

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

weekly worker



Cameron throws slab of red meat to Eurosceptic right, but Tories face split danger

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Professor Callinicos
and the dark side

LETTERS



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

Unite scandal

Millions of people would be forgiven for thinking that the illegal blacklisting of over 3,000 construction workers has suddenly been discovered.

Yet it has been the worst-kept secret for over two decades that those who spoke up with concerns for health and safety on construction sites or defended wages and conditions were punished and denied employment. Brave people paid a heavy price, as each year, each month, each day brought more discrimination - more lives were being wrecked, houses lost to repossession, stress induced ill health, heart attacks and even worse.

It was more than three years ago, in 2009, when the information commissioner's office (ICO) raided the offices of the Consultancy Association and found the illegal records of files kept on 3,200 workers. Ian Kerr was fined a paltry £5,000 for storing information contrary to the Data Protection Act. To add insult to injury, the fine was paid not by Mr Kerr, but by the employers who had enlisted his services. Then last year, before he met with his untimely death, Ian Kerr 'spilled the beans' when he gave evidence to the Scottish Select Committee.

Jerry Hicks, who is on the illegal blacklist, says: "I know there are those that liken this to the 'phone-hacking' scandal, but I believe this has more similarities to the Jimmy Savile scandal. How many institutions knew or suspected? How many employers outside of the contributors knew? How many MPs suspected or knew? How many union officials suspected or knew and perhaps benefited? What and how much did the police know?"

Why the lack of effective action? Why has it been left to the determined struggle of the Blacklisting Support Group, along with some very courageous people already on the list, to expose the abuses and attempt to redress the wrongs and bring those responsible to book? As a spokesperson for the ICO rightly pointed out in response to today's outcry from trade union leaders, "Where were the unions three years ago?"

Jerry Hicks, the only challenger in the current election for Unite general secretary, said: "The union had the perfect opportunity to confront blacklisting employers. The Olympics could have, should have been the time and the vehicle to take on and defeat the blacklist. It would have propelled the abuse into the national news. It was an opportunity lost."

Back in 2010, Jerry was among those protesting at the Olympic site over workers failing to find employment there. At the same time, trade union leaders at the TUC conference only a mile away made speeches about the need for 'civil unrest', yet not one of them came to the protest.

It would seem that some bandstanding is going on here. After all, who spoke out the loudest or even at all during those long grim years? Labour in office? Unite's leadership? Jerry Hicks pointed out: "Two years ago, during the last election for the top job in the UK's biggest union, I was the only one of four candidates that made blacklisting in construction an issue and promised to redress the wrongs - both in my campaign and election address. Mr McCluskey and Ms Cartmail - also candidates - chose not to mention it. They obviously had other priorities. Perhaps for them it has only just become a national scandal."

Now there is another election on for Unite's general secretary, having been called 'out of the blue', brought forward three years and fast-tracked. To many it seemed as though it would go uncontested, allowing McCluskey to extend his term of office without actually going to the members. But Jerry is well on the way to securing the 50 branch nominations required to force the ballot of 1.5 million members.

He said: "There are two candidates: one on the blacklist who has always spoken out and acted against it; and one who decides to shout about it now it has hit the headlines. In life everything is about timing. I have my views as to why Mr McCluskey has chosen now, but I leave it to you to draw your own conclusion."

Jerry Hicks added: "Labour 'shadow business minister' Chukka Umunna is now calling for an investigation into allegations that firms involved in major projects, including the Olympics and Crossrail, blacklisted workers. Great! But why wait until in opposition? What did Labour do during its three terms and 13 years in government? As every year went by, demands for justice went unanswered, while trade unions poured money into their coffers."

Len McCluskey calls for a "Leveson-style enquiry", which is correct, but also an easy demand now that it has already hit the headlines. Why didn't the Unite leadership maximise the opportunities that previously came their way to highlight the abuse? Assistant general secretary Gail Cartmail, who openly supports Len McCluskey in his election campaign, described the 40 or so guilty firms as "an industry in denial, failing even to apologise". She is right.

However, it's not just employers that Unite officials can be hard on. In 2011, when eight construction companies gave notice of unilateral withdrawal from a national agreement, 500 Unite electricians took matters into their own hands, met, agreed and embarked on a year-long campaign of protests and unofficial actions, which proved to be a very successful strategy. Official backing did eventually come - better late than never. But Unite's initial response to this campaign beggars belief.

