” and bolt-on democracy’ *Weekly Worker* November 12 2009.
15. See p11 of *The kick inside*.

L Parker *The kick inside: revolutionary opposition in the CPGB, 1945-1991* November Publications, London 2012, pp118, £6

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ECONOMY

The madness of

The ruling class has no alternative to austerity and the drive to create a pristine capitalism. Not only is that impossible, but, as shown by South Africa, the working class is beginning to revolt. This is an edited version a speech by **Hillel Ticktin**, editor of *Critique*, on November 17



Capital will kill and destroy: that is its nature

If one looks at the current situation, one would have to conclude not that we are coming out of a crisis, but that the ruling class is becoming more and more afraid. Mervyn King, the governor of the Bank of England, says that the real position is getting

worse. Why is he saying that? One could say, of course, that he is coming to the end of his term, and that he has to say how bad everything is. But it is clearly more than that. There really is a degree of pessimism now within the ruling class itself, which he is

expressing.

The second aspect of the situation is that austerity has more or less become the dominant mode of discourse. Barack Obama represents the left wing of the ruling class, and even he frames his policy within it. Except that his

austerity is not the same as the Tea Party austerity, which seems to rule in the Republican Party and would have been the policy if Romney had won. Nevertheless, there will be a form of austerity, whichever side you take in mainstream politics at the moment.

In this country it is obvious that Ed Miliband has more or less accepted that line as well. In fact it is the line that was set in the 1930s - the Austrian line, as it was called. Paul Krugman has said that austerity is in effect a means of control. Behind the word 'austerity' one can hide the *form* of control, hide the fact that there is a ruling class that is doing very well, and that society is, if anything, becoming more unequal, not less so. That can be hidden behind the word 'austerity' - that is what Keynes said and what Krugman has been saying.

One might have expected Keynes to have said that if he had been a reformist. But he was nowhere near the left, and was strongly anti-working class. However, one has to accept that the ruling class, in order to survive, has to make concessions at certain times. And in order to make concessions they have to recognise their own real position, and make it clear that by making concessions they are retaining control. It amounts to removing the veil of commodity fetishism and saying, 'Yes, we are here in control, despite these concessions'.

However, the austerity line is the reverse: it amounts to a refusal to accept what is real. Yet it is the dominant viewpoint now. In 2007 I attempted to analyse the different forms of capitalist control - both those that are inherent in the nature of capital itself and the substitutes employed at this time - and see how far they could be maintained. Austerity is part of that.

At the present time no alternative policy is being put forward. Krugman is isolated and the Keynesian approach is not being advocated, except in a very limited sense. Obviously, it was used in 2008-09 to pump money into the system, and it did save the world economy from going into a bottomless slump. Without that taking place the system really would have collapsed. What would have happened afterwards we do not know. But they simply had to act, but, having done so, they are now reversing the line.

They are not prepared to countenance the Keynesian solution, and so the only place left is austerity. Various people, including Krugman, are saying that the policy is mad. It is mad because it is impossible. Welfare cannot simply be abolished, which is what it requires. Apart from anything else it would mean a collapse in demand, and at a technical level it would mean reintroducing debtors' prisons. How else do you deal with a situation where millions of people are near to starving and where there would be riots? So, it is impossible, simply because the population would not accept it. Of course, the ruling class understands that, and a number of economists who advocate austerity are not that stupid either. But I have to say many of them *are* - much of what has appeared in the press is simply nonsense.

In attempting to balance the budget, they are actually restoring the reserve army of labour. In other words, they are returning to a classic form of capitalism, as outlined in *Capital* volume 1. This is particularly prominent in volume 3, where Marx examines the nature of crisis, although it is also present in volume 2 of

a dying system

Theories of surplus value.

However, there are at least some sections of the ruling class who see that it is impossible to actually do it. That if they try to do it, it will increase the momentum towards change, or cause riots; as in South Africa. The trade unions and working class may start to act as a unified class and that would be highly dangerous. This is the contradiction at the heart of capitalism itself.

It was not like that in 2007. They had not yet got to this point, and nobody knew people were quite so mad. That the Tea Party is mad is obvious, but that the mainstream ruling class would actually proceed in this manner - the Conservative Party in the UK and the CDU in Germany - was totally unexpected. That is a paradox and, of course, a weakness. It does serve the purpose of providing a cover, as it puts forward a false enemy. It appears to be a policy which can be reversed, but they do not want the alternative policy: that is to say, they cannot re-inflate the economy; they ruled that out from the 70s onwards.

Why was there a shift towards finance capital at that time? Some people argue in terms of the falling rate of profit, but there are many arguments against that viewpoint. I think that they simply ruled out reflation because it would lead back to the 70s. If the working class got back to anywhere near full employment, it would start being able to act collectively as a class again; it would become far too powerful. So it is not that they cannot do it: they will not do it. They simply will not take the Keynesian road.

Redistribution?

One can also look at the question more generally. I am thinking in particular of what was said in 2007 by Bill Gross, head of Pacific Investment Management, which holds more than \$1 trillion in government bonds. It may only be half of what the Chinese hold, but it is still pretty important. It was he who declared that British bonds were toxic, and it was this that justified the government's policies of austerity. The influential viewpoint of that company was one of the reasons that the US credit rating was downgraded.

Speaking at the 2007 annual general meeting of his company, he said that it was "far better to recognise that only twice before during the last century has such a high percentage of national income gone to the top 0.1% of American families". This was long before Occupy, and not from a person on the left. It was "far better to understand", he continued, "that society should place an initial emphasis on abundance, and the state should continually strive to distribute the abundance more equitably". One might think that the following might perhaps be a quote from Skidelsky, in his phase as a leftwinger, but it is still Gross: "... when the fruits of society's labour becomes maldistributed, when the rich get richer, and the middle and lower classes struggle to keep their heads above water, as is clearly the case today, then the system ultimately breaks down". He continues: "... boats do not rise equally with the tide; the centre cannot hold."¹

This from a member of the Republican Party who has to be considered an integral and central figure in the ruling class. But that was in 2007. The situation is clearly

much worse today, in terms of income distribution, for example.

The most important aspect of the crisis is the fact that money is not capital. That is to say, there has been a build-up of money which cannot be invested, and when that happens value does not create more value. There is no self-expanding value and money which does not self-expand is not capital. This build-up of trillions around the world is obviously the problem today - the reason why things are getting so desperate and people are starting to demand the government adopts a different policy.

However, the level of unemployment has not risen in the way it did during the great depression. In America it may not be wonderful, but it is a lot better than it was in 1933. That is so precisely because of the policies adopted, which in part has meant that around the world, particularly western Europe and the United States, companies have tended to keep workers on, while effectively decreasing their wages, or have allowed workers to retire early.

