



**Origins of the SWP  
crisis. Tony Cliff as a  
third-period Blairite**

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# China Miéville and Richard Seymour speak out



# LETTERS



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

## Rebellion

Last week I attended an SWP public meeting in the immediate aftermath of the conference, and what I found surprising was its uncharacteristic level of constructive debate.

In the interest of protecting the identities of the comrades involved, names and places have been redacted. I hope the comrades involved understand that I write this in the interest of facilitating the widest possible debate about ideas and democracy.

The speaker reporting back from conference began by talking about the disputes committee session. They told the meeting that they had voted against the report and explained that - despite the best intentions of the DC - investigating rape allegations was well beyond the remit and ability of the SWP, that whatever the committee had done it would have been wrong, and that this was a serious mistake that needed to be learned from. A young woman asked whether the same people had been re-elected onto the disputes committee, and we were told that they had - presumably because no alternative candidates had been proposed.

We were then told that the branch delegates had voted with the minority against the expulsion of four comrades accused of organising a secret faction.

The big discussion during the meeting was about party democracy. One member repeated the central committee's allegation of the Democratic Opposition proposing a "federalist" structure, and talking about "anarchists" and "autonomists", though this was corrected by the speaker. The same member commented that the SWP's internal democracy had been "good enough" over the years, though recognised that some changes might be necessary and that a dialogue about what sort of democratic structures were necessary needed to be had.

The speaker indicated that they were in favour of some of the milder proposals put to the conference, such as bulletins before party council. They also admitted that the Democratic Opposition and the Democratic Centralist factions had drawn up their proposals in a very short period of time and recognised that more time was needed in order to produce better proposals.

I argued that if they wanted to continue the debate about internal democracy then they ought to allow the two factions to continue in the post-conference period - it was because factions had to dissolve that this discussion could not continue. I said it was important to allow them to organise in the post-conference period in order that a set of coherent ideas could be developed and taken to the next conference. I pointed out that the SWP does not have any alternative structures to allow any meaningful debate about internal democracy.

The main counter-arguments against allowing factions were that they doomed an organisation to failure: the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste and the Fourth International were proof of this; and that allowing factions would prevent the SWP from effectively engaging in activity because they would be permanently preoccupied with theoretical discussion. One member claimed that the SWP spends three months debating theory and strategy in the pre-conference period and then spends the next nine months carrying out the decisions made at conference. It was further claimed that the SWP is a Leninist party and

that its current internal regime is an example of democratic centralism.

I pointed out that the Bolsheviks had allowed factions to develop their own ideas and produce their own daily newspapers - Bukharin and *Kommunist* for example - that attacked the leadership, yet the Bolsheviks successfully carried out a revolution. I said that the SWP cannot, on the one hand, claim the political legacy of Lenin and the Bolsheviks, while, on the other hand, refuse to allow factions to develop and argue for a set of ideas in order to encourage debate and achieve clarity of ideas in the group as a whole. I also argued that debate and activity are not counterpoised to one another: they should be practised side by side. Finally, if the argument to allow factions appears "sensible and reasonable", as one SWP member present commented, it is because it is. It should not be dismissed because of the problems with the NPA.

The most notable thing about the meeting was that, despite the insistence that comrades would adhere to the SWP's conception of democratic centralism, they risked expulsion by openly defying the central committee ban on talking about 'comrade Delta' in public and seriously discussing their thoughts on internal democracy in the post-conference period.

Comrades, you clearly want to discuss what went wrong, to discuss the lessons that need to be learned, while the central committee tries to silence dissent and declare, 'Case closed'. Don't accept the CC nonsense that this is navel-gazing: it is not; it has had wider political consequences in the past.

If you think that it is wrong that the same people are still on the disputes committee after their ramshackle investigation of the comrade Delta allegations, that it is wrong their comrades have been expelled for raising legitimate criticisms, and that the debate about internal democracy needs to continue - if you want to save the SWP - follow the recent example of other comrades and rebel.

You have already taken the first step. Encourage others to do the same.

**Andrew Thompson**  
email

## Shocking

In our egalitarian hunter-gatherer past, the rule against rape was the foundation of all culture. If the human body isn't sacred, what is?

But today in patriarchal class societies, whether that means institutions such as the BBC, the police, children's homes or the church, internal cultural forces protect the vested interests of the powerful to the point where they crush any victim who dares raise their voice.

So how shocking is it that a socialist organisation as significant as the SWP - which pays lip service to debating issues of class and gender inequality - should fall into the same pattern: closing ranks around their leadership, and expelling anyone who questioned the procedures used to investigate allegations?

How shocking is it when Tom Walker tells us that "feminism is used effectively as a swear word" by leadership supporters against class-conscious comrades such as Hannah Dee? Walker notes this is a "legacy of a sharp political argument conducted decades ago against radical feminism and its separatist methods of organisation" ('Why I am resigning', January 10).

There is a history of SWP paranoia about women's right to organise. In my experience of engaging in SWP debates on the origins of women's oppression, at Marxism in the early 1990s, I was one among several

academic colleagues - some members of the SWP, others not - who reported on cutting-edge anthropology. Our work vindicated and updated Friedrich Engels on early human society being based in the solidarity of the matrilineal clan. We debated the sex strike theory, then a new and intriguing model of human origins. At the first, very large Marxism summer school I attended, there was genuine interest, with comrades young and old wanting to know more and debate the questions raised. Over the subsequent year, at SWP branch level, the ideas inspired numerous follow-up debates. At the following Marxism - I believe 1991 - we were astonished at the ferocious attack on all SWP colleagues who wanted to engage in these debate. They were threatened with expulsion if they ever dared mention the matter again. This clampdown came from the very top.

Later, we reflected on the vehemence of the response of the male-dominated leadership. Could it be that they perceived a theoretical academic discussion about the human revolution as threatening? Why? The idea that modern science could bear out Marx and Engels in the argument that women in solidarity had leverage against bad male sexual behaviour evidently came too close to the bone for some of the men of the central committee.

Engels' theory, embracing its modern updates, teaches us that sex and gender are not merely issues to be dealt with on a moral level - although they are that - but they are central and crucial to any revolutionary effort whatsoever. Revolution means turning the world upside-down. Only when society is run and organised by women and children at the centre of decision-making - as we see in any hunter-gatherer camp - can we possibly succeed. When Marx and Engels advanced their thesis, they were making clear they saw women as the revolutionary sex. Their concept of the proletariat as the revolutionary class entailed logically the notion that the oppressed sex would play the critical role in organising resistance.

**Camilla Power**  
London

## Victim

The recent eruption of discontent among SWP comrades does not come as a surprise to those of us who have fallen victim to the machinations of the SWP hierarchy. It is regrettable that this issue had not been addressed earlier and handled in a less tortuous way. But with hindsight it is easy to perceive the logical conclusion of events that happened two years ago and even more.

In my particular case I was expelled from the SWP for criticising the direction the party was taking when it formed a cross-class alliance with the small business owners of Brick Lane and the East End. George Galloway, Respect's figurehead, triumphed in ousting Oona King and winning the most votes in the Bethnal Green and Bow constituency to become Respect's first MP. The SWP's John Rees, then their national secretary, buoyed by this election success, decided he would stand as a councillor in the borough of Tower Hamlets (no doubt imagining he would be a latter-day George Lansbury fighting cuts and war).

Up until then my journey in the SWP had been fairly routine for a new member - paper sales, conferences, Stop the War ... I was slowly being sucked in by the organisation, including being asked to attend meetings for those select comrades who were on message and who showed enthusiasm for carrying out party work. However, I was beginning

to have my own doubts, particularly after attending meetings of Respect in east London. It was clear that John Rees's plan was not working out as he intended. The balance of forces in Respect appeared to be swinging the way of the small businessmen and their allies.

At the same time I was starting to read other papers and locate different perspectives. When Martin Smith attended a local branch meeting and I questioned the SWP's version of Leninism and democratic centralism, things came to a head soon after, when I was handed a mobile phone by the local party organiser who said that Martin Smith wanted to talk to me. Effectively his words were, 'You're out of the party.' I tried to find out why, but he said he didn't want to talk about it, and the call ended. I could not think of a reason.

I appealed against the expulsion and had a hearing before a disputes committee that included Pat Stack. My expulsion was upheld on the basis that I had been blogging public meetings of Respect. My sentence, laughable at the time, also included not being allowed to sell *Socialist Worker* and attend Marxism. This I thought had to be challenged.

The next year I turned up at Marxism, ticket in hand. I went to one of the larger sessions and was waiting for it to start, when Martin Smith, who must have been eyeballing me, came over and sat next to me. He said, "Simon, I thought I told you not to attend Marxism. Can you come with me and hand your ticket back?" I thought this was completely ridiculous. However, I did not want to argue with Smith, and slowly followed him out towards the door. However, I did not see why I should stand for this bullying, and headed towards the back exit, still carrying my ticket. Smith noticed and chased after me. Unfortunately I couldn't get away in time, and he wrestled me to the ground, trying to grab my ticket. I was totally shocked and a little terrified about this sudden turn of events. Eventually I managed to extricate myself from Smith's clutches and get out of the building to the safety of some friendly comrades. But no SWPer was prepared to say they believed my version of events, preferring to side with Smith - as evidenced by an opportunity I had to raise the issue at a later Respect conference.

Looking at recent events, it is easy to see why SWP comrades pretended not to believe critics of their party. It was and still is, I believe, run on authoritarian lines, with a bullying culture verging on the narcissistic to keep everyone in line. Those who disagree are not tolerated. I hope for the good of the left that the comrades who voted against the CC stay in, rebel and fight for a revolution in their organisation's culture.

**Simon Wells**  
London

## Quantity left

I am someone who has never been a member of the SWP, but have in the past (1980s) worked on campaigns alongside them. What, of course, has stifled the real growth of leftwing politics in this country has been purest factionalism. It is one thing to have strong political beliefs based naturally on evidence-based knowledge, but this has meant division and distrust amongst like-minded people, who are to all intents and purposes trying to achieve the same ends.

Whilst I am not aware of the background relating to the rape allegations and their implications to the SWP member, it is clear that this is too big an issue to side-step and

its impact is politically devastating to future support. This then is an opportunity for members to reflect globally on where they actually are in the political spectrum and how best their efforts can be directed to influencing politics; against the backdrop of the most reactionary government that we have seen in living memory.

What is now required is for all leftwing factions to unite under one banner of the left, like Die Linke and the Front de Gauche. Today there is a much clearer picture as to where the blame lies for the economic and environmental devastation that we suffer, but it is not being effectively articulated because the working class mass party (Labour) supports the same neoliberal agenda as the Tories (Con Dems).

The cat has also been let out of the bag in the guise of quantitative easing. Professor Steve Keen has made the case for the total restructuring of the 'casino economy'. Never in the history of mankind have so many opportunities displayed themselves for democratic control of the economy than now, which is why the left should not squander it by factional infighting and separation. QE today is socialism for the rich and capitalism for the poor. A united leftwing force in government could use it to fund government expenditure for the benefit of people rather than corporate interests. All that is standing in our way is the will to do it.

**Mervyn Hyde**  
email

## Conflict site?

Readers of the *Weekly Worker* may be amused to find that the crisis in the SWP is echoing in the text of the SWP's Wikipedia page. Now, as a repository of common knowledge publicly accessible to all with an internet connection, the contents of the Wiki page of a group, company or organisation, and how this is written, is of great importance in terms of public image management or the provision of a fair and impartial account of history, depending on one's view.

Given the highly contentious nature of the present crisis in the SWP, combined with the organisation's structural dislike of critical reminders of past events, one could imagine how sensitive the Wikipedia page could become for any bureaucrats unhappy with their past follies and betrayals of the membership, as they see them pop up there on the web for all to read.

It may just be a coincidence, but the SWP page has seen an absolutely frantic increase in editorial activity, with more alterations made in the first two weeks of January than in the whole of the last six months of 2012! Could there be a connection with the present crisis?

One item that has been tussled over is the brief mention that the CPGB gets in all this, with its support for the Democratic Opposition within the SWP getting a nod. However, the wording here has clearly been seen as somewhat sensitive. On the one hand, edits have been made, perhaps, to insinuate that the CPGB is pulling the strings of dissent within the SWP, with the Democratic Opposition having to offer a denial of the connection (simply getting someone to deny something so inherently daft is a classic from the dark arts of media relations).