The effect is that, although unemployment has risen, it has not done so as fast as it did in the great depression. That is why most economists do not refer to the current situation as a depression, although it does constitute one from Marx's point of view - a point also made by Krugman. A depression is not a matter of one or two quarters without growth, but long-term stagnation, in which there are ups and downs.

The point is that in the recent period the capitalist class has been doing very well: profits have actually gone up during a depression. Well, that cannot last, but it is actually what has happened. So if Bill Gross were to repeat his remarks today (although I am not sure he would) he would have to go even further.

This affluence does not just apply to the top of the capitalist class; it also applies to managers. The income of the top percentile in Britain, the top 11,000 earners, has increased by 50%. As a result, top managers who were previously receiving, say, £2.5 million a year are now getting five million. Not bad. So for some people it has been a rather good depression.

There is increasing antagonism towards people who pocket so much money, although it is not class antagonism as such. Yet the whole argument around companies that are avoiding tax is really a blind alley. That is the nature of capitalism - companies and individuals must always strive to minimise their tax bill. Instead of making a big deal about a managing director who is making 10 million, why not just tax them at say 95% or even 99%? They would still be doing very well compared to most of us.

The reason that will not happen can be explained by the nature of capitalism itself. Obviously, the logic would not just be to tax the capitalist class, but for the state to redistribute their entire wealth to the working class. But that would not be capitalism. So campaigning on the basis of this or that company, or this or that terrible capitalist who does not pay their taxes is really just a way of avoiding fighting the system.

However, that is the kind of form that resistance has taken, and that clearly is where we are today. But the left just seems to go along with this miseducation of the population.

In fact why is it 'responsible' to pay tax? Why do we want to pay for more wars?

South Africa

An interesting aspect of this is that in the third world we can see control beginning to fray. There is an obvious case of this in South Africa, and I would like to say a few words about that. A central question is the crucial role of Stalinism in maintaining the system. Now obviously, the Soviet system no longer exists, and the Chinese Communist Party is a kind of afterlife - market Stalinism, Stalinist capitalism, or whatever one calls it. It is a form of derived Stalinism.

In South Africa, Stalinism is still playing a key role. The fact is - and I have to say this because people do not generally understand it - in 1994, the capitalist class preferred to put in a non-racist government. The whole concept of racial capitalism is simply wrong. The theory was that, in order for capitalism to develop in South Africa, the capitalist class had to use racial discrimination.

I do not intend to go on about this, as I have written a book about the question,² but it does appear to me to be simply wrong. But it was the basis of the South African Communist Party's ideology that took a nationalist line rather than a line against capitalism, putting off the day that capitalism could be overthrown to some time in the future. That, as you know, is the hallmark of Stalinism - there is always some reason why communism is always something for the day after tomorrow.

In South Africa the SACP adopted the line that the essential thing was to end racial discrimination, but the capitalist class would be unwilling to do so. In fact, it meant that they could stop paying white workers between 10 and 20 times what black workers were paid. From the point of view of the capitalist class, this was simply an incubus that they did not need. The result was that the rate of profit was not high and they regarded it as preferable to abolish the wage difference, which is what they did. As a result, profits have gone up, and so it was a successful change from the point of view of the capitalist class.

The South African government includes not only members of the Communist Party, but those who to a large degree they have been influenced, or controlled, by the Communist Party. The major trade unions have also been controlled by the SACP. So when there is an industrial dispute it has been compared to 'playing tennis with yourself' - on one side of the net there is a minister who belongs to the SACP and on the other an SACP union leader.

The unions are closer to Soviet-style unions, except that it is cleverer than that, because they do go on demonstrations, they do demand higher wages and they go on strike. But it is easy to put wages up every year because the *real* wage is something different. Although it is hard to work out the real figures, one could argue that sections of the workforce have either the same wage as in 1994, when the government came in, or a lower wage.

That is the way South Africa has been run for the last 20 years, and why people should have put up with that is not very clear. But things have finally snapped.

The point of going through this description is to show that the form of control rested to a large degree on

Stalinism: the way they actually control the unions and the propaganda they are putting forward. When the government arrived in 1994, and before then, there were slogans all over the place calling for socialism - there was a level of socialist consciousness. But the overall understanding of what socialism would mean and how it would take place was very low, and a lot lower than it was in the 1950s. The level of understanding among the left was very poor.

Unless you understand the nature of Stalinism, you will not understand what has happened in South Africa. And unless you have a more general theory of the global economy, with Stalinism bound up in it, then you will not understand the current economic situation either. The world is in transition - away from capitalism, whilst remaining within capitalism - and there are three sets of laws in operation: the laws of capitalism, the laws of transition and the laws of decline.

In South Africa there are people now in power who talk about socialism, who have spent many years in jail fighting the apartheid regime and who appear to be honest. Some of them are honest and genuine, of course, although many are now millionaires. There is the wonderful example of Cyril Ramaphosa, the former general secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers, who is now a multi-billionaire and director of the company against which workers in Rustenberg have been on strike. He is not the only one.

The point is that there is a highly complex situation, with obviously a very low level of education, including socialist education. The ANC government has one of the worst records on education. According to *The Economist*, it comes somewhere like 120th in the world. So it is not surprising that it has taken 20 years for people to react. It is little wonder that people do not understand socialism when there is a government of multi-millionaires proclaiming themselves to be communists and socialists, presiding over an economy where the majority have very low wages.

That includes the opposition within the African National Congress milieu. Even someone like Julius Malema, the expelled former leader of the ANC Youth League, who calls for the nationalisation of the mines, is simply an opportunist. He is personally very well off and in fact seems to act as a spokesman for outside interests.

Despite this complexity we are now seeing the beginnings of a revolt. So far it is taking a trade union form - demands for higher wages, for more workplace control and so forth; and concessions have been made. And it is not just in the mines. It began in the platinum and other mines, but now it has spread throughout industry and even agriculture. There is a generalised revolt of workers in South Africa, precisely because of the conditions they have to endure, and without there being any understanding, any theory whatsoever, about the underlying causes.

Since perhaps the 50s and 60s, there have been perhaps two countries where Trotskyism has been some kind of force. One was Ceylon, where a Trotskyist faction entered into government, and the other was South Africa. In the Western Cape in particular Trotskyism was dominant on the left, even when it was not dominant in the country as a whole. It

is no accident that quite a significant number of Trotskyists come originally from South Africa. The late Neville Alexander came from that tradition, and was immersed in it in Cape Town. But now it has been degraded, and the level of discussion is very poor. So I do not think you can expect very much more to happen at this time, but it does give hope: if the working class is acting as a whole, then that provides impetus for a left to be formed. One that is to the left of the Communist Party, of course.

Control undermined

Global profits have tended to go up since 2009. But here you have an important source of those profits - the third-world extraction of minerals - being threatened. If you look at the FTSE 100, the *Financial Times* bellwether of companies, a large proportion of those whose profits are under threat are in mining. There is an acceptance that capitalism is in trouble, which is not surprising: they are in trouble and they are going to be in trouble.

Hence the importance of South Africa technically, politically and economically. The interaction between South Africa and other countries on the continent means the revolt will spread. There are many migrants in South Africa because even the low wages paid to workers there are higher than in other African countries. So it is not surprising that workers try to get into the country, and that is why the population has grown so fast in spite of the Aids epidemic. In the 50s, the population stood at around 12 million, and now it is over 50 million. Life expectancy went down under president Thabo Mbeki, dropping to something like 45, but, now that proper HIV medicine is available, it has gone back up to 51.

South Africa is an example of what is happening, and the degree to which they control is being challenged. What I have argued is that, on the one hand, there are the classic means of control: commodity fetishism and the reserve army of labour; on the other hand, they have already been partly shot through. In the period from 1945 to, say, 1972, there was no reserve army of labour in Britain: it is hard to talk of what existed as a simple reserve army, when there were welfare benefits and what Marx would have called a surplus population. But now the intention is to fully restore the reserve army of labour - and for that the reduction of welfare benefits to the absolute minimum is necessary.

Any such attempt will, of course, result in big problems for the capitalist class. Workers will fight for their rights and the fact that capitalism has been overthrown, even if the result was Stalinism, has meant that it can be seen through and exposed, and this will continue to happen as long as capitalism exists. Anyway, the point is that the revolt will spread - it must spread. The stories of what happened, that people were shot down and tortured, are well known. So we can expect the revolt to spread to other countries on the continent - and I would think to other continents too ●

Notes

1. 'Enough is enough' Pimco *Investment Outlook*: http://media.pimco-global.com/pdfs/pdf_sg/IO%20August_07_SGP%20Final.pdf?WT.cg_n=PIMCO-SINGAPORE&WT.ti=IO%20August_07_SGP%20Final.pdf.
2. H Ticktin *The politics of race: discrimination in South Africa* London 1991.

WORKERS POWER

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Leon Trotsky: the Stalinist system was still in its infancy. But we do not have the same excuse

The rise of Stalinism and the emergence of the Soviet socio-economic formation under the first five-year plan posed some very difficult questions for revolutionary Marxists, and started a debate that has continued to this day.

Unlike those who considered that the Soviet Union had become a state-capitalist society, and others who claimed that it represented a new form of exploitative society, Trotsky viewed it as a degenerated workers' state: although, he argued, the Soviet leadership had politically expropriated the working class, it had nonetheless laid the economic basis for a workers' state by establishing a planned economy. Despite its political powerlessness, the proletariat remained the ruling class, and the bureaucracy was a parasitic growth upon society which the working class had to remove from power

if the potential of the economy was to be fully realised.

When Workers Power emerged from a split in the International Socialists back in the mid-1970s, it still adhered to the state capitalism of its parent organisation, but within a few years it had come to accept Trotsky's analysis, and the original edition of this book, published in 1982, was intended to demonstrate its continued validity. However, this adoption of a basic tenet of conventional Trotskyism did not mean that the group endorsed any of the various permutations of Trotsky's analysis presented by Trotskyists in the decades following his death in 1940.

The degenerated revolution provides a detailed account of how the Trotskyist movement managed to be continually wrong-footed in respect of the survival of Stalinism during World

War II and its expansion afterwards, and of Trotsky's analysis by Ernest Mandel, Michel Pablo and Joseph Hansen led many Trotskyist currents to adapt to Stalinism not merely in the Soviet bloc, but also in Tito's Yugoslavia, Mao's China and, especially, Castro's Cuba, and to consider that Stalinist regimes could play a progressive role once they were in power and even be very positive players in the global struggle for socialism. The book also shows that the split in the Fourth International in 1953 and the ensuing demonisation of 'Pabloism' in various international Trotskyist currents not only did not really come to terms with this theoretical confusion and ensuing adaptation to Stalinism, but actually extended it, albeit in different ways.

The degenerated revolution marks itself off from the idea that Stalinism

is entirely counterrevolutionary on the basis that this led, on the one hand, to Mandel considering that, as Tito did seize power in Yugoslavia, he could not have been a Stalinist, and, on the other, to the Lambertists in France adapting to anti-communist forces within the labour movement. It also demurs from the idea that Stalinism has a dual nature, as this leads to 'the petty bourgeois eclecticism of choosing the 'good' or 'positive' acts or aspects of Stalinist policy and supporting them uncritically, while rejecting the 'bad' or 'reactionary' ones (p209), with the result that some of those taking this standpoint ended up endorsing the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the suppression of Solidarność in Poland.

Dualistic theory

However, despite this disavowal, *The degenerated revolution* in fact does

accept the idea that Stalinism did have a progressive side: otherwise why should it implore us to "defend the post-capitalist economies against attack by imperialism or its agents" (p233)? This desire to have it both ways arises from the fact that the basic problem did not start so much with the Trotskyist movement's various distortions of Trotsky's theory, but is inherent in the theory itself, which certainly does promote the idea that Stalinism has a dual nature.

The fact that the property relations in the Soviet Union "were not capitalist and that economic policy was determined by central planning did not mean that this statified property in the USSR had a socialist character", *The degenerated revolution* states confidently (p52). However, this sits unhappily with the veritable rhapsody to Stalinist industrialisation, which

kicked off Trotsky's most substantial and in places incisively critical analysis of Stalinism, *The revolution betrayed* - and which is cited here approvingly on p62: "Socialism has demonstrated its right to victory, not on the pages of *Das Kapital*, but in an industrial arena comprising a sixth part of the Earth's surface - not in the language of dialectics, but in the language of steel, cement and electricity."

Trotsky's analysis of Stalinism ensured that the movement he created was hobbled from the start. Notwithstanding the very valid criticisms that the book makes of the Trotskyist movement on this question after 1940, it is nonetheless unable to escape from the consequences of this flawed theoretical framework.

The degenerated revolution stands firmly in the traditional Trotskyist theoretical framework. It insists that, "while the bourgeoisie under capitalism is a *necessary* component of the relations of production", the bureaucracy was "not ... a necessary element in the planned property relations of the Stalinist economy" (p89). Is this the case? The Soviet bureaucracy did not seize power from a working class that was in control of a functioning planned economy. A genuine planned economy requires *as an absolute necessity* the democratic involvement of producers and consumers in the drawing up and implementation of the plans, but the Soviet working class had been steadily excluded from exercising political and economic power through the 1920s; by the time the first five-year plan was inaugurated in 1928-29, the bureaucracy was already confronting the working class as a ruling elite.