Since then, edits have been made to ensure a scrupulously neutral and clear wording, to the effect that the Democratic Opposition formed itself, leading the CPGB to offer its support *ex post facto*, with no sinister implications. Needless to say, there would be very little mileage in the SWP bureaucracy attempting to imply

that any of the dissenters are puppets of the CPGB. No-one would believe that. Does the SWP bureaucracy need a more convincing villain?

This could all just be coincidence and entirely innocent, but it shows nonetheless that open sources of information and its free flow can be the enemy of the bureaucrat, as we have seen from the SWP central committee's negative attitude to the internet as a whole and to the rights of the organisation's members to communicate, share ideas and organise with each other. If it were not coincidence, I do not think anyone would be surprised.

**Michael Copestake**  
email

## Coining it

I'm not sure what the connection is between the current lamentable situation in the SWP and Tony Cliff's theory of state capitalism in Russia (we'll have to wait for part two of Jack Conrad's article, 'Origins of the crisis in the SWP - part one', January 10). But I do see a connection between Cliff's theory of state capitalism and Conrad's theory of 'bureaucratic socialism'.

Both argue that a fundamental economic change took place in 1928. But what? Both before and after 1928 the state industries were organised in the same basic way. Both before and after 1928 workers were paid money wages for the sale of their labour-power. Conrad fails to show that the management of state industries changed in 1928. He also makes the rather bizarre claim that, after 1928, workers were paid in "non-money or at most pseudo-money". According to the logic of his theory, after 1928 workers must have been some sort of state-slaves. But what were they before 1928? Were they then paid in real money?

He is right that whether workers in Russia after (and, indeed, before) 1928 sold their labour-power is the key issue in deciding whether or not Russia can be described as capitalist (rather than as some new class society). I would say they were and that, far from Russia being some sort of "post-capitalist" society, as Conrad claims, it never ceased to be capitalist after 1917, because the wages system was never abolished. Quite the reverse. It was the policy of the Russian government to expand and extend working for wages at the expense of peasant farming.

**Adam Buick**  
email

## Crippled

I was delighted to read Jack Conrad's 'The Soviet Union question', in which he argued so cogently for a position that I have long held to be the only reasonable one for a Marxist unencumbered by dogma. Clearly, the post-1928 USSR and other 'second world' socio-economic systems cannot be placed on a scale running from capitalism to socialism, but represented a divergent evolution, concerned with industrialisation by non-capitalist means.

I came to this conclusion following my personal observation of Poland, where I spent the academic year 1959-60 on a Unesco scholarship, and my view was later confirmed when I read the famous open letter of Kuroń and Modzelewski. Later I discovered that the same sort of thing was argued, also from personal observation, by that unjustly neglected communist writer, Ante Ciliga, who was one of the first Marxists to hold this position, long before Shachtman *et al.*

Whether that system can be dignified by the term 'mode of production' is a secondary matter. Hillel Ticktin thinks it can't, but I think it can. Unstable and short-lived as it was, production did take place, relations of production existed,

surplus product was extracted. Maybe we should call it a crippled mode of production.

This seems like a purely academic issue, following the demise of these systems. But it isn't. Those who hold to the 'workers' state' view display profound lack of understanding of exploitation and the state, let alone a workers' state, while the 'state capitalism' brigade display a lamentable lack of understanding of actual capitalism.

**Moshé Machover**  
London

## 'Anti-Germans'

Overall, I found Susann Witt-Stahl's 'Excusing capitalism of role in rise of Hitler' a very decent article, which reflects the difficult and exhausting struggle between the German left and the so called 'anti-Germans' in a very authentic way (*Weekly Worker* December 6 2012).

As I became politicised, in particular within Linksjugend, the youth organisation of Die Linke, I came across these militant nationalistic and pro-war activists at an early stage. I first had personal experience of BAK Shalom members at the federal conference of the Linksjugend last year in Berlin. BAK Shalom is a faction which describes itself as "a working group against anti-Semitism [sic], anti-Zionism, anti-Americanism and regressive anti-capitalism within the Linksjugend". Its political work focuses mainly on supporting Israel's apartheid politics and action against the "Muslim threat", and denouncing every criticism of Israel as anti-Semitic.

Their justification for this unconditional solidarity with Israel is in line with those who claim that Germans, with their Nazi heritage, have a special responsibility for the safety of all Jewish people around the world and that this can only be achieved through a strong Israel. (Personally, I fight against every form of anti-Semitism just as strongly as I oppose anti-Muslim racism, sexism, homophobia and all other types of discrimination, as is absolutely natural for every leftwing person.) Their allegations of anti-Semitism have not only been totally untruthful, but have severely damaged the left and led to a big smear campaign against Die Linke within the German mainstream media, whilst giving the bourgeois parties further material for denunciation.

At the federal congress in Berlin, the left within the Linksjugend called on BAK Shalom to withdraw support for the 'Stop the bomb' campaign or else face exclusion from the youth organisation. It was pointed out that a campaign which is supported by people like Henryk Broder, a journalist who works for various Springer papers and is well known for his anti-Muslim vitriol, can hardly be progressive. That part of the motion calling on BAK Shalom to withdraw was accepted after a debate where the tension between the left and the 'anti-Germans' was very noticeable. Delegates from the eastern German Länder in particular were quite supportive of BAK Shalom - members from eastern Germany are more likely to support coalitions with bourgeois parties and to abandon essential left principles in general.

However, when it came to the second part of the motion, many were very reluctant to vote for the exclusion of BAK Shalom should they refuse to comply with the decision of the congress. At first I could not understand this contradiction, but then a comrade explained to me that this might be because of a false understanding of left pluralism within the Linksjugend, which is often mistakenly justified by Rosa Luxemburg's statement that "freedom is always the freedom of dissenters". But what did she actually mean by it? Was it really in her interest

to defend nationalistic, bellicose and bourgeois forces within the left? I do not think so.

Rosa Luxemburg provides a glowing example of how fight for left ideals, for which she finally paid with her life. Using her for pseudo-left purposes can only soil her memory and political legacy, but this is what the 'anti-Germans' continuously do.

**Jeannot Freitag**  
email

## Erfurt required

I have absolutely no idea what David Ellis is talking about in his cryptic comment (Letters, January 10). It certainly does not relate to anything I actually wrote other than to get what was said completely the wrong way round!

For example, I did not say that the purpose of a workers' state was to force the sharing of the fruits of the workers' labour. Quite the contrary: the point I made follows on from Marx's statements in *Critique of the Gotha programme*, in which he attacks the position of the Lassalleans, who did argue for that. Marx makes clear that such a thing cannot be achieved even under the first stage of communism, let alone under capitalism.

The point I made was that, in so far as such a society has not raised its productive potential to allow that to happen, any such redistribution would mean having to retain some form of state to bring it about. The whole point here is that if this is, as Marx says, the first stage of communism, then we have already gone beyond the stage of a workers' state - ie, of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The bourgeoisie have already been defeated by this stage, and the state should be in the process of withering away, if indeed it has not already done so. We can only move to the principle of sharing out society's total production to meet individual needs - apart, of course, from the provision of the social insurance fund to cover illness, old age and so on - in proportion as society's productive potential rises to make it possible.

As for sharing out the available work, that is something which could be done under the first stage of communism. But how exactly does David Ellis believe such a demand could be implemented outside a revolutionary situation? The working class is not powerful enough to enforce it, and the capitalist state has no reason to voluntarily introduce it. It falls into that category of demand that Marx criticised as "revolutionary phrase-mongering".

The demand for a living wage is a different matter. Winston Churchill introduced the first minimum wage in 1909 and did so on the basis of arguing against the small, bad employers undercutting the larger, better employers. Such a demand is quite possible and achievable because it fits with the needs of big capital, and helps them to bring about greater concentration by undermining small capital. But its extension into providing a similar level of income for the unemployed, which I support, is not in the interest of big or small capital, and will not be volunteered by the state.

Quite the contrary: it's why we cannot rely on the capitalist state for such measures, and instead have to develop our own worker-owned and controlled social insurance funds, as Marx and Engels and the First International advocated. They demanded that the state keep its hands off the workers' friendly societies established for that purpose, and called for the return of funds where that state had appropriated them. It is why Engels opposed the demand for the establishment of a state-run national insurance scheme put forward in the Erfurt programme.

**Arthur Bough**  
email

# ACTION

## CPGB podcasts

Every Monday we upload a podcast commenting on the current political situation. In addition, the site features voice files of public meetings and other events: <http://cpgb.org.uk/home/podcasts>. Resuming on January 7.

## London Communist Forum

**Sunday January 13, 5pm:** Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by discussion and *Capital* reading group. Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. This meeting: chapter 10, section 5: 'The struggle for a normal working day'. Organised by CPGB: [www.cpgb.org.uk](http://www.cpgb.org.uk).

## Radical Anthropology Group

Introduction to anthropology: an intensive study of mythology **Tuesday January 22, 6.15pm:** 'Are hunter-gatherers gender-egalitarian?' Speaker: Camilla Power. St Martin's Community Centre, 43 Carol Street, London NW1 (Camden Town tube). Cost per session: £10 waged, £5 low waged, £3 unwaged. Discounts for whole term. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: [www.radicalanthropologygroup.org](http://www.radicalanthropologygroup.org).

## Syria, the Kurds and the west

**Thursday January 17, 7pm:** Public meeting. School of Oriental and African Studies, Room V211, Vernon Square Campus, Penton Rise, London WC1. Organised by Stop the War Coalition with Kurdish Federation UK: [www.stopwar.org.uk](http://www.stopwar.org.uk).

## Hands off NHS

**Thursday January 17, 7.30pm:** Report on Sodexo dispute from GMB reps, Lord Nelson pub, Trafalgar Street, Brighton. Organised by Brighton and Hove Labour Representation Committee: [www.l-r-c.org.uk](http://www.l-r-c.org.uk).

## Free the children

**Thursday January 17, 7pm:** Discussion meeting on Palestinian political child prisoners, Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester M2. Speaker: Victoria Brittain. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: [www.palestinecampaign.org](http://www.palestinecampaign.org).

## Save Sheffield

**Saturday January 19, 11am:** Anti-cuts protest. Assemble Devonshire Green for march to town hall. Organised by Unite the Community Sheffield: [www.facebook.com/groups/305443082835943](http://www.facebook.com/groups/305443082835943)

## Solidarity with Greek anti-fascists

**Saturday January 19, 12 noon:** Demonstration, Greek embassy, 1A Holland Park, Notting Hill, London W11. Organised by Unite Against Fascism: [www.uaf.org.uk](http://www.uaf.org.uk).

## Britain's legacy in Palestine

**Saturday January 19, 9.30am to 5pm:** Conference, Friends House, 173 Euston Road, London NW1. Organised by Palestinian Return Centre: [www.prc.org.uk](http://www.prc.org.uk).

## Support for women prisoners

**Friday January 25, 5pm:** Demonstration, Holloway prison, Parkhurst Road, London N7. Organised by Miscarriages of Justice UK: [www.mojuk.org.uk](http://www.mojuk.org.uk).

## Against racism

**Saturday January 26, 12 noon to 4.30pm:** Public meeting, St John the Baptist Church Hall, Grainger Street, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1. Organised by Tyneside Community Action Against Racism: <http://tcarb.org.blogspot.co.uk>.

## Palestine Solidarity Campaign

**Saturday January 26, 10am to 5pm:** AGM, London Irish Centre, 50-52 Camden Square, London NW1. Register online at [www.palestinecampaign.org/PSC\\_AGM](http://www.palestinecampaign.org/PSC_AGM). £8 waged, £6 unwaged. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: [www.palestinecampaign.org](http://www.palestinecampaign.org).

## Save Lewisham Hospital

**Saturday January 26, 12 noon:** Demonstration. Assemble Lewisham roundabout for march to Mountsfield Park. Organised by Save Lewisham Hospital: [www.savelewishamhospital.com](http://www.savelewishamhospital.com).

## Women in Afghanistan

**Tuesday January 29, 6.30pm:** Public meeting, House of Commons, Parliament Square, London SW1. Organised by the Afghanistan Withdrawal Group of MPs and Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk](http://www.stopwar.org.uk).

## Capitalism in crisis

**Thursday January 31, 7.30pm:** Public meeting, Patrick Burgh Hall, 9 Burgh Hall Street, Glasgow G11. Speaker: Hillel Ticktin. Organised by Glasgow Marxist Forum.