The abandonment of the largely capitalist New Economic Policy, the establishment of a massive industrial base and the breaking of the power of the peasantry by means of forced collectivisation enabled the bureaucracy to become a fully-fledged ruling elite, standing in opposition to the working class and peasantry. As this new economic infrastructure was not organised on a capitalist basis - the law of value being firmly suppressed - but by way of top-down targets, commands and allocations, and *specifically excluded the involvement of the working class* other than purely as subordinates with less rights than those that workers have won in bourgeois democracies, it is fair to consider that the bureaucracy was an "indispensable part" of the Soviet socio-economic formation. It created it, dominated it and managed it on a day-to-day basis, to the exclusion of all other social strata. To consider the bureaucracy as an essentially superfluous excrescence is to make a mockery of Marxist analysis. It involves the wrenching apart of the economic infrastructure from the political superstructure, as if there were no essential interrelationship between them in a Stalinist society.

As a result of the absence of market relations and their only viable replacement, democratic planning, the Soviet economy was institutionally and operationally dysfunctional from the very start of the first five year plan. Even after the extremely precarious situation of the early 1930s had passed, it was affected by a wide range of problems at every level. Plan targets were rarely met, and perennial problems included a lack of coordination and disproportions amongst the different sectors of the economy and within individual sectors; falsified statistics; poor product quality, resulting in vast quantities of defective goods; poor labour discipline and lack of skills; lack of innovation and discouragement of initiative; and poor maintenance and storekeeping.

Irrespective of the considerable quantitative and to a lesser degree qualitative achievements of the Soviet economy, these factors were not isolated occurrences or teething problems, but were *inherent in the system* - a nec-

essary result of the property relations established under the first five-year plan, and therefore never eradicated. To call this dysfunctional mess 'planning', even if qualified by the word 'bureaucratic', is to demean the very meaning of economic planning under socialism: any similarity between the Soviet command economy and the planned economy of a socialist society was therefore purely coincidental and superficial. This book dismisses all too easily those who concluded that the Soviet Union suffered from 'planlessness', a concept that first appeared in the early 1930s and which looks all the more valid in the light of historical observation.

Faulty analogy

The degenerated revolution follows Trotsky in the insistence that "the working class remained the ruling class because the property forms in existence were those that the working class requires in order to build socialism" (p89). But how indeed could the Soviet Union be a 'workers' state' if the working class was cruelly oppressed by the ruling bureaucracy, stripped of practically all of its democratic rights?

Trotsky's explanation - that the working class was only *politically* expropriated by the bureaucracy and that, because the economy was not capitalist and rested upon an economic foundation ultimately made possible by the success of the October Revolution, it was nonetheless the ruling class - is unconvincing. His analogy with fascism - that a victorious fascist party politically expropriates the bourgeoisie, but that, as capitalism still exists, that stratum thus remains the ruling class - is also unconvincing. While the bourgeoisie does not require democratic structures to be able to rule, and the capitalist classes in fascist countries have broadly appreciated the fascists' suppression of the working class, socialism requires a workers' democracy as a *prerequisite*.

Without workers' democracy, not only does the working class lack political and economic power, *but the socialist nature of the society goes into abeyance*. Should the working class for whatever reason relinquish its political and economic power, some other social force must take over the reins of state power - either a revived capitalist class or a new elite emerging from the state machinery that the working class can no longer control - and this cannot but have a substantial effect throughout society.

The degenerated revolution endorses Trotsky's accusation that to view the victory of the bureaucracy as signifying a change in the socio-economic nature of the Soviet Union is to predicate such a shift originating in the superstructure of society, rather than in its economic infrastructure. But this accusation is based upon a crude, schematic reading of Marxism. Changes initiated in the superstructure can impact upon the infrastructure. The tremendous transformation of the economic infrastructure in the Soviet Union after 1928-29 was inaugurated by the bureaucracy - that is, by a conscious decision within the superstructure - and these changes in turn impacted back upon the bureaucracy: they provided the material base by which the bureaucracy could become a fully-fledged ruling elite. This was not unique to the Soviet Union: an analogous process occurred in 19th-century Japan and Germany, when the ruling elites consciously decided to develop a capitalist economy and by so doing transformed themselves into authentic bourgeoisies.

The working class in a Stalinist state did not need to expropriate a capitalist class, but nonetheless was required to *seize state power from the bureaucracy* and assert its control of the means of production and distribution in order to start running soci-

ety in *its* interest. This was a task as thoroughly revolutionary as anything facing the working class under capitalism. The Stalinist state could not be taken over ready-made and used in the interests of the working class any more than the state in capitalist society. It was not a question of the working class overcoming the obstacles "to the full realisation of the potential of the property relations of the USSR" (p89), but the *replacement* of those property relations by those of socialism, the *replacement* of the regime's systemically inefficient and wasteful bureaucratic administration of the economy by economic planning, democratically elaborated and implemented by the producers and consumers.

Question of reform

The degenerated revolution devotes barely half a dozen pages to two key events in Soviet history: the process of de-Stalinisation after 1953 and the abortive Liberman market reforms of the 1960s. Trotsky considered that the insecure social position of the Soviet elite as result of its being a parasitic excrescence necessarily made its rule chaotic and convulsive, and that the extreme violence of the Soviet regime during the 1930s was symptomatic of that insecurity. His insistence upon the centrality of terror to the Soviet regime implied heavily that any genuine measure of liberalisation of the regime was an impossibility, and this book duly points to "the inability of Stalinism to survive as anything other than a regime of terror" (pp90-91) - after having denied that Stalin's malignant personality was responsible for the great terror (p80).

Firstly, unlike the violence that was a central feature of the first five-year plan - which was inevitable once the decision had been made to engage in breakneck industrialisation and forcibly collectivise the peasantry - that of the great terror was the policy choice of Stalin himself as a means of dealing with his rivals in the party leadership (the show trials) and disciplining the bureaucracy as a whole (the wider purges). Had Stalin been replaced by Kirov around the time of the 17th Party Congress in 1934, it is extremely unlikely that the great terror would have occurred.

Secondly, the Soviet leadership *did* manage to forgo mass terror and arbitrary rule after Stalin's death, and it *did* liberalise the regime to a considerable degree. De-Stalinisation was not "an attempt to return to the norms of pre-1934 Stalinism" (p78). Although after 1953 the Soviet Union remained a police state with considerable restrictions upon democratic rights, the regime never again resorted to the degree of coercion seen during the first five-year plan, let alone that of the great terror. The suppression of the Hungarian revolution in 1956 and the repression of rebellious workers in Novocherkassk in 1962 were exceptions, not the rule.