## Voices of Women against Austerity

**Saturday February 2, 1pm:** Public event with many speakers and sessions. Brighthelm centre, North Road, Brighton BN1. Crèche available. Organised by Brighton Women Against Cuts: [www.bhwac.wordpress.com](http://www.bhwac.wordpress.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.



China Miéville: open rebellion

# Opposition emboldened as demand for recall grows

The leadership can no longer lead - but a positive outcome to the crisis requires more than the removal of the entire CC, argues **Paul Demarty**

The Socialist Workers Party has been waiting a long time for a revolutionary situation. On some occasions, as with the fatuous 'All out, stay out' slogan it advanced to striking public sector workers last winter, it has tried, with dismal results, to force one - or delude itself into thinking there *is* one. Now, it has got one. But there is only one catch - it is not Britain that has been plunged into such a crisis, but the SWP itself.

I am only half being ironic here. Lenin famously defined a revolutionary situation as one in which the rulers cannot rule in the old way, and the oppressed will not be ruled in the old way. While the outcome of this brouhaha cannot be foretold, there is no denying that Britain's largest (for now) revolutionary organisation is in chaos. The leadership is defensive and rudderless; and, for once, there is open and militant rebellion against them.

It is not hard to see why. The last week has been utterly calamitous for the SWP's ruling clique. The

release, on Andy Newman's blog, of the now infamous transcript of the disputes committee report and debate at conference was already bad enough. An appalling misstep such as this absurd investigation into *rape charges* might have been manageable, had the whole thing been kept out of public view. Now, every SWPer from Aberdeen to Cornwall knows what went on - and so do all the people they have to work with in trade unions, on campuses and in other left groups.

Yet it was the *Weekly Worker's* publication of Tom Walker's resignation letter which exploded the situation. Two days later, the story merited a full page in *The Independent*, an entry on Laurie Penny's *New Statesman* blog, and even the mockery of the *Daily Mail*. While comrade Walker effectively urged others to follow his example and resign, his article seems to have had the opposite effect (the best proof that it was the wrong advice). SWPers now feel emboldened to come out *openly* and

criticise the leadership, daring Charlie Kimber, Alex Callinicos and their creatures on the central committee to expel them.

Penny's article quoted the novelist China Miéville, for a start. "The way [the] allegations were dealt with ... was appalling. It's a terrible problem of democracy, accountability and internal culture that such a situation can occur, as is the fact that those arguing against the official line in a fashion deemed unacceptable to those in charge could be expelled for 'secret factionalism'." He also pointed out that "many of us have for years been openly fighting for a change in the culture and structures of the organisation to address exactly this kind of democratic deficit".<sup>1</sup> Not as openly as this, comrade ...

## Tomb of the infuriated

Compared to Richard Seymour, the man with whom he has previously

teamed up as a democratic dissident, Miéville is positively bashful over this whole affair. Comrade Seymour - who runs the prominent *Lenin's Tomb* blog, and now writes for *The Guardian* - followed up on Laurie Penny's piece with an absolutely scathing run-down of 'the story so far', of the incompetent and shameful attempt at a cover-up and efforts to bully people back into line.

"[The CC] tell members to get on with focusing on 'the real world'," he writes. "In the real world, this is a scandal. And we, those who fought on this, told them it would be. We warned them that it would not just be a few sectarian blogs attacking us. We warned them that after we had rightly criticised George Galloway over his absurd remarks about rape, and after a year of stories about sexual abuse, and after more than a year of feminist revival, this was a suicidal posture, not just a disgusting, sickening one."

He concludes with a call for

resistance a great deal more convincing, in its own restricted sphere, than any of the canned rhetoric in the last decade of *Socialist Worker*: "The future of the party is at stake, and they are on the wrong side of that fight. You, as members, have to fight for your political existence. Don't simply drift away, don't simply bury your face in your palms, and don't simply cling to the delusional belief that the argument was settled at conference. You must fight now."<sup>2</sup>

The CC's response, meanwhile, was pitiful; initially a strictly internal publication, its comment to members was quickly and inevitably leaked to *Harry's Place*, and eventually - and grudgingly - put up on the SWP's own website.<sup>3</sup> "We took allegations against a leading member of the party very seriously," Charlie Kimber pleads; "far from being a cover-up, this sort of open discussion [of the DC report at conference] shows that our procedures and elected bodies are accountable to our membership,"

he insists.

In short, it was a repackaged version of the same bullshit that the CC has pushed throughout this affair. Seymour certainly was not fooled; if anything, his reply made his opening salvo look restrained:

"I urge people to stay, and to fight. But one hardly blames those who have had enough of the Kafkaesque nightmare, enough of listening to people spout demented gibberish in meetings and aggregates, enough of hearing the same lies repeated, enough of wildly tenuous historical analogies, enough of cheap *Realpolitik* passed off as wisdom. How many times can you hear, 'Well, I was at a paper sale this morning, and no-one mentioned it', before you start thinking of having people sectioned?"<sup>4</sup>

Others have now followed the comrades' lead, and made public their own opposition to the CC. Nathan Akehurst posted a somewhat milder criticism on his blog<sup>5</sup>; Emma Rock and Ian Llewellyn added their thoughts to *Lenin's Tomb*, which has now been thrown open as a platform for dissident SWP members. A new blog has turned up, under the banner of the 'SWP Opposition',<sup>6</sup> with an open letter to SWP comrades, which we republish here, demanding a "focus on the political implications and challenges ahead for our party and more widely for the movement and our class". Others have been sounding off, openly and anonymously, on Facebook, on comment threads and wherever else they feel confident to do so.

## Non-leadership

The remarkable thing, of course, is that they *do* feel confident to do so. Barely a month ago, the notion that the internet would be full of SWPers demanding a recall conference and the sacking of the entire central committee - many under their own names - looked pretty fanciful. Yet here we are. And underlying this fact is that 'the rulers cannot go on in the old way'.

For the first time in decades, the initiative in the SWP has not been with the CC; they have surrendered it spectacularly, wildly underestimating the significance of the knife-edge vote on the DC report, the 11th-hour split in *their own ranks* and the level of anger that exists over this affair. Having spent years ensuring that an open rebellion could simply never happen, they are utterly at sea now that it has.

They are in something of an impossible position. Comrades Seymour and Miéville are the best exemplars of it; they are both assets to the SWP, with public profiles that lend it some credibility among broader layers of progressive-minded people. Given their notability, and given that this scandal has now reached the bourgeois media, the leadership clique shrinks from expelling them. But because these two get away with it, all opponents in the SWP are emboldened to speak up.

The gravity of the situation should not be overstated. This 'revolutionary' crisis is a *moment*, which still needs to be seized by the opposition. The possibility very much exists for the CC to regain the initiative; it cannot be expected to keep piling mistake upon disaster upon calamity.

There is also an element of 'confirmation bias' of which we should be wary - an SWP member calling for the blood of Charlie Kimber is much more noticeable than one who has, indeed, been cowed into submission. Still, there are certainly a great many more in opposition than are visibly complaining on the blogs, with entire branches dominated by people who want the CC out.

The demands that have been

thrown up in the course of the rebellion are *generally* positive - and, more encouragingly, they are marked by an absolutely correct sense that this is the moment that a fight can be won.

The great unifying demand is to recall conference, which appears everywhere; it goes without saying that simply petitioning the CC to call one will not get too far, given that a central purpose of such a conference for many delegates would be to turf it out *en masse*. Within (broadly) the SWP's constitution, oppositionists ought to fight for the national committee to call one (though it appears to be packed with loyalists). They are fighting in the branches for a motion to recall conference - for which they would need 20% of branches to sign up. That could be a stepping stone to a full conference. The PC, of course, has up to now never been more than a way for branch delegates to be cajoled into rubber-stamping the latest inane CC *diktats* - but then, the Paris Commune was merely a mundane bourgeois local authority before 1871.

These are technical questions. The fact that they have been linked - by comrades Seymour, Rock, Miéville, and countless anonymous commenters - to the question of the party regime *as a whole* is positive and necessary. Seymour suggests "creating more pluralistic party structures, ending the ban on factions outside of conference season and rethinking the way elections take place"; and indeed he and Miéville have repeatedly called for year-round discussion bulletins and other democratic reforms.

The sentiment is present elsewhere, although often in more diffuse forms. Emma Rock: "All party forums should be more than just talking shops and should have real teeth to implement new ideas. Likewise ideology and the development of our political position should not be left to a handful of theorists, but should be engaged in by every comrade in every branch. We should become a true hub for the development of new ideas, and not be left lagging behind groups such as UK Uncut or Occupy."<sup>7</sup>

We will leave aside the last phrase, and simply point out that, surely, *any* revolutionary organisation should seek to arm its militants with theory, to become a 'hub of ideas', that its forums should not be talking shops. The SWP has increasingly had the opposite character, however, and simply a correct *diagnosis* of this problem is an advance.

## Root and branch

The gaping hole in all this is *political* criticism of the SWP's direction. The dissidents have all set themselves up as 'defenders of the IS tradition' against a leadership which has somehow perverted it. This is ultimately wrong-headed. That tradition is thoroughly implicated in all aspects of this disaster, and will have to be dealt with to avoid a repeat - even if the rebellion is successful on its own terms.

A pertinent demonstration is the 'women's question', which is most *directly* posed by the *form* the crisis has taken. Most participants - leadership and opposition - have taken pains to stress the 'proud tradition' of the SWP in fighting women's oppression. In fact, it is anything but, as Dave Isaacson makes clear elsewhere in this paper; the SWP's history on this question is a series of flip-flops, according to the political exigencies of the leadership in particular contexts.

Yet this is exactly the approach you would expect on the basis of Tony Cliff's reading of Lenin - the leader with the 'good nose', who could sniff the air and reorient the party overnight; the leader unafraid to 'bend the stick' to keep his troops

on the straight and narrow, to make wrenching theoretical turns. This conception of political leadership results necessarily in wild political reverses; but, more to the point, it leads to *unaccountable leadership*.

The major form this has taken is the alternate accommodation to and anathematisation of feminism. The emergence of the IS and then the SWP as a significant force on the revolutionary left is coterminous with the emergence of second-wave feminism, which (thanks as much to the heady political context as anything internal to it) frequently took on a left tilt, and attempted to articulate itself as socialist in some way.

Yet this is, in a sense, perverse. The *Communist manifesto* itself calls for women's liberation. International women's day started out as a movement of working class women *against feminism*, and it was the workers movement which made it an international phenomenon (that movement has now been colonised - and that *is* the word - by feminism). The history of our movement is peppered with women (and men) who have made radical, even at times wildly utopian, proposals for ending women's oppression and exploitation, explicitly tying it into the socialist project as an integral and inseparable part, and equally *decrying feminism every step of the way*. If this tradition had not been buried, second-wave feminism would have been dead on arrival.

What intervened was, broadly, Stalinism - the retreat from women's liberation by the Soviet regime in the late 1920s and onwards; the accommodation by Stalinist parties in the west to trade union sectionalism, and corresponding development of a sexist internal culture and philistine political attitude to women. Similar maladies afflicted many of the Trotskyist groups - including, until the launch of *Women's Voice*, the IS/SWP.

'Feminism' today does not mean the same thing as it did when Zetkin, Kollontai and the others were attacking it. But the fact that many SWP members are happy to self-describe as 'feminist' is ultimately a function of the *failure* of the IS tradition to live up to its billing. This tradition, after all, is the armour that supposedly protected the SWP from all the depredations of Stalinism, uniquely on the far left. Yet its utter *confusion* on the question of feminism is a direct result of its *failure* to do so. The thoroughly and obviously Stalinist handling of the recent furore is another index of that failure, and it is hardly a novelty, as generations of ex-SWPers will readily attest.

The present crisis in the SWP is, in fact, a result of the secular decay of its political tradition. Very well; we are all, in this period of reaction, products of decades of entropy. This paper derives from a rebellion against 'official communism'. There is no reason the SWP could not buck the trend - but the obstacles do not end at the current CC: they include the political tradition and method they claim, with some justice, to defend. A revolution in the SWP, like any revolution, will have to involve more than a change of personnel ●

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## Notes

1. www.newstatesman.com/laurie-penny/2013/01/what-does-swps-way-dealing-sex-assault-allegations-tell-us-about-left.
2. www.leninology.com/2013/01/crisis-in-swp.html.
3. www.swp.org.uk/14/01/2013/response-attacks-swp.
4. www.leninology.com/2013/01/a-reply-to-central-committee.html.
5. http://nathan-akehurst.blogspot.co.uk/2013/01/notes-on-swp-crisis.html.
6. http://swpopposition.blogspot.co.uk.
7. www.leninology.com/2013/01/guest-post-on-crisis.html.

# Doubts exist over authenticity

The *Weekly Worker* is publishing this statement from a blog from the newly created 'SWP Opposition' (<http://swpopposition.blogspot.co.uk>). If genuine it shows that the open rebellion against the bureaucratic-centralist SWP regime is reaching new heights.

However, the big problem is that many comrades in SWP circles are sceptical. I have been told - including by those who you would expect to be in the loop - that no-one knows who is involved. One comrade closely associated with the Democratic Opposition told me: "We are warning comrades away from it". It was the comrade's "firm belief" that SWP Opposition is actually a "front" for the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. Those who like conspiracy theories may prefer the notion that it is a central committee provocation, designed to lure actual or potential dissidents into revealing their identities.

In response to my enquiry, I received an email from the SWP Opposition stating that the new faction has the support of "27 members" ("and growing"), including "two former full-time organisers and current and former national council members". The trouble is, nobody - including, as far as I can tell, those associated with the officially recognised

opposition factions set up before the January 4-6 conference - has any idea who these might be.

In view of the expulsion of four comrades just before conference simply for exchanging ideas (including discussing *whether* to form a pre-conference faction - and then deciding not to), it would be unsurprising if genuine oppositionists decided to maintain secrecy. However, more and more comrades are now *openly* coming out in opposition to the CC, to its abysmal anti-democratic practices and its disastrous mishandling of rape allegations.

Surely now is not the time to 'keep your head down'. The campaign for democracy has been building a head of steam and so far no moves have been made against prominent blogger Richard Seymour, for example. If everyone came out openly at this time, the CC would have a real problem. If comrades are not convinced, I would suggest that any secret faction could, for instance, be fronted by one or another ex-member whom everyone trusts.

Whatever the truth about the SWP Opposition, there is no doubt that the SWP leadership - however much it pretends it is now a case of 'business as usual' - is floundering ●  
**Peter Manson**

# Open letter to fellow members of the SWP

Dear comrades

Conference is usually the time where the party unites behind the perspectives agreed and the central committee are given the mandate and authority with which to lead us during the struggles of the coming year. The events of the past few months have already given our enemies plenty of ammunition to attack the party. However, the debates leading up to and including those at conference have not successfully addressed the outstanding issues and concerns raised in the pre-conference period and, if left unresolved, will only continue to damage the party further.

The serious allegations made against a leading member of the party have unleashed questions not just about the handling of the case itself, but also around the standard of democracy, accountability and organisation required within the party. We do not wish to revisit the details of the

case brought to the disputes committee, but instead focus on the political implications and challenges ahead for our party and more widely for the movement and our class.

We reject the comments made by central committee members and others that to turn inwards now would harm the organisation. There are serious questions outstanding and not to address them will risk the long-term future of the revolutionary socialist project we are trying to build. We are founding this faction as a rallying point for those who believe, as we do, that the issues and concerns raised warrant further debate and discussion.

For a democratic, effective and united revolutionary socialist organisation, join us and fight for change from below ●

Yours for socialism  
**SWP Opposition**  
<http://swpopposition.blogspot.co.uk>

# Rebellion, regroupment

Ben Lewis surveys the British left's response to the crisis gripping the SWP, and calls for a radical change of culture



**Lenin: Bolsheviks were triumphant ... not least because of open faction fights**

Judging the crisis at present ripping through the Socialist Workers Party, *Weekly Worker* writers have quite rightly stressed that the *trigger* that set the whole thing off was the scandal surrounding its former national secretary, Martin Smith.

Yet we have also pointed out that the *underlying* reasons for the current crisis can and should be located elsewhere - firstly in the Stalinoid organisational norms and rotten practices that the SWP leadership shamefacedly pursues in the name of 'Leninism'; and secondly in the organisation's lack of serious and workable perspectives more generally. Either these perspectives begin and end with an extremely narrow sect outlook of simply recruiting, at an extremely low political level, another thousand or so 'members' per year, or they border on the unhinged: anybody remember the 'All out, stay out' call for the unions' general strike demanded by the SWP in 2011?

Nonetheless, the SWP is hardly *unique* on the British, or indeed the international, Marxist left, when it comes to lack of internal democracy or to its inability to offer any kind of viable strategy for moving beyond our current petty divisions and frontist fakery. General-strikism, behind-the-scenes manoeuvring and an almost exclusive reliance on spontaneity abound. Unfortunately, this reflects a common understanding of revolution amongst the left premised on a small, tightly-knit group that skilfully, almost imperceptibly, manipulates

the working class towards the socialist dawn - a million miles away from the project of Marxism, with its emphasis on majoritarianism, consciousness, democracy and the mass party.

As such it is worth taking a look at some of the far-left responses to the current factional war being fought in the SWP as a way of assessing where we are currently at, as well as the prospects for revolutionary regroupment posed by this welcome rebellion within Britain's largest leftwing group. Some of our more philistine readers might dismiss such things as 'sectarianism', 'navel-gazing' or 'old left' methods of conducting politics. Yet this mindset ironically reveals how much they have *in common* with those like Charlie Kimber, Alex Callinicos and Martin Smith, who dismiss other organisations and their ideas as nothing but "vultures" bent on poaching members from "the party".

No. Reports of SWPers up and down the country becoming more open to engagement and discussion with those outside their ranks is good news indeed and must be encouraged. Far from seeing others as enemies, it should be the absolute *norm* for comrades to exchange ideas, write polemics and letters in each other's newspapers (or to establish publications where such exchanges can take place) and generally behave as thinking and critical communists. This would facilitate the development of strategic ideas, the struggle against stale sect perspectives, and help to

confront the burning question of our times: organising our forces into a viable partyist project solidly based on the politics of Marxism. This is, after all, what the CPGB and the *Weekly Worker* are dedicated to.

## Calling the kettle black

The unsigned response by the small British Trotskyist group, Workers Power, is well written, and has the rare merit of openly calling on the SWP opposition to stay in and organise.<sup>1</sup> Instead of responding with a narrow, 'all join us' approach, the article calls for "an emergency conference to restore the basic norms of democratic centralism", arguing that without the right to form factions and tendencies or to openly and democratically elect the leadership, that leadership is "not accountable to the members", which can lead to a culture of "leadership impunity". "Outside periods of severe repression," it continues, "there are no good reasons for limiting these safeguards." All fair enough, so far.

However, WP to this day stubbornly sticks to the *bureaucratic-centralist* notion that factions and tendencies can only exist *internally* - ie, they must never go public outside the group. So the comrades write that the scandal around comrade Smith "immediately led to an enormous explosion of anger and disagreement and left members with *no alternative* but to take up the issues outside the party" (emphasis added). In other words, given internal

democracy and factional rights, comrades are normally expected *not* to raise criticisms of disagreements outside the group. But if the minority cannot appeal to the working class on a question they consider vital, what choice do they have but to split off? In the conflicted and sectarian world of modern British Trotskyism, the reasoning usually offered for restricting dissent to internal channels is that sects like Workers Power are merely small 'fighting propaganda groups', whose capacity to organise would be weakened and its message obscured if they were to permit anything other than a single public line on all main questions. For them the masses have no right to know about differences or even conflicting nuances and shades of opinion. That would only confuse the poor things.

Indeed, while I in no way countenance the recent apolitical walkout from Workers Power led by comrades Simon Hardy and Luke Cooper (nor, as we shall see, their liquidationist political conclusions!), the above description of the brewing dissent in the SWP could equally apply to WP *less than a year ago*, when the organisation developed varying ideas on the question of 'broad parties'.

Not that we could read about these arguments in the pages of *Workers Power*, of course. That would be tantamount to 'centrism'. Instead there were rumours, and finally the proclamation of yet another split and yet another new group. Another stunning leap forward for our class.

Thus, while the WP comrades are right to mainly focus on the question of organisation and the SWP's regime, the fact is that their criticisms smack of a certain hypocrisy, of "Trots calling the kettle black", as it were. However it is dressed up, restricting the articulation of *public* dissent is a form of bureaucratic centralism too. While in WP this does not take the form of the kind of bullying and intimidation associated with your average SWP hack, the fact remains that such a *modus operandi* runs counter to the experience of the healthiest aspects of Bolshevik culture. From the early days and small numbers around the post-*Iskra* "propaganda group" to the heights of mass influence from 1905 onwards, the Workers Power way of approaching political dissent and discussion would have been anathema to the Bolsheviks.

Workers Power is not alone, however. Take Counterfire, the Eurocommunist-esque rightist split from the SWP that came out of the misnamed Left Platform in 2010. Its response to the SWP crisis has dramatically missed the point by doing nothing else than simply foregrounding Lindsey German's 'Feminism - a 21st century manifesto' (yawn). Maybe some people upset with the SWP will leave and join Counterfire!

Yet any rigorous analysis of the SWP's bureaucratic centralism from the likes of comrades German, John Rees, Chris Nineham and Chris Bambery would necessarily have to be openly *self-critical* too. It was they who, until a few years ago, actually presided over and helped to develop that horrid regime. And their 'Bolshevism' cannot countenance the public articulation of dissent either. As comrade Rees puts it in his 2010 pamphlet on strategy, analysing the world and deciding on the next step "inevitably requires *internal* discussion and argument *inside* an organisation".<sup>2</sup>

The reader will appreciate that this is not just a case of making some rather cheap (and easy) points against the *pseudo-Bolshevism* of those like Workers Power and comrade Rees. The point is that unless we break with such a sterile approach then our ability to move beyond the sect is severely hampered. This approach engenders an endless cycle of splits and divisions - often for frivolous reasons. It blurs lines of political disagreement instead of sharpening them and thus *miseducates* both the organisation's membership and the working class more generally.

It is not that there are no big divisions or fundamental questions that need to be addressed on the left. Quite the opposite. Yet preventing minority views from finding *public* expression simply breeds further splintering and overall fragmentation. Of course, while the open expression of differences is no guarantee against splits, and while not all splits are unprincipled or manifestations of regression, what certainly *will* guarantee them is if comrades in a minority are effectively banned from fighting to win a wider public to their side.

## AWL and partyism

To its credit, the response offered by the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, authored by Edward Maltby and Martin Thomas,<sup>3</sup> delivers some

# and the party we need

solid blows against this widespread conception of Bolshevism.

As they put it, "The question of party democracy isn't just a technical question of the best way to conduct a discussion ... ideas can only be dealt with and improved rationally through full, open debate. Artificial displays of unanimity clarify nothing."

For them, the SWP has "drifted into a concept in which a revolutionary organisation is valued mainly as a machine and measured by its ability to count recruits and issue slogans which 'fit the mood', not by its contribution to enlightenment, education and clarification in the labour movement". They rightly deem the system of temporary factions to be an effective "ban on debate". It is a "Stalinist distortion".

This is, of course, correct. But the roots of the problems in the Bolshevik Party's self-conception go back a little further than Stalin: to Zinoviev's thesis on the party at the 2nd Congress of Comintern in 1920 and - most crucially in terms of this discussion - to the 1921 ban on factions within the Bolshevik Party, as Russia was desperately holding out and hoping for the German revolution.<sup>4</sup> (As an aside, this is often why modern-day Trotskyists can often invoke Trotsky's writings from the late 1920s and 1930s to justify their emphasis on *internal* democracy today: Trotsky uncritically took the theses of Comintern's first four congresses as the basis for his later factional struggles against the Stalinist monolith. This is also true of thinkers like Antonio Gramsci and György Lukács.)

However, what is quite clearly lacking from the AWL article, as well as in a subsequent piece,<sup>5</sup> is any kind of strategy with which the SWP opposition could fight for a healthier left with revolutionary *partyist* perspectives. Again, few surprises here. Time and time again the AWL has proven itself to be lacking the necessary programmatic perspective and outlook to struggle for the kind of Marxist party we need. Instead, this organisation is characterised by trade-unionism, so-called 'united front' work, student 'fees and cuts' activism, the fight for a "workers' [Labour] government" and - lest we forget - the regularly recurring disease of social imperialism. As loudly as SWP and AWL activists might shout at each other over all sorts of issues, they certainly have one thing in common: 'programmophobia': that is, the failure to even see the need for a Marxist programme around which our forces can cohere.