The proposed Liberman reforms of the 1960s were the result of considerable discussion within the Soviet apparatus during Khrushchev's time as leader in respect of the slowing down of the rate of growth of the Soviet economy. Nonetheless, despite their modest nature, these proposals for a degree of marketisation in the economy were soon abandoned because, although the Soviet leaders recognised that all was not well in the economy, they instinctively understood that any major move towards introducing the market would have unpredictable consequences. The last thing any Soviet bureaucrat wanted was uncertainty, and the bureaucracy was loath to try anything even slightly risky, let alone something that could undermine its entire social foundation.

However, in the light of the stag-

nation that was soon to affect the Soviet economy, and the dynamism of the Chinese economy after it introduced market measures, one might ask whether the Soviet bureaucracy could have avoided its fate by fully engaging in a thoroughgoing process of market reforms in the 1960s, when the economy still had some life left in it and had not yet slipped irreversibly into stagnation. Unfortunately, despite covering in some detail both the terminal decline of the Soviet economy and the move to the market in China, this is a question that *The degenerated revolution* does not ask.

National development

If the Soviet Union was not a state-capitalist country, did not represent a new form of class society and was not a workers' state, however degenerated, what was it? Hillel Ticktin has provided an analysis which convincingly argues that the Soviet socio-economic formation was an historical accident that was the result of the bureaucratisation of an isolated workers' state, and was inherently unstable and historically unviable because it did not constitute a new mode of production. That the Soviet economy lasted barely six decades from the promulgation of the first five-year plan (with the last decade being one of terminal decline following one of stagnation), that the tendency towards declining growth rates was both immanent to the system and irreversible within it, and that the Chinese bureaucracy openly went for the market a little more than two decades after the 'great leap forward', show that we did not have an historically viable social formation.

It is worth placing the Soviet-style socio-economic formation in the broader historical context of the development of capitalism on a world scale. Well over a century ago, Marx wrote in the third volume of *Capital* how capitalism was forced to distort its own laws of motion in order to advance, by means of suppressing competition through monopolies and joint-stock companies, and Engels extended the analysis in *Anti-Dühring* by investigating the use of the state within capitalist society. The experience of the Soviet-style socio-economic formation enables us to take their observations to a new level.

If one strips the Soviet-style socio-economic formation of its ideological facade, and considers it as what it really was - a programme of intense national economic and social development, in a country in which a state apparatus under a forceful leadership takes the place of a non-existent or failed bourgeoisie - then some interesting factors come to light. The Soviet Union and China were the last significant countries to undergo a profound process of indigenous modernisation. Both were huge states containing vast amounts of natural and human resources. Both had at their helm a national leadership that was determined to push aside all internal resistance and external opposition in order to carry out its programme. And under this leadership, and with these essential resources, these countries were indeed transformed into modern industrial societies. The process was often haphazard, wasteful and inhuman, but, all in all, the basis for a modern industrial society was indeed laid down. Within a world dominated by a few imperialist powers, the far-reaching modernisation in the Soviet Union and China required the suppression of the law of value. The changes that took place under Stalin and Mao could not have occurred if the ruling criterion in their societies had been profitability.

Where else since the dawn of the 20th century has this process of indigenous modernisation been car-

ried out? There have been relatively coherent examples, such as in the British dominions and South Korea, but the process here was encouraged by imperialist states and carried out under their aegis. In most of the non-imperialist world, modernisation has been patchy and lop-sided, and modern industry, where it exists, sits incongruously alongside primitive agriculture and vast, barely productive shanty-towns. The national leadership in India has proved unable to root out pre-bourgeois social forces; the current industrial development of Brazil is largely dependent upon investments from the big powers, with a great deal coming from China.

The irony of the Soviet-style socio-economic formation is that, whilst it can forcibly modernise a big, backward country, there is a limit to its ability to maintain the process of modernisation. As the Soviet economy matured under Stalin's successors, its growth rates declined, but the Soviet elite backed away from embarking on the programme of market reforms that it considered introducing as a means to reverse this process. The result was stagnation and ultimate collapse: the transition under Gorbachev and his post-Soviet successors was not to a modern capitalist society, but to Russia becoming more akin to an impoverished, gangster-ridden third-world supplier of primary products.

The institution of a serious process of market reforms in the 1960s may well have enabled the Soviet elite to embark upon a far more successful transition to the market. Success would not, of course, have been guaranteed; but the results could not have possibly been worse for the rulers than what actually happened. The Chinese elite, however, keenly watching the stagnation to the north, realised that, if it were to survive, let alone thrive, it needed carefully to guide the Chinese economy back to the market. This it has done with considerable aplomb and, even if success is not guaranteed, China is in a better position than most of the developed capitalist powers to confront today's parlous economic situation.

So what we actually had was a *temporary process* of non-capitalist national modernisation that would enable the Soviet and Chinese elites to build up their societies - not to build a socialist society (why would any ruling elite wish to relinquish its social power?), but, whether they realised it or not, so that they could at some point rejoin the capitalist world. To paraphrase Marx's *The holy family*, it is not a question of what this or that Stalinist bureaucrat, or even the whole bureaucracy, at the moment regarded as its aim; it is a question of *what the bureaucracy was*, and what, in accordance with this *being*, it would historically be compelled to do. Compelled to rejoin the capitalist world, the Soviet bureaucracy fatally misjudged its re-entry; its Chinese counterpart has timed it well.

The degenerated revolution defends a theoretical construct which was faulty when it was conceived during the 1930s and which has consistently misled the Trotskyist movement and underpinned many of its major miscalculations over many decades. Back when Trotsky was evolving the theory, he did have the mitigating circumstances that he was confronted by a socio-economic formation that was only just coming into being and that his knowledge of it was constricted to some degree by the relatively limited amount of information available, exacerbated by the difficulties of working in exile. Marxists today do not have those excuses ●

Paul Flowers

A longer version of this review will appear in the next issue of *Revolutionary History*

ROTHERHAM

Who's fit to be a parent?

If members of 'mainstream' parties should not be barred from fostering, asks **Eddie Ford**, what about us 'extremists'?

Last week's headlines were dominated by the furore over a Rotherham couple who had their foster children removed from their care after the council was "tipped off" about their membership of the United Kingdom Independence Party. They had been approved foster parents for seven years and had been caring for three young children.

Rotherham council was worried, so it seems, that since the children were "not indigenous white British" (rather from an eastern European "migrant background") the couple would not make appropriate foster parents, given Ukip's stance on immigration. Telling their story to *The Daily Telegraph*, the couple quote a social worker saying Ukip "does not like European people" and "wants them all out of the country to be returned to their own countries" - hence the assertion that they would not have been the "right cultural match" for the children. Furthermore, another social worker, they say, claimed Ukip has "racist policies" - the implication being, presumably, that the couple must hold racist views themselves. Seeing how the council has to consider the "needs of the children longer term", the couple were told, it had no choice but to take the children away from them.