Moreover, the question of the *programme* is hardly unrelated to discussions over left organisation and democracy. As the experience of the RSDLP shows us, membership is based on the *acceptance of* (not agreement with) the party's programme, and the leadership must be accountable to that programme as well.

## Odds and sods

Perhaps because it is constantly seeking to be the latest new thing in British politics, the Anti-Capitalist Initiative has not yet directly commented on the SWP crisis. However, over the Christmas period, one of its leading members, former *Workers Power* editor Simon Hardy, published a two-part series on 'The forgotten legacies of Bolshevism on revolutionary organisation'.<sup>6</sup> Doubtless based on material written in his *internal* arguments within WP from last year, the article offers some

further historical examples of *open* factional struggle within Bolshevik history.

Yet Hardy's critique of WP's conception of the 'vanguard party' is extremely disappointing. He summarises his argument as follows: "The Bolsheviks should be situated within a *tradition of building broad parties* that allowed for a plurality of tendencies, and saw themselves as a tendency seeking to fuse a revolutionary-democratic and communist politics with the militant leaders of the working class struggle" (emphasis added). Neatly enough, this understanding of 'broad-party' fits in with comrade Hardy's project today. Yet this overlooks the very obvious point that the RSDLP - like its model, the German SPD - was a *Marxist* party united around a *Marxist* programme. This programmatic approach thus repeatedly saw the *exclusion* of those who rejected the programme, not least many of the "convinced individual anarchists, syndicalists, left reformists and perhaps even those who do not accept the class struggle" that comrade Hardy and Cooper are seeking to cobble together into a single organisation.<sup>7</sup>

Stuart King, whose organisation, Permanent Revolution, has now been effectively disbanded to work in the ACI, argues along similar lines. Despite quite correctly pointing out that "no-one should rejoice at the problems in the SWP" because "an implosion of the biggest far-left organisation in Britain in the absence of any alternative will weaken everyone struggling against austerity and capitalism", comrade King has staggeringly little to say about the way forward for SWP oppositionists. Take, for instance, the section of his article headed 'Overcoming the crisis of the left', something we must all aspire to. What advice does our comrade have for those fighting for democracy and strategic clarity in the SWP? How does he seek to address the big questions of programme, organisation, leadership and theory that result from our class's strategic defeat in the 20th century, a defeat that has scattered our forces to the four winds? Simple. Don't you know there are some people in the Anti-Capitalist Initiative who are looking to "do things differently" and to organise "new" forces around the so-called anti-capitalist movement (by which he means largely phantom allies in what the comrades conceive as some kind of mass movement: Occupy, UK Uncut, etc). The ACI wants a "new way forward", "overcoming the sectarianism and divisions of the past" to build a "non-sectarian revolutionary left".<sup>8</sup> If the "new way forward" will proceed unencumbered by a revolutionary party then it is hardly surprising that comrade King has no advice in relation to members of groups whose ostensible aim is the construction of such a party. In this sense, the approach of his former comrades in WP is much better.

At least he is not as forthright in calling for the opposition to walk as is Pham Binh, an American blogger who used to be a member of the International Socialist Organisation. The comrade claims that "Tom Walker, who wrote a powerful and searching resignation letter, is much more advanced in his thinking than the SWP's critical stalwarts." Accordingly, SWP leading dissident Richard Seymour's "exhortation to SWP members to fight is right in spirit, but mistaken strategically. 'Leninism' is a rigged game to begin with, and the reality

is that the majority of the SWP is behind the leadership, the CC holds all the cards, and the opposition's power has peaked, as demoralisation, resignations, and expulsions take their toll."<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately for comrade Pham Binh, the "more advanced" comrade Walker was explicit in saying that he does *not* have answers for the left to move forward.<sup>10</sup> One wonders where SWP oppositionists comrades are supposed to go, or how walking is going to advance the cause of revolutionary organisation?

Finally, if only to point out some of the pseudo-anarchist side-effects that the profligacy of stultifying bureaucratic centralism can throw up on the left, it is briefly worth mentioning Barry Biddulph's reply to Simon Hardy on Bolshevism, which was published on the *Commune* website.<sup>11</sup> For comrade Biddulph, bureaucratic centralism and Lenin were simply two peas in the same pod from 1904 (!) onwards. Not only does this let the SWP leadership off the hook somewhat: it also does a staggering disservice to any serious historical approach to Bolshevism. Comrade Biddulph merely takes all the hoary old myths of Trotskyism on the "vanguard party" (the elite that 'worried about the workers', the alleged formation of the single-faction Bolshevik 'party' in 1912, the so-called 'deBolshevised' Bolshevik party in April 1917, when it supposedly ditched the minimum-maximum programme, etc) and inserts 'minus' signs where most of our Trotskyist comrades have 'plus' signs. The fact that the article is illustrated by a flattering image of Rosa Luxemburg does nothing to strengthen comrade Biddulph's argument.

His is a cruder form of the anti-partyist spontaneity of the far left more generally: the strategic way forward supposedly lies *solely* in strikes, workers' committees, factory bulletins, occupations, demonstrations, etc. That the party is built on theory and programme 'from the top down' is, for these comrades, pure Bonapartist elitism etc. For Marxists it is ABC.

## Significant silence

Whatever their merits or shortcomings, at least one can say that the above comrades felt obliged to comment, however tangentially, on developments in the SWP. Thus far this is *not* the case for two of the SWP's larger competitors on the British left: ie, the Socialist Party in England and Wales, and the Communist Party of Britain.

Perhaps a certain sense of *Schadenfreude* currently prevails as they watch one of their most influential opponents tear themselves to pieces as they get on with 'building the party'. After all, the *Morning Star's* CPB in particular is steeped in the bizarrely Manichean world view that consists of their group and the mass organisations on the one hand, and nothing but 'sects' on the other.

Indeed, given that the historical roots of those like Robert Griffiths can be traced back to the (Stalinised) reading of Lenin's *What is to be done?* and tracts like Stalin's *Fundamentals of Leninism* and the *Short course*, it is hardly to be expected that the CPB would seek to lecture the SWP on democracy, internal or otherwise. (That said, it is obvious that the old 'official' CPGB certainly had a healthier democratic culture than the SWP today, what with elected district secretaries and such things!)

The Socialist Party's Peter Taaffe is hardly a champion of Bolshevik

democracy either. In his (pretty dire) defence of the Militant's lack of democracy in 1996, he takes the line of Counterfire and Workers Power by wheeling out the usual nonsense that allowing open factions could lead to his group becoming nothing more than a "debating club".<sup>12</sup> (We note that the split in the Militant used the pages of that famed Marxist daily, *The Guardian*, to argue out its differences!)

Yet he and others in the SPEW office might look upon developments within the SWP with a certain apprehension. A rank-and-file rebellion in the SWP will hopefully lead to similar developments across the left more generally. It might serve to embolden those SPEW comrades who, say, might have concerns about the group's fawning attitude towards the trade union bureaucracy, and how this manifests itself in that group's deadly dull weekly publication, *The Socialist*. Here's hoping ...

## Marxist unity

So what is to be done? Genuine partisans of our class can agree with the following sentiments expressed in the Workers Power article discussed above: "Against the background of the deepest capitalist crisis in generations, the abject failure of the established organisations and leaders of the working class movement to lead any effective defence of the class, the self-imposed crisis of the SWP could yet have a positive outcome - if its members use it to reorient their organisation and engage with other revolutionaries to build a party worthy of the name. We sincerely hope they can - for the sake of the entire left, in Britain and internationally."

Struggle decides. After all, as we see from the formation of communist parties in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution, such as our very own CPGB in 1920, revolutionary unity does not come through stitch-ups by bureaucratic elites. It comes through political struggle and the empowerment of the rank and file within our movement - in the left, in the trade unions, in the Labour Party - against all bans, proscriptions and gagging orders, whether carried out by a local SWP full-timer, a trade union bureaucrat or a Labour leader. Of course, the current struggle beginning in the SWP does not take place against the backdrop of 1917 and the drive to revolutionary communist unity. Yet in *objective* terms, at least, these are no ordinary times either. Much is at stake.

And in the process of the struggle against bureaucracy in our movement, ideas become sharper. Activists become

more politicised and frozen canon can quickly melt in the heat of battle. That is why the fight for democracy and change within the largest leftwing organisation in Britain is one for the workers' movement as a whole, one in which all partisans of our class must engage. If we refuse to foreground the question of transforming the left from top to bottom then we will not get anywhere. We cannot unite the class without uniting the best amongst ourselves.

We need a political and cultural revolution. Realignment on the basis of a revolutionary programme is necessary, desirable and increasingly urgent. It is the will that is currently lacking. This will must be *forced* on the current misleadership of the left.

The 'broad party' approach is a dead end. Eduard Bernstein does not point towards working class rule. We need a Marxist party with a Marxist minimum-maximum programme (minimum for working class rule; maximum for communism), embodying the idea that the working class can and must take political power. The fundamentals of this programme must be: working class independence; no strategic alliances with the bourgeoisie; democracy in the state and in our own movement; and internationalism ●

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## Notes

1. www.workerspower.co.uk/2013/01/swp-rape-and-democracy-crisis-what-now.
2. Emphasis added. Cited in B Lewis, 'John Rees: illusion of being a master of strategy' *Weekly Worker* December 2 2010. Rather unfortunately for the logic of his argument, comrade Rees cites the April 1917 debates as an example of such a healthy internal culture. But both Marcel Liebman and Paul Le Blanc pointed to the *public* nature of these disputes long before comrade Rees picked up his pen to write his offering on the way forward for the left today.
3. E Maltby and M Thomas, 'Politics without oxygen': www.workersliberty.org/swpdemocracy.
4. For an extensive discussion of the implications of these developments, see M Macnair *Revolutionary strategy* London 2008, chapter 6, 'University in diversity'.
5. 'SWP: the case isn't closed' *Solidarity* January 16: www.workersliberty.org/system/files/270.pdf.
6. Part 1: http://anticapitalists.org/2012/12/28/building-a-revolutionary-organisation-i; part 2: http://anticapitalists.org/2013/01/01/forgotten-legacies-part-ii-the-problem-of-monopoly-in-the-sphere-of-politics.
7. Reported at www.workerspower.co.uk/2012/07/anticapitalist-initiative-not-fit-for-purpose.
8. S King, 'Sex, lies and audiotape': www.permanentrevolution.net/entry/3430.
9. www.thenorthstar.info/?p=4691.
10. See T Walker, 'Why I am resigning' *Weekly Worker* January 10.
11. B Biddulph, 'The forgotten criticism of Bolshevism': http://thecommmune.co.uk/2013/01/13/the-forgotten-criticism-of-bolshevism.
12. P Taaffe, 'On democratic centralism': www.marxist.net/namechange/nameframe.htm.

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**SWP**

# Countless zigs and zags over women's oppression

The central committee claims that the SWP has a consistent record of fighting for women's liberation. Former national committee member **Dave Isaacson** sheds light on the not so excellent truth

**F**irstly I must say that I do not think that the massive crisis currently taking hold of the Socialist Workers Party - while clearly triggered by allegations of sexual abuse at the hands of the group's erstwhile national secretary, Martin Smith (aka comrade Delta), and their catastrophically bungled and downright dishonest handling by the bureaucratic apparatus - is at root about these issues. Fundamentally it is about the failure of the SWP's perspectives and the inability of the rank-and-file membership to do anything to correct them under the bureaucratic-centralist regime.

While SWP members doubtlessly do much good work as individuals, their group's perspectives and mode of operation have meant that as an organisation they have done little more than service themselves and their apparatus. As a revolutionary organisation the SWP is not fit for purpose. Many things could have triggered a crisis such as the one before us now. The Respect debacle came close, but in spite of their complicity the rest of the CC were able to use the role of John Rees *et al* to shield themselves from the worst of members' anger.

On this occasion the removal of Martin Smith as national secretary and getting him to step down from the CC (while allowing him to retain other positions of responsibility and leadership) was quite rightly not sufficient to quell rebellion. The particular form that the crisis has taken has brought numerous questions relating to women's oppression and democracy to the fore. The whole fiasco reeks all the more of hypocrisy by virtue of the fact that, while the actions of the SWP's disputes committee made a mockery of the seriousness of the rape allegations, over the same period the SWP had been calling for Julian Assange to face rape charges in Sweden. So when - in response to the details of their crisis featuring in the press and all over the internet - Charlie Kimber, the SWP's national secretary, issues a statement on behalf of the CC stating that "our party has a proud tradition of fighting for women's liberation, as is shown, for example, by our consistent campaigning over the decades to defend abortion, and by our criticism of George Galloway for his remarks about the Julian Assange rape accusations",<sup>1</sup> we cannot take this claim at face value.

What is the real record of the SWP when it comes to fighting for women's liberation? By examining such questions we hope to gain positive lessons, not just for those in and around the SWP, who will now be asking many searching questions of their organisation's history, but by all of us on the left. After all, it is certainly not just the SWP which has a less than pristine record in this area.

## Respect and abortion

It is worth starting with recent history - indeed, the very examples Kimber uses (abortion and 'standing up to Galloway') - before delving further back into the past. It seems that barely a sentence can be issued by an



**Women's liberation: a class question**

SWP hack without some distortion of the truth. It must be said from the outset that it is insufficient to "defend abortion" - as Kimber claims the SWP has been doing - as at present women in the UK do not have the right to choose an abortion as they see fit. Abortion rights need not only defending, but extending too. Women must be free to opt to terminate a pregnancy without needing the say-so of doctors (who we know can let their personal prejudices affect decisions), and that this right must be available to the woman as early as possible and as late as necessary.

The SWP's record concerning abortion over recent years certainly

falls short of consistent. When in 2004-05 we witnessed a rise in activity and press attention given to anti-abortionists, members of the CPGB argued that the left needed to take this threat seriously. Other activists recognised a need for something to be done too and moves to set up a new campaign were made. However, as CPGB member Anne Mc Shane reported at the time, "At a meeting held on September 16 2004 to discuss the launch of a new pro-choice initiative, Candy Udwin told us 'on behalf of' the SWP that 'it would be extremely difficult to encroach on existing rights' and that there was no reason for a new campaign to be set up. For them it was

a non-issue."<sup>2</sup>

Of course, this all took place when the SWP was championing the Respect project and did not want its own action to embarrass its partners, such as Respect's anti-abortionist figurehead, George Galloway, and the Muslim Association of Britain and other Muslim leaders. For insisting that principles around women's and LGBT rights must be upheld clearly in Respect propaganda, CPGB members were slandered as 'Islamophobes' (in much the same way as SWP oppositionists are today labelled 'autonomists' and 'feminists') - as if individual Muslims could not be won to accept principles such as a woman's

right to choose, a notion which is frankly based upon Islamophobic prejudices itself.

I personally remember SWP members sitting dumbstruck and powerless to object when George Galloway slammed abortion as an "abomination" at a Respect rally at Leeds University. Even the deliberately vague position Respect as an organisation held in relation to "a woman's right to choose" was too much for Galloway, and the SWP all too willingly conceded more ground. The issue was made a matter of conscience, so that, regardless of any policy Respect had, George could - as Respect's sole representative in Parliament - do and say as he pleased. The CPGB's motion calling for accountability of representatives at the 2005 Respect conference was dutifully voted down by SWP comrades.

John Rees summed the SWP's methodology up very well in his closing speech at Respect's launch convention in 2004. He said: "We fought for the declaration and voted against the things we believed in, because, while the people here are important, they are not as important as the millions out there. We are reaching to the people locked out of politics. We voted for what they want."<sup>3</sup> As if the job of Marxists is to hold a mirror up to society rather than seek to revolutionise it.

Let us not dwell on Respect any longer though. While it illustrates clearly the bankruptcy of Kimber's claims to consistency in defence of abortion and resolve in standing up to Galloway's reactionary positions regarding women, it is for many SWP members a period viewed as an aberration. A temporary blip amongst an otherwise wholesome history. Yet, while it is a particularly noxious example, it is actually part of a pattern of opportunism going back much further.

## Women's Voice

This is not to say that SWP members have not done some excellent work campaigning for women's rights and on numerous other questions - they have. I know this both from my own time in the SWP and from working closely with SWP members since then. All but the most blinkered of sectarians will acknowledge this. The organisation is composed overwhelmingly of sincere revolutionary socialists and if it simply disintegrates as a result of this crisis then the whole left and working class movement will be the weaker for it.

Yet the best way to ensure that is the end result would be for SWP comrades to quell their criticisms and ignore the reality which is staring them in the face. The opposite approach is needed. We must open up the entire history of the SWP, and the rest of left of which it is a part, to a rigorous and searching interrogation. Only then can we achieve the clarity we require to move on to something better. This is not "navel-gazing", as SWP hacks would have you believe, but a long-overdue health check.

The most notorious aspect of the SWP's history with a strong bearing on the group's track record regarding women's liberation is the period from



1972, in which it ran the *Women's Voice* publication/organisation until its closure in 1982. It was the decision to terminate *Women's Voice*, combined with the subsequent articles produced over the next few years by way of theorising the SWP's position on women's oppression, which has left its mark on the SWP ever since - it is still evident in the way CC loyalists are conducting themselves today.

Tom Walker notes in his resignation statement that "'feminism' is used effectively as a swear word by the leadership's supporters".<sup>4</sup> He goes on to explain that "this seems to be a legacy of a sharp political argument conducted decades ago against radical feminism and its separatist methods of organisation, but unfortunately it is being used today against young, militant anti-sexists coming into the party. In fact it is deployed against anyone who seems too concerned about issues of gender." From my own experience in the SWP I can concur that the same arguments that were used to argue for the closure of *Women's Voice* are recapitulated many years after the actual event.

So what actually happened back then in the 1970s and early 1980s? Not having been a participant, and recognising that all the accounts I have heard or read from participants have been heavily partial, it is not easy to see through the factional fog. However, it seems likely that the basic facts that Ian Birchall - a member of the SWP and its International Socialists forerunners - relates, in his history of the IS/SWP up until 1979, give a brief but fairly accurate impression of the development of *Women's Voice* up until Tony Cliff moved to have it closed down. This pamphlet was published before that, and its account was soon deemed to be off-message.

Birchall explains that "IS can be criticised for the fact that in the early 1970s the organisation as a whole failed to recognise the importance of the rise of the women's liberation movement, and to make a serious enough intervention in it. IS women were, of course, involved from the beginning ... However, the work tended to be left to the small group of women who took the initiative, with little guidance or encouragement from the central leadership of the organisation."<sup>5</sup>

However, by 1975 those around the *Women's Voice* publication, signified their growing importance with a rally of 600 in Manchester and the appointment within IS of a full-time women's organiser, Sheila McGregor. By 1978 the SWP decided to constitute *Women's Voice* as an organisation in its own right, with local branches, etc. A rally of 1,000 women was held in Sheffield. By the end of Birchall's account, which ends in 1979, it all seemed to be going so well, but it really was not long before the shit hit the fan.

Some within *Women's Voice* wanted greater independence from the SWP. Feminist ideas must have had a strong influence. In his autobiography Cliff claims: "I always opposed both ... *Women's Voice* and also the black workers' paper, *Flame*"; and: "Sadly, although I was in the leadership of the SWP, I was never allowed to be involved in the activity of *Women's Voice*."<sup>6</sup> I do not know how true this is, but it seems that Cliff was opportunistic enough to tolerate *Women's Voice* as a means to bring potential recruits closer to the SWP until it became significant enough to be a threat, or a viable entity in its own right. Then, Cliff came out in opposition to the group. Significantly he won over the leading women activists, Sheila McGregor and Lindsey German. The latter led the assault in what by all accounts

was a bitter fight. *Women's Voice* was shut down, as was *Flame* and the SWP Gay Group. Many members were lost through both expulsions and resignations. But for Cliff this price was certainly worth paying.

A more detailed appreciation of the history of *Women's Voice*, and indeed other aspects of the SWP's work regarding women's oppression, is beyond the scope of this short article, but some basic conclusions can be drawn. It is important that Marxists intervene in and build movements for women's liberation, but such work must be carried out with the politics of Marxism, not feminism - which at the end of the day offers a sectional outlook. The project of Marxism is for universal emancipation and this necessarily entails women's liberation, just as surely as the birth of class society required the oppression of women. Marx's simple claim, that "the emancipation of the productive class is that of all human beings without distinction of sex or race",<sup>7</sup> is key. The struggle for communism can only be won by the action of the working class.

## Defeating sexism

Consistency in upholding principles is not something the SWP is famed for. In this article we have not even touched upon other examples, such as the apologetics displayed towards the Iranian regime in the Stop the War Coalition - hardly a high point for defenders of women's rights within the SWP. The group has always emphasised the importance of giving workers the confidence to be militant

(irrespective of how this is achieved) over and above seeking to develop a conscious fight for a clear socialist programme.

It is precisely this absence of a political programme - something Tony Cliff prided himself in - which has ensured that the history of the SWP, more than any other far-left group, has been a history of zigzags. Flipping from one opportunist get-rich-quick scheme to another, with occasional bouts of sectarian isolation. Cliff believed he had a nose for judging when the moment was right to bend the stick and felt a political programme would have held him back from doing so. Frankly, if there were no other arguments for the adoption of a programme, then this would be sufficient. It is vastly more difficult to hold a wayward leadership to account without a programme to act as a guide to your organisation's practice. SWP rebels should remember this, as they begin to grapple with the question, 'What next?'

Sexism and patriarchy constitute barriers to working class unity - and thus socialist revolution - which must be fought. To do so effectively we need to understand how these features manifest themselves within the working class. One of the unfortunate theoretical dogmas which the SWP adopted in developing justifications for the closure of *Women's Voice* was the insistence that working class men do not benefit from women's oppression. Lindsey German wrote: "I would argue ... that not only do men not benefit from women's work in the family (rather the capitalist system as a whole benefits), but

also that it is not true that men and capital are conspiring to stop women having access to economic production."<sup>8</sup> This has dovetailed with the overwhelmingly economic approach that the SWP has taken to women's oppression, focusing mainly on questions of equal pay, rights at work, etc. An insufficient approach, of course. All manifestations of women's oppression need to be challenged, including sexism within the working class - or the revolutionary party for that matter - if workers are to be united in a conscious fight for communism.

Of course, in the sense that women's oppression acts as a barrier to communism - universal emancipation - then it does not benefit anyone. However, to leave it at that would simply be foolish. In the world as it existed in 1981 (and today) clearly men did gain benefits as individuals, as opposed to a being part of a class, from the inferior position of women. Women on average still do the bulk of housework and childcare, while men still get better pay and access to work. "The modern individual family is founded on the open or concealed domestic slavery of the wife, and modern society is a mass composed of these individual families as its molecules. Within the family he is the bourgeois and the wife represents the proletariat," wrote Engels in his *Origins of the family, private property and the state*.<sup>9</sup> It is not sufficient to seek equality within the family, however. What is required is the complete abolition of the patriarchal family as a privatised sphere of domestic labour.

As for the denial of women's access

to economic production, while there is certainly no conspiracy by all men to achieve such a thing, generations of craft unions did just this and it was not until World War II when women were finally admitted to the Amalgamated Engineering Union. This situation has undoubtedly improved, but sexism still plays a part in the unions and elsewhere in the working class movement. By denying that it has a material basis we do ourselves no favours.

Acceptance of this fact should not, however, lead us to doubt the bankruptcy of separatism. Women's emancipation is not a question for women alone, but for the whole working class. While autonomous socialist organisations for women and other groups can play some role, the absolute priority must be the winning of unity in action of working class women and men. Without this we will never reverse what Engels famously dubbed the "world-historic defeat of the female sex"<sup>10</sup> ●

## Notes

1. *Socialist Worker* January 14.
2. 'Respect silent on abortion onslaught' *Weekly Worker* March 17 2005
3. 'Socialism: the final shibboleth' *Weekly Worker* January 29 2004.
4. 'Why I am resigning' *Weekly Worker* January 10.
5. <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/revhist/otherdox/smp/smp3.html>.
6. T Cliff *A world to win* London 2000, p146.
7. [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/05/parti-ouvrier.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/05/parti-ouvrier.htm).
8. L. German, 'Theories of patriarchy' *International Socialism* December 1981.
9. [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1884/origin-family/ch02d.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1884/origin-family/ch02d.htm).
10. [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1884/origin-family/ch02c.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1884/origin-family/ch02c.htm).