The couple went on to tell the *Telegraph* that they had been "stigmatised and slandered", denying they were racists. In fact, "we were actively encouraging these children to speak their own language" and "enjoyed singing one of their folk songs in their native language" - and, having been told the religious denomination of the children, "we took steps to ensure that a school of their denomination was found". Unsurprisingly, the couple have called on the council to make a "public apology" and "clear their record" as foster parents.

Apparently, the siblings were subsequently split up - the boy placed with one family, while the two girls, one of whom is a baby, were sent to another. These families, it is reported, are "white British" and we can only assume that - unlike the couple - they can meet the 'cultural needs' of the children. They might even be members or supporters of 'respectable' organisations like the Labour Party, Liberal Democrats or the Conservative Party, which doubtlessly would be a great source of comfort to the children.

Funny

The first thing that has to be said is a lot of hot air and righteous fury has been generated by this matter. Another precautionary note to strike is that the 'scandal' has been generously milked by the *Telegraph* and other rightwing newspaper such as *The Sun*, which, of course, have their own reactionary axes to grind - the inequities of 'loony left' councils, 'political correctness', social worker 'do-gooders', and so on.

But at the end of the day we in the CPGB have no more idea than anyone else as to what Rotherham council's case notes say. The social workers concerned may have access to information that we simply do not have. In other words, we are ignorant of the facts. When a senior councillor at the Labour-run Rotherham council warned about people "wading in to pass judgement" on the row without

"any real knowledge" of the case, they might possibly have a point.

Nevertheless Rotherham was hardly going out of its way to dispute the parents' version of events. Joyce Thacker, the council's £130,000-a-year strategic director of children and young people's services, told the BBC's *Today* programme that she had come to the decision to remove the children after a "lot of soul-searching", but what the listeners had to understand was she had been "criticised before for not making sure" that the cultural and ethnic needs of non-indigenous children were being met. The council had to be *seen* to be trying to cater for those needs of the children under their care in order to avoid the possibility of censure. For instance, she explained, if the Ukip "party mantra" is for "ending the active promotion of multiculturalism" (to use her own words), then she has to "think about that".

Similarly, the leader of Rotherham council, Roger Stone, was at pains to emphasise that this remains a "very complex case involving legal advice" - not least the "particular features" of the children's background and an "external agency" responsible for providing the foster carers concerned. Naturally, the council is now working hard to "establish the facts" and "make sure all the correct procedures were carried out" before the decision to remove the children was made.

However, a council spokesperson said "issues" had been raised regarding the "long-term suitability" of the Rotherham couple fostering "these particular children". Because of their Ukip membership? Absolutely not, they insisted - being a member of Ukip "should not bar someone from fostering" and the couple would be allowed to foster other children in the future.

Anyhow, specifics aside for now, the *Weekly Worker* is entitled to speak about the general questions and issues thrown up by the Rotherham row - which for us are relatively simple. There is no *inherent* reason why Ukip members cannot make good and effective foster parents. To say anything else would be absurd, if not inhuman. In terms of principle, people should be judged purely on their ability to look after kids and cater for their needs (and that would certainly involve encouraging them to speak the language of their parents and understand their culture - otherwise how could they communicate with and relate to their mother, father, aunts, grandparents, etc?). It is perfectly possible that a Ukip member could do that, whilst a Labour Party member could not. This should be obvious.

After all, people are *funny* and having truly dreadful politics does not necessarily make them truly dreadful people. Have you read the Labour manifesto recently? Thanks to the narrow, class-based 'education' system and the regressive mass media, people inevitably have all manner of irrational ideas. Sometimes next to madness, as far as communists are concerned - the recent Church of England synod debate and vote over women bishops amply confirms that. When it comes to thinking or dealing with people you do not personally know or events beyond your immediate environment, there is a tendency to make sweeping prejudicial judgements - they are not like us. Scroungers. Lazy.

However, it can be a very different story indeed if you are talking about the person next door or someone you regularly drink with down the pub - which is not to say, of course, that you automatically love them. But most people get on with most people most of the time. Therefore people who utter racist nonsense can have black friends and happily eat an Indian takeaway. We all know that.

Alienated

The question does not end there though. Given that we *all* live in a thoroughly alienated, perverted and distorted society, none of us - sadly - are fully human. No exceptions. Therefore in that sense *none of us are fit to be parents* - whether 'naturally' or by fostering/adoption.

Yet we would fight tooth and nail against any legislation or decree, or even the merest suggestion, to the effect that only those who have passed some sort of test will be allowed to have children or become parents. The fact that you are gay, straight, Tory, Labour, Liberal, Socialist Workers Party, CPGB, etc in and of itself means you are no more or less likely to be a loving parent than anyone else. Society may be fucked-up, but *despite* that we can still manage to express our humanity by helping to bring up the next generation. Just as importantly, people's ideas *change* - even if they are members of the British National Party or Ukip. Politics is not fate.

Logically, this can only mean that we should - and this is not something I say very often - agree with education secretary Michael Gove (himself adopted), when he said the decision to remove the Rotherham children was "arbitrary, ideological and indefensible" - *if*, that is, it was taken purely on the basis of Ukip membership and not for some other reason that we do not yet know about. But Gove also said that any council or agency which decides that support for a "mainstream" party disbars an individual from looking after children in care would be "sending a dreadful signal that will only decrease the number of loving homes available to children in need". It obviously would. But what about *non*-"mainstream" parties?

Predictably, but interestingly nevertheless, Gove ducked a direct question from a BBC presenter who asked whether a BNP couple could also make "acceptable" foster parents. The hapless Gove, of course, had no choice but to huff and puff about the "unacceptability" of racism and suchlike. He fudged it. A

dilemma raised by a letter to the *Telegraph*, which asks: "Would Joyce Thacker ... take similar action to prevent children from being fostered by members of the SWP, which calls for revolution and supports law-breaking by its members?" (November 26).

The CPGB, on the other hand, has no problem in giving a straight answer. Unlike some on the left, we will not torture ourselves about the nature of the 'Nazi' BNP. What is sauce for the goose is surely sauce for the gander. We can think of no earthly reason why BNP members should *automatically* be ruled out as potential foster parents - officially 'no-platformed', so to speak. But, of course, their attitudes and sensibilities would, naturally, have to be taken into account. It would be inhuman to hand over kids from a 'non-indigenous' or migrant background to people who think that they and their parents should be repatriated or treated as second-class citizens.