# Another week, another resignation

I am writing to you to make you aware of my resignation from the Socialist Workers Party and my reasons for this. In light of the recent articles in the national media, and other resignations, I feel, as a recently new member, it is important to highlight my concerns as well.

The way in which the SWP handled the cases of Julian Assange and Jimmy Savile, both within the party (discussions at branch meetings) and through *Socialist Worker*, made me proud to stand with others who saw through capitalist notions of justice, women's liberation, gender and power relationships. We are aware that women are too often not taken seriously or treated in a manner that helps push them deeper into their trauma, pushing back their ability to process and come to terms with the horrors that they may have endured.

This is why I have been so appalled at the handling of the recent allegations heard by the party's disputes committee. Despite our concern over the methods the current political system uses, we are not independent of it; we are part of this system and therefore in order to change it from within, we need to be seen to be a legitimate organisation that works for the good of all people. How else will the SWP ever be seen as a viable alternative by the masses?

With allegations of rape, our hands are tied and we are very limited in our abilities to carry out true justice ourselves. We do not have the means in order to achieve this. We can only stand by to a certain extent and allow the processes of the capitalist police and courts take their course. But, because we are aware of the

injustices and the inherent flaws in these capitalist institutions, we can only offer to serve as a 'buffer' of sorts to soften the blow to both parties if either faces the often cold and uncaring hand of the state.

We could debate and discuss what could potentially be within our remit, all at the discretion of the accuser, perhaps, advocating adequate counselling services for the people involved, making sure that, if they have grievances with the handling of the case - such as, treatment by the police, issues with legal representation and counselling/crisis services - we can be there to offer support and advice.

The DC has defended its actions, saying, "had the disputes committee believed that the accused person was guilty, it would have expelled him from the SWP immediately". This statement fails to address the wider consequences of a guilty verdict of rape and/or other sexual misconduct. Does this mean as long as the defendant has no access to female comrades, it is acceptable for women outside the party to be at risk of being attacked?

The DC's response to a now hypothetical situation does not address the fact that the accused will need mental health treatment for an underlying illness and/or help them to address their abusive violent impulses if they are indeed guilty. Where is any suggestion of such a programme?

Obviously, in the current political system, rehabilitation either does not go far enough or is patchy, even non-existent in some places, with the state all too ready and willing to put people in jail, with little or no support

in preparation for life after their sentence, let alone helping them become aware of their actions and learn to address and adjust their behaviour to become functional members of society. Regardless of our views, it's currently all we have.

What if the accused is innocent, regardless of the internal decision made, but proven by an established court of law? It would be yet another injustice at the hands of the disputes committee. When someone is accused of such a crime, there needs to be a proper system of investigation and court-based time for them to defend themselves adequately. Neither of these could be achieved through the sham court of the DC. Due to the lack of credibility of the DC, comrades have had to draw their own conclusions concerning this matter, mostly based on conjecture and hearsay, which will inevitably filter out into their personal lives and involvement with the party, causing it to become a constant reminder for those actually involved.

The DC never had the right to investigate this case in the first place. One of the committee members knew the accuser from being in the same district and, aware of a conflict of interest, they stepped down from the case. Five committee members were or are comrades on the CC, having close ties with the accused. Seven comrades on the disputes committee then viewed the 'evidence' for "four long days" to conclude, in their opinion, a verdict of not guilty. We are also told that this decision was not reached unanimously - one comrade disagreed, believing harassment was "at least likely". How can it be that seven people on a disputes

committee took it upon themselves to be judge, jury and executioner in matters of such magnitude?

Surely, this is a case of bad judgment on behalf of the DC even to entertain the idea of holding a committee on an issue such as rape? I do not doubt that members thought about the matter seriously, but it was not a jury of the accused's peers. Rather, to quote a recent member in the news, it was "a jury of his mates".

One of the most important attributes of a socialist, in my view, is the capacity for humility. I may be wrong but, by admitting our mistakes, we learn from ourselves and from others; in turn helping to shape the society we want to live in. Humility opens us up to being accountable for our actions, especially for those in our leadership who we allow to hold a certain level of power over democracy in the party.

I see no humility and no acceptance of wrongdoing by the disputes committee or the central committee with their dealings in this case. Now conference has passed, the factions have dissolved and dissent kept in check (under threat of expulsion) until the three months preceding next year's conference, as stated in our constitution. A pressing issue such as this needs to be resolved at the time, not a year later. Otherwise the SWP stands for even less than the parties that claim to be democratic at the moment.

I have seen no reasonable outcome to the problems we face and no longer feel the SWP in its current form reflects my values, morals and understanding of socialism. Therefore, I feel I have no other option but to leave the SWP ●

**Jon Hosier**

**WOMEN**

# Macho culture and the lessons we can learn from the Middle East

How should sexism be combated? **Yassamine Mather** compares the situation in Britain with the practice of two guerrilla organisations



**Sakine Cansız: never a 'yes woman'**

On Wednesday January 9 three members of the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK), including Sakine Cansız, a founding member of the organisation, were murdered in Paris. There are many theories about who was behind the execution-style killings and most of them relate to conspiracies to derail the current talks between the PKK and Turkey.

It could be that hard-line nationalists or Islamists within the Turkish security forces were behind the murders, although it is far more likely that Iranian or Syrian security forces, anxious about recent progress in negotiations between the Kurdish group and the Turkish state, were behind the murders. Iran's security forces have already killed a number of the regime's opponents in France and got away with it. One thing is clear: whoever was responsible for the murder of the three Kurdish activists made it look like an internal execution. PKK supporters say that in death as in life, Sakine Cansız was an equal to any of the organisation's men. Others might argue that the 'macho militarist' culture of the organisation had another victim.

Although she was a loyal supporter of imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan, she was no 'yes woman'. There are unconfirmed reports that she had fallen out with the leadership in the past and that her partner, Mehmet Şener, was killed in the early 1990s as a result of PKK factional infighting. But she engaged in self-criticism and was rehabilitated. Former PKK members recount an incident in the 1990s when Öcalan made fun of prisoners who had just ended a hunger strike, saying: "They sold out the revolution for a bowl of shorba [soup]". But Sakine, who had just been released from a 13-year prison sentence, stood up against the 'leader' and defended the prisoners. A courageous act that, according to the same reports, actually impressed Öcalan.

PKK supporters often claim that the large number of female fighters in their ranks is testimony to the group's determination to fight patriarchy and Cansız is quoted as saying that that women's participation in the PKK's armed struggle was no "token gesture".

Critics will point out that masculinisation of women in guerrilla organisations is no path to women's

liberation and in many ways I would not disagree with this view. Having said that, Sakine's life and her commitment to socialism have lessons for all of us. I did not know her, but, reading about her life, I was struck by the similarities with the lives of so many of the Fedayeen women fighters in Kurdistan. I felt I had known her all my life. And in a week when British left politics has been dominated by allegations of sexism in the Socialist Workers Party, it could be that the successes and mistakes of some of the Middle East's main radical left organisations have lessons for the challenges facing women activists in leftwing European organisations.

For all the PhD theses (usually written by men with little first-hand experience or knowledge of the Fedayeen) about the plight of women in the Organisation of the Iranian People's Fedayeen, I maintain that my experience as a candidate member, member and full cadre of the OIPFG contradicts all the stereotypical accusations. I am not implying that a militarist organisation with confused politics had overcome sexism. However, given the patriarchal, religious backdrop of

the first Islamic regime in the Middle East, or in the case of eastern Turkey, given the predominance of Islamic fundamentalism, the practises of the Fedayeen in the 1980s and the PKK reveal surprising achievements regarding women's equality. I believe these advances were achieved because members of these organisations took their politics and their commitments to revolutionary change seriously and, despite the serious flaws in their political outlook, their organisational practice was superior to that of the radical left in Europe.

No amount of reading or quoting Engels or Kollontai, no repetition of standard texts about the dual exploitation of women, can help us deal with the current debate about sexism in the SWP. One can safely assume that left activists, and certainly members of the SWP central committee, are familiar with such texts - indeed they quote them regularly and, at least on paper, there is no major difference between the opponents of sexism on the left and those they accuse of sexism. That is why in trying to find answers we might do well by looking at the limited and indeed isolated achievements of the

Fedayeen and PKK. Of course, it is perfectly legitimate to use the SWP fiasco to revisit the issue of sexism on the left, but the fact that this aspect has dominated internet discussions on the subject is regrettable - especially as we now have the *Daily Mail* lecturing us about 'feminism'!

Of course, the specific conditions of leftwing military operations in the snowy mountains of Iran or Turkey cannot be duplicated. But it is important to establish what can be learnt from the positive and negative aspects of those experiences. This article is not concerned with the shambolic behaviour of the SWP's CC in relation to allegations of rape (although I would say that sexism was not the cause of that particular problem - more the inevitable consequence of other shortcomings: a rudderless political outlook, lack of strategy, cronyism, and the absence of democracy). No, this article concerns the practices of the Middle Eastern left and the way those practices impact on women's equality.

## **Membership**

The Fedayeen imposed notoriously stringent membership conditions

and, although these were often criticised by other groups, I do think the idea of recruiting 'revolutionaries' on the basis of a passing expression of sympathy on a demonstration or protest is far more ridiculous - unless one is only interested in membership quantity, as opposed to quality.

In order to become a member of the Fedayeen, a supporter with a reasonable understanding of its politics would have to pass one, preferably two, tests: emerging from jail with a "courageous prison record" and surviving a couple of cold winters in the battlegrounds of Kurdistan. These qualifications were obviously specific to a particular era in Iran. However, fighting capitalism in the 21st century is not a dinner party and it is certainly time for the organisations of the radical left to revisit their minimum conditions for membership. There must be happy medium between these two extremes.

Those that think they can build a serious organisation by distributing membership cards at various protests are badly mistaken. It is not surprising that members recruited on such a basis bring with them all sorts of retrograde predispositions or prejudices, including sexist attitudes. It is not surprising that such recruits are 'impressed' by the powerful men (or women) in the organisation they have joined.

The membership requirements of the SWP - and indeed many of the other organisations of the radical left - appear to me to be less demanding than those of a gym (you may not actually show up for a workout, but at least you have to pay your subscription). So why are we surprised when 'yes men' and indeed 'yes women' are the ones who get promoted in the SWP?

The other side of the coin is the cavalier attitude towards lethargy. For all the talk of action to bring about the overthrow of capitalism, we are not talking about a combatant membership: a large chunk of the 7,000-plus men and women who are supposed to be SWP members cannot be considered activists, let alone serious revolutionaries, so why should we expect them to have conquered sexism?

## Sexist society

One reason why guerrilla organisations have a better record of combating sexism is because they are isolated from society. Their members do not interact within normal society. The claim that Fedayeen women activists of the 1980s were totally 'liberated' must be taken with a pinch of salt. However, there is no doubt that separation from day-to-day family tasks did present unparalleled 'opportunities' for women. We live in a patriarchal society and removal from it at least presents us with the possibility of creating conditions where sexism can be more easily combated.

By definition guerrilla women did not have household responsibilities. Either we were childless or those with children had their offspring looked after by parents or relatives in cities and villages far from the battlefield. We did not have any gender-specific duties, so, in that respect, living in a collective military base was to a very limited extent like living in post-revolutionary conditions. Female comrades in European leftwing organisations (maybe with the exception of a few full-timers) spend the majority of their time in a sexist environment - as wage-earners (often on lower wages than their male counterparts), as carers for children and the elderly, as unpaid workers doing housework (and, in the vast majority of cases, spending many more hours on housework than the men they live with). At the best of times it would be impossible to expect a political organisation to deal with the day-to-day discrimination women activists face in society - discrimination unrelated to party activity.

To overcome this situation there are difficult personal, social and political choices to be made and in my opinion those who put politics in command often come out of it stronger. As women, we may vent all our frustrations about sexual inequality within the political organisations to which we belong. It is certainly easy to play the role of the victim, but for a revolutionary such attitudes are cop-outs. If we are to

combat sexism within our organisations, we must start by building female comrades' self-confidence.

Women activists are often their own worst enemy when it comes to their own capabilities, organisationally and politically. On this issue we must rebel against stereotyped work. We need to consider the possibility of ditching housework and reducing care duties so that we have enough time to write articles, to participate in meetings, to organise. But many female comrades are not in a position to do so - who would look after their children? who would care for their elderly parent? Some do not *want* to do so, yet all of us expect miracles from our political organisation.

## Physical and mental

Even guerrilla organisations take note of the fact that there are physical differences between men and women, and some tasks are more suited to women's physical capabilities.

However, life in a combat zone leaves little room for chivalry. Women might be issued with lighter guns and in the case of the Fedayeen, female combatants had to come to terms with the company of a dedicated male bodyguard, who would have his gun pointed to her head when they ventured into dangerous areas. This bizarre custom was meant to ensure that the organisation would never allow a female fighter to fall into the hands of the Islamic regime. Upon arrival in Kurdistan, my immediate reaction to this practice was to condemn it as an insult. But a few weeks into my stay, having heard about the kind of torture Islamic Guards reserved for communist women, I actually found it reassuring that my bodyguard would make sure I was dead rather than taken prisoner. It was a practical step taken to deal with a specific issue.

However, with the exception of this single practice, men and women wore the same uniform, performed the same tasks, were treated more or less equally in the camp, in battle and in the division of labour.

In Kurdistan, maybe because we lived so far from reality (away from capitalist commodity fetishism, away from the false modesty imposed by the Shia state) our appearance seemed to have no significance and this in itself had a liberating effect. Qualities such as the ability to debate, organise and, yes, shoot accurately, were considered far more important than looks - our military uniform did not leave much room for coquetry. Both in Kurdistan and later as the representative of the organisation abroad, I was well aware that

using make-up and spending time on one's appearance in other ways were considered serious flaws.

I know this will be frowned upon by modern feminists, but if revolutionary women are to be equal with men there must come a time when we stop becoming victims of commodity fetishism - a time when we refuse to be concerned about our appearance. Apart from anything else, this will leave us more time for politics, its theory and practice. Whether we like it or not, the inequality in terms of the time we spend on non-political tasks - be it family, housework, childcare or our appearance - does contribute to our lack of confidence. It does make us victims of a sexist culture, sexist society. It is up to us individually and collectively to change this - we cannot expect men to do it for us.

## Power and sex

Throughout their clandestine life in Iranian cities, the Fedayeen banned sexual relations of any kind between members of the organisation. Both the pre-1979 Fedayeen and the PKK have been accused of executing comrades for breaking such rules, and the shah's secret police and some on the Iranian left keep repeating the allegation that the Fedayeen would impose the death penalty for initiating a relationship with another member of the organisation. Although this allegation is completely false, the sex ban does show the kind of discipline considered necessary to confront the dangers presented by clandestine political activity in a police state.

Of course, such a ban would both be ridiculous and represent an interference in the private lives of comrades under any other circumstances, but there is no doubt that the left has to deal with the issue of the abuse of power by men, and occasionally women. However, the simple answer must be to combat bureaucracy, privilege and kowtowing to those in positions of power. It is wrong - and counterrevolutionary - to encourage an admiration of senior cadres simply because of the position they hold, or to promote myths about their intellectual or organisational capabilities to encourage respect for their rank. Such practices can result in a cult of personality - to the detriment of the building of a serious political organisation.

The issue is not one of sexual abuse, pure and simple (although elements of such abuse exist). It is one of unaccountable power. That is what the members and supporters of all working class organisations must constantly be on their guard against ●

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## Fighting fund Upsurge

Readers may not be surprised to learn that our online readership has shot up over the last couple of weeks. In the seven days since the last issue came out, no fewer than 31,851 people read us on the web. That represents a threefold increase compared to the average readership over recent months. In fact last Thursday alone (the day *Weekly Worker* No944 hit the internet) we had 8,489 readers - a similar figure to what we have sometimes notched up in a week in the past.

The reason for this upsurge is no secret. It is entirely due to our coverage of the crisis engulfing the Socialist Workers Party. This fact alone gives the lie to those who say that the role of any socialist or communist paper must be to 'appeal to workers' - they mean the mass of ordinary workers, rather than the class-conscious, *politically* aware minority. In reality there is a role for publications of both types, depending on given circumstances.

This paper is unashamedly aimed at left political activists, not workers in their millions or even union militants. It

is to this minority that we look at present to fight for the Marxist party that *would* be able to appeal to the millions. And our readership figures prove that our target audience is real enough. The way the left organises is important to them.

That is why I am so confident that my appeal in this column, week in, week out, will not fall on deaf ears. Comrades *know* that the fight for party is a vital one and that this fight must be paid for (especially as we have temporarily increased the number of pages). We need at least £1,500 every month and in January we have raised £772 so far. Last week saw £115 come in via standing orders and £90 in cheques (thank you, HJ, LY and FP).

But more than half the month has gone and we need to step up the pace. Do you count yourself among the partyists? ●

**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.**

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

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

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**Xenophobia  
should not be  
welcomed by left**

## Cameron's Pandora's box

With Ukip riding high in the polls, writes **Eddie Ford**, the Tories are desperate to steal its votes

**F**inally, the waiting is over. On January 18 we will get to hear David Cameron's much anticipated 'big speech' about Europe.

Of course, within the Conservative Party there is a substantial rump of far-right and plain loony MPs, content to peddle endless xenophobic gibberish - especially after a good lunch. Such pathetic, nationalist drivel, needless to say, attracts significant grassroots support and - alas - strikes a certain resonance with a section of the British populace. Nor is the excitement confined to the Tory and tabloid press. Doubtlessly the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain and others will use the speech as an opportunity to promote their noxious national socialist agenda of withdrawing from the European Union 'capitalist club' but remaining within the United Kingdom 'capitalist club'.

Cameron is walking a tightrope. He could easily end up pleasing nobody but upsetting virtually everybody. Many Eurosceptic backbenchers want a simple in/out referendum on continued UK membership of the EU, preferably sooner rather than later. Unless adverse political circumstances presented him with almost no choice, it seems extremely unlikely that Cameron would go down that particular path, but he has to throw "the bastards" (as John Major memorably and not inaccurately called them) some juicy red meat to stop them going for his throat.

Therefore Cameron promises to hold a referendum on a "new EU settlement" if the Tories are elected with a majority in 2015. This will entail "renegotiating" London's terms of membership or the "repatriation" of certain powers if there are any revisions to the Lisbon treaty - a near certainty considering the beached EU project and the ongoing euro crisis.

The British electorate willing, these Tory plans for renegotiation will take place in 2017 or 2018 - a very long time when it comes to EU politics. Cameron has already revealed to his Conservative cabinet colleagues what his negotiating strategy is going to be and has already annoyed some, most notably Kenneth Clarke. Cameron has certainly opened up a Pandora's box and almost anything could happen. Certainly the fault-lines within the Tory Party, and the coalition as a whole, are thoroughly exposed.

### Gamble

Why is Cameron taking such a gamble? Frankly, because he is worried about Europe - worried that it could cost him the next general election. Opinion polls have consistently shown that large numbers want to get out of the EU and, far more importantly still, the United Kingdom Independence Party's political fortunes are currently riding high.

Last November Ukip notched up some pretty impressive by-election results, especially in Rotherham, where it came second on 21.79% of the vote. Some recent polls have put Ukip third - more ominous signs for the Liberal Democrats. An *Opinium/Observer* survey conducted in January 8 puts Labour at 41%, whilst the



**Kenneth Clarke: worried**

Tories are on 31%. But Ukip is on 12%, compared to the Lib Dems' 7%, the lowest figure ever recorded for the party by that particular polling agency. The same poll shows that over half of the British public believe that the UK should withdraw from the EU if Cameron cannot negotiate a "significant return" of powers. A majority (57%) also believed that the UK's interests are "fundamentally different" from other member states.

However, only 25% believed it was likely that the prime minister would be successful in taking powers back in areas such as employment, compared to 47% who said it was unlikely. Naturally, 69% of Ukip supporters believe that a successful renegotiation would be unlikely, while just 18% think it would be likely - and 88% of them agreed with the statement, "I would be more likely to vote for a party if they promised a referendum on whether the UK should remain in the EU or withdraw".

In other words, whilst Ukip cannot win the next general election, it can certainly lose it for the Conservatives. Expressing Tory anxiety, the party's vice-chairman, Michael Fabricant, has argued that "all parties should keep their options open" in the final months towards May 2015 - ie, the Conservative Party would be foolish to dismiss out of hand the idea of an electoral pact with Ukip. He even claimed that Ukip could come *first*

in the 2014 European parliamentary elections! Which would certainly give it "some momentum" before the general election.

Leaving aside such speculation, some Tory strategists say that electoral logic demands that Cameron moves closer to Ukip territory in order to undermine its vote - or face the boot in 2015. Pitching his tent, Cameron told ITV1's *Daybreak* programme that, though the "beating heart" of Britain needs to be in Europe because "we're a trading nation", he was determined to resist "too much interference" and "bossiness" from Brussels. Such a view was now a "mainstream aspiration" among voters, not just a Ukip concern (*The Guardian* January 14).

As for Ukip leader Nigel Farage, he claims his party is now part of the "political mainstream". He said Ukip would talk to other parties about a pact if they promised a referendum on Europe - but the Tories would first have to ditch Cameron and get someone more "sensible". After all, didn't the prime minister say in 2006 that Ukip were a "bunch of fruitcakes and loonies and closet racists"? A scandalous suggestion. Farage is also on record that he would "do a deal with the devil if it got us a full, free and fair referendum".

Well, there might be a quite a few candidate devils in the Tory Party. Like Eric Pickles, the misnamed communities secretary, who informed

*Pienaar's politics* on BBC Radio 5 Live (January 13) that Britain should not remain in the EU "at any price" and pledged to cast his vote in the referendum based on what he judged to be the "national interest" - not necessarily "voting on party lines".

Meanwhile, the Fresh Start group - which seems to be backed by more than a 100 Tory MPs - is about to publish its "nuclear" proposals for Europe. Declaring that the status quo is "no longer an option", its "manifesto for change" will demand the repatriation of "key powers" in order to retain the UK's "national democratic accountability". More specifically, the backbench body calls for "significant revisions" to the EU treaties to allow a "complete repatriation" of social and employment laws, for example - why can't workers in Britain be forced to work more than 48 hours a week? And if Britain does not get what it wants, then the government should consider the "unilateral disapplication" of EU social and employment law in Britain.

Obviously, not a view shared by Kenneth Clarke, a cabinet minister without portfolio. He told the *Financial Times* that calling for a referendum is "what the hangers and floggers used to do", he is deeply worried that Cameron's "gamble" could lead to the UK exiting the EU, which would leave Britain with a "reduced role in the global political world".

### Special relationships

Predictably, there is widespread international disquiet over Cameron's current stance - most notably in the US. Philip Gordon, the assistant secretary for European affairs, cautioned on January 9 that referendums have "often turned countries inwards". He went on to explain that the US wants an "outward-looking" and "unified" EU with Britain in it as a "strong voice" - that is in the "American interest". To put it more plainly, the UK's "special relationship" with US imperialism would be devalued in the eyes of the

Obama administration if Britain left the EU.

For the US, Britain's role is quite clear. Only by being at the core of the EU, not sitting grumpily on the sidelines, can the UK fulfil its traditional function of stifling Franco-German ambitions to become the alternative hegemon to US imperialism. True, as things stand now, this prospect seems quite fantastical - the EU bureaucracy cannot even work out what to do with tiny Greece, let alone challenge US supremacy. Nevertheless, the US aims to remain the world's only super-power, or global cop. And Britain's usefulness lies precisely in its ability to help the US maintain that position.

Another very important aspect of the 'big speech' is the revealing light it throws on the Lib Dems' relationship to their coalition partners. The *Weekly Worker* cannot be counted among those who think the coalition is weak and could be blown away by the first protest strike. The wretched Liberal Democrats have been reduced to a *slave* party, tied to the Tories, come what may. Just look at them. In a cruel but exquisitely deserving twist of fate, the 'pro-European' Lib Dems now sit in a government alongside extreme Europhobes plotting to get Britain out. Nick Clegg has warned that uncertainty over the EU will have "chilling effect" on jobs and that the "arcane debate" over UK membership could go on for many years. Agony upon agony. But absolutely no talk of divorcing the Tories or pulling out of the coalition.

In reality, the Con-Dem coalition will almost certainly last to the next general election. Cameron needs the Lib Dems, especially in the absence of an electoral pact with Ukip, and the Lib Dems have little option but to preserve the coalition for as long as possible, since they will be wiped out come polling day if they stand independently - another safe bet. That is the nature of the Con-Dem 'special relationship' ●

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