Actually, Ukip is *fundamentally* no different from the mainstream parties - it only differs by degree, not qualitatively. It currently has 12 MEPs, 31 councillors and three peers in the House of Lords (all Tory defectors). Ukip describes itself as a "libertarian, non-racist party seeking Britain's withdrawal from the EU". No wonder party leader Nigel Farage is "very angry" and "very upset" at the suggestion that Ukip is against immigration - let alone David Cameron's famous 2006 LBC comment that the organisation is a "bunch of fruitcakes and loonies and closet racists mostly". Replying, Farage indignantly declared on the *Today* show that he believes in "controlled immigration" - yes, just like Tories, Liberal Democrats or Labour. And, of course, there are no "loonies" or "fruitcakes" in any of those parties - god forbid.

While it goes without saying that Ukip is more extreme than the Tories or Labour, ultimately it *shares* the national chauvinism of the mainstream parties ●

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Nigel Farage: furious

REVIEW

Rapid development
 and workers' struggle

Minoru Yasumoto **The rise of a Victorian ironopolis: Middlesbrough and regional industrialisation** Boydell Press, 2011, pp250, £60



Middlesbrough: workers' recognition

Not for the casual reader, this comprehensive work charts the remarkable rise of Middlesbrough, Britain's foremost iron town. Middlesbrough was a town which grew like Topsy seemingly overnight. It was said it was not discovered: it was manufactured - "Cincinnati and Chicago are perhaps the best specimens of American-made towns with which Middlesbrough can be compared: but these do not equal in self-sustaining vigour or rapidly of growth of the Pease-founded colony on the banks of the Tees" (L Praed *History of the rise and progress of Middlesbrough* Newcastle 1863, p3).

When the owners of the estate started planning the town in 1831, it had only 383 inhabitants. As it began expanding, migrants came from Yorkshire, elsewhere in England, Ireland and Scotland. As the process continued, the Irish population would be greater here than any other English town other than Liverpool. Middlesbrough was originally a railway town, used to transport coal from south-west Durham, but after the discovery of rich iron ore deposits in 1850, the town grew swiftly through the expansion of iron and steel manufacture.

A whole chapter is devoted to a case study of the initially voluntary North Ormesby Hospital, and the development of medical facilities provided by workers themselves through popular subscription. The town's working class spearheaded a wide range of forms of self-organisation, driven by the rapid industrial development, as well as the human causalities of the manic industrial process.

The great strike and lockout in 1865-66 had deep and lasting effects on the industrial relations culture of the steel industry. Iron and steel were among the first industries where workers' organisations won recognition, but the employers ensured they were tied into a binding arbitration process. However, the nature of the plants and ongoing industrial processes made them highly vulnerable to wholesale unofficial industrial action. The great strike of 1866 had led to the creation of the Board of Arbitration and Conciliation for the North of England Manufactured Iron Trade, aimed at heading off class conflict. From the late 1860s to the end of the 19th century the joint arbitration

board had introduced a sliding scale to fix wage rates. Unlike the coal industry where a similar sliding scale had ensured the systematic forcing down of wages to poverty levels and lower, causing mass upsurges of industrial militancy and anti-bureaucratic struggles, in the iron industry, doubtless as a result of the insights gained from observing the coal industry, things did not work in this way. The sliding scale, though tying the union into the corporate body of the industry, seems to have been advantageous to the workers, at least when compared to other industries and regions.

"In 1869 its first verdict was to raise wages from 8s to 8s 6d per ton. In 1872 came an increase in puddlers wages of one shilling per ton, followed by a further rise of 2s, bringing the puddlers pay to 2s 6d per ton. The following year they had a further 9d. While these improvements in pay did not proportionally match the ironmasters increases in profits, and of course there were intermittent falls, the institutions' effectiveness in rising wage levels should not be dismissed. Between 1870 and 1880

above all in the first half of the 1870s there was a sharp rise in ironworkers pay and in real earnings on Teesside" (p191).

Lest anyone draw the conclusion that paternalist incorporation and kindly employers are the answer, we should note that this response resulted from *fear* - fear that the workers might adopt militant tactics or develop less conciliatory organisations.

Another interesting fact revealed by the book is that the whole period of migration saw a massive imbalance of gender proportions - overwhelmingly it was young men who were on the move and sinking new roots. The scene must have resembled the frontier and gold rush towns of America and Australia.

Middlesbrough's contribution to the industrial development of Britain and the world is in many ways pioneering and unique. This study, although largely a statistical and economic history, will doubtless become an authority on the town's industrialisation and rapid development ●

David Douglass

Fighting fund

£164 needed in two days

With this month's fighting fund ending on November 30, we are still £164 short of our £1,500 target. But there are two efficient ways in which you can help us out and make sure we get that essential cash in time.

First, there is the *Weekly Worker* PayPal facility on our website (the number of visitors it had was down a bit last week, by the way, at 9,142). Just get out your card and we'll have your donation within minutes. Second, you can transfer money directly to the paper (account number: 00744310; sort code: 30-99-64) from your online bank account. Another speedy operation. Either way, we could do with that money - we don't want to add to the shortfall from earlier in the year after we've been doing so well recently.

The bulk of donations received this week once more came in the shape of

those regular standing orders - eight of them, ranging from £5 to £75 (thank you, JT!). They amounted to £197. Then there were three cheques in the post: £20 each from KN and FC, plus £15 added by OG to her resubscription. So the £242 received over the last seven days takes our November total to £1,336 - thanks to one and all. But we still need to finish off the job!

So if you've been thinking of helping our paper's fight for a single, united Marxist party, but haven't yet got round to doing so - well, there's no time like the present! ●

Robbie Rix

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

What we
 fight for

- Our central aim is the organisation of communists, revolutionary socialists and all politically advanced workers into a Communist Party. Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.
- The Provisional Central Committee organises members of the Communist Party, but there exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called 'parties' on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed 'line' are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.
- Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.
- Communists oppose all imperialist wars and occupations but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question - ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.
- Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, 'One state, one party'. To the extent that the European Union becomes a state then that necessitates EU-wide trade unions and a Communist Party of the EU.
- The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.
- Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.
- Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally. All forms of nationalist socialism are reactionary and anti-working class.
- The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote. They will resist using every means at their disposal. Communists favour using parliament and winning the biggest possible working class representation. But workers must be ready to make revolution - peacefully if we can, forcibly if we must.
- Communists fight for extreme democracy in all spheres of society. Democracy must be given a social content.
- We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.
- Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.
- Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women's oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.
- Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin's Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.
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weekly Worker

**Establishment
is furious with
its church**

Irrelevant? If only

The Church of England's failure to accept women bishops is embarrassing, but solutions short of disestablishment are absurd, argues **Paul Demarty**

Whatever else may be said about it, the Church of England is terribly English. England is part of a modern, capitalist nation, yet the image it sells abroad is of palaces and pageantry, the stuff of a dead aristocracy preserved as a marketable symbol. England is permanently in a quiet, polite identity crisis, which is primarily of a temporal nature.

Nothing embodies this more eloquently than the established church. It, too, has the patina of timeless continuity to it (despite stemming, in a basically contingent way, from the grubby power-politics that grew up around the reformation and counter-reformation). Yet it is infamous for being the church of liberal vicars, of the touchy-feely individualist spirituality that characterises our age, and of people who can barely be said to believe in god at all.

Mostly, this is the cause for beatific tolerance. We tolerate this tottering institution with an ironic but affectionate smile, because its quaintnesses are - in the national myth - our own. Not so this week: the C of E general synod failed to ratify a tortuous compromise plan between the trendy vicars and traditionalists, which would allow women to become bishops.

The decision-making process itself is quite a spectacle, somewhat reminiscent of the tsarist дума, with its class-divided curia structure. Three bodies had to pass the vote by a qualified majority - the houses of bishops, clergy and laity. A majority of each voted in favour - most overwhelmingly the bishops. But the vote in the house of laity did not meet the two-thirds threshold, missing it by an agonising six votes.

'Agonising' is the word of the week. The debate on the day lasted for *nine hours*, and was by all accounts turgid. This is primarily due to the dishonest tactics of the opponents of women bishops - a motley bunch of bible-thumping fundamentalists, Anglo-Catholics and other oddities. They are all opposed *in principle* to women having authority over men.

What they make of the formal head of the church - her majesty the queen, *fidei defensatrix*, to whom everyone from the parish vicar to the archbishop of Canterbury is in theory answerable - is difficult to gauge. Biblical references in support of this stance are of a piece with all 'traditionalist' biblical references. The Good Book will be taken at face value where it reconfirms already-held prejudices. Where it does not - eg, the sanctification of genocide in the Old Testament - some clever theological construction will be pressed into service as a convenient dodge. The principle is not fidelity to the *Bible*, but fidelity to patriarchal oppression of women *as such*.

Given all this, the traditionalists preferred to argue as if they were well-meaning brokers of a compromise between Lambeth Palace and an inert, off-stage mass of old-school Christians, and feared for the 'unity' of the church if further provisions were not made



Monstrous regiment?

for conscientious objectors to female bishops. The agreed provisions were quite generous enough already; but it is the C of E mainstream that suffers if the policy is not passed, not the lunatic fringe, which are quite happy to cock a snook at modernity. They have outgoing archbishop and self-proclaimed 'bearded leftie' Rowan Williams over a barrel.

This is the 'salami slice' tactic so beloved of anti-abortionists, only in reverse - every inch of ground the traditionalists concede, they do so only with the most vigorous guerrilla battles. They fight hard and they fight dirty. In this case, they fought just hard and dirty enough.

Who, anyway, *is* the house of laity? The bishops and clergy are self-explanatory - and rigorously on message. The house of laity is supposed to represent ordinary churchgoers (in fact, it embodies the notion, so central to the C of E, that the highest 'lay member' of them all - the monarch - is the supreme authority). There is no such thing as an ordinary churchgoer, however; the system of elections inevitably favours evangelicals, who disproportionately make up the forces sufficiently invested in the future

direction of the church to sit through the interminable dullness of the parish and deanery committees which, in turn, elect the general synod.

The response from the establishment has been, on the whole, a forceful collective facepalm. David Cameron, a lay Anglican (by his own admission, not especially observant), urged the church to "get with the programme" - a very C of E, trendy-vicar phrase. Politicians of all stripes (barring the Tory right, of course) are deeply embarrassed. The *principle* of women's equality has been conceded in just about every sphere of life, even where the reality remains stubbornly resistant to change. The church sticks out like a sore thumb.

There have been suggestions that the church may be brought to book under existing equalities legislation. In fact, it may already be - just as the British National Party had its whites-only membership rule overturned by a European court, so it may be that putative women bishops may have a case before the European Union judiciary themselves for discrimination.

That would be a fittingly absurd outcome. Yet it is difficult to imagine it coming to pass. EU law may be judicially binding, but it would lack

the requisite moral authority to bring the lay synod members (to which body new elections will not take place until 2014) to heel. In fact, it may *reduce* the vote simply in protest. The most likely outcome would be the one the church bureaucracy fears the most, even now - a split.

For similar reasons, veiled threats from the government to enforce gender parity are unlikely to amount to much. In Britain, it is said, politicians 'don't do god'. This is utterly false, though it is true that we do not make such a song and dance of it as the Americans; but in this particular case, dabbling in the internal affairs of the church is best avoided. Cameron would inevitably face a rebellion from his own right wing, which would serve to remind the country that his party remains the natural home of misogynistic wing-nuts. Splitting the Church of England would not be a particularly good mark on a Tory CV either.

More to the point, the direct governance of a religious institution by state power - while it is written in the Church of England's DNA - looks pretty ridiculous in this day and age. We no longer persecute heretics and non-established faiths, shaky relations with Islam notwithstanding. Faith is ostensibly a private matter - indeed, that very 'privacy' is the main means whereby theologically inspired reactionary politics are insulated from criticism. (George Carey, with his infamous comparison of himself and others opposed to gay marriage to the victims of Nazi concentration camps, provides a graphically stupid example.)

Who the hell is David Cameron to tell the Church of England that it should not enforce sexist mumbo jumbo as a matter of its dogma? (Never mind the European courts!) Surely it should be the choice of the church itself. Yet it *cannot* be - precisely because it is an established church. Looking for rational solutions to religious difficulties is

always a counter-intuitive matter, but it is surely rational even from the religious point of view to disestablish the church, freeing it from the need to track the political exigencies of the bourgeoisie.

Many a true word is spoken in jest, however, and those who joke about the faithlessness of the Anglican clergy have a point. The church does not exist primarily as a *religious*, but as a *state*, institution. It benefits enormously from this arrangement in a thoroughly worldly manner. The church is one of the largest landowners in the country. It enjoys enormous state subsidies and privileged access to power. In return, it need only do one thing - put a brake on the forward motion of society, act out its purpose in the dignified part of the British constitution, spread obedience to authority and other fine and noble Christian doctrines.

The issue of whether women should be entitled to be bishops is something of a distraction. Yes, a single dent in a reactionary institution and its reactionary ideological base is better than nothing. Yet it is no more than a dent. Defence of patriarchy is hard-wired into *every* major world religion. Progressive-minded women of faith, instead of trying to smash the stained-glass ceiling, might want to wonder why that is, and why such ideology is so hard to shift in religious institutions; they will not find the answer in the *Bible* or the *Bhagavad Gita*, but in a materialist analysis of religion.

As far as the Church of England goes, such an analysis has one key lesson. Disestablishment of the church, the seizure of all its lands and property not directly connected to worship, and the enforcement of full secularism in society - that is, the absolute separation of church and state *across the board* - is an essential part of overturning bourgeois power ●

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