In an email to Gail Cartmail copied to every Unite construction official and some staff, the national officer for construction, Bernard McAuley, spewed bile against those very same members of the union, describing them as a "cancerous group", "opportunists", "mindless individuals" and mentioned Jerry Hicks by name. Jerry challenged this outrageous diatribe and its wide circulation. No formal apology or condemnation ever came - and both officials are still responsible for 'looking after' construction members. It is easy to see how, by design or carelessness, names can appear on blacklists.

Legal action is being taken on behalf of a number of construction workers, who are seeking compensation for having their names on the blacklist. But shamefully this, the only major court case, is a private case brought by the workers themselves and not funded by Unite. It has been left to the good offices of Guney, Clark and Ryan to take legal action on behalf of the construction workers.

Just as the blacklist was more than just rumoured for years, so was the possible involvement of some union officials in supplying information to the consultancy agency. A Leveson-style enquiry that Len McCluskey now calls for, may embarrassingly establish whether union officials have been involved when, in the past, internal union investigations have failed to find sufficient evidence.

Jerry Hicks said: "In life, chances to really make a difference come and go. The Vestas occupation on the Isle of Wight was one. It was wasted - I believe the best chance to save the Remploy factories would have been protests and occupations during the Paralympics, but that chance went begging. There will be other chances to fight injustice and the Con-Dem cuts, but who will recognise them and act and who will inspire people to believe that big victories are possible?"

Grassroots Left

No to cuts

Over 20,000 marched through Lewisham on Saturday in a demonstration clearly enjoying the overwhelming support of the local community against the threat to Lewisham hospital.

With the South London Healthcare Trust now in administration, cuts have been proposed that include the scrapping of the hospital's accident and emergency department and the downgrading of its maternity ward. The 'special administrator' appointed, Mathew Kershaw, produced a report outlining further cuts and privatisations at other hospitals in south London and the fight against attacks on local health services has attracted widespread coverage.

On a national level, the damage wreaked on the NHS as a result of private finance initiatives is now being used as justification for the current reforms. Debt-laden trusts are subject to restructuring and severe cuts and in parallel the role of private capital is ever growing. The march was a clear indication of the scale of the opposition to all this.

However, whilst demonstrations can be incredibly useful political tools, they are limited in what they can achieve. The government fully intends to push on with its 'reforms', showing complete disregard for their unpopularity. There have been calls from many corners of the left for a coordinated and sustained campaign by the unions and local anti-cuts groups to halt them and there can be no question that tenacious resistance is required in the face of such attacks.

But we must be honest that there can be no indefinite defence of 'what exists' or a return to what existed. Communists should be careful to avoid imbuing this struggle with nostalgia and assert that a return to the welfarist post-war settlement in present-day conditions is impossible (and undesirable). The current reforms should be viewed as part of a trend within contemporary capitalism towards greater involvement of business in public services; as part of the increasingly important economic role of healthcare companies in western economies; and as part of the strategy of the capitalist class to make the working class majority pay for the economic crisis.

In other words, they are inextricably linked to capitalism in its current form and require a revolutionary alternative to fight them. The argument for a democratic, socialist public health system based on meeting people's needs, unfettered by managerial bureaucracy and the logic of capital, must be raised alongside the call for a democratic alternative to capitalism.

Callum Williamson
email

Priorities

As many on the left are aware, there is a crisis of leadership within the Socialist Workers Party, but they continue to think they can force unity on their members. Whilst I take no issue with Alex Callinicos's criticisms on, say, the Labour Party or Occupy, in his latest piece, I do

take issue with what he says will arise if the opposition succeeds in establishing a "different model involving a much looser and weaker leadership, internal debate that continually reopens decisions already made, and permanent factions." If this succeeded, claims Callinicos, the SWP would become a much smaller and less effective organisation, unable to help build broader movements [read: opportunist attachment to movements]" ('Is Leninism finished?' *Socialist Review* January 2013).

This is clearly aimed at those of us who are now rebelling, many of whom were also in the Democratic Opposition. But the problem is that our organisation has barely grown at all. Is the SWP currently effective? Despite the dissolving of factions after conferences, it is now in a deeper crisis without a "clear direction". The fact is that resentment in the 'party' are not going to disappear just because factions are forced to dissolve due to the undemocratic constitution. The right to form factions, free of being accused of setting one up in secret, and for as long as necessary, is an essential part of resolving differences positively in order to achieve real unity. Yet instead of resolution we get forced dissolution. In other words, the leadership is seeking to resolve differences negatively through its bureaucratic constitutional rules on factions and arbitrary deadlines for a recall conference.

That the SWP leadership believes that faction-forming will lead to a smaller party belies the fact that some comrades have already left, including Tom Walker, who previously worked on the paper. This is a crisis of their own making, not one of oppositional forces. It means that it is more necessary than ever to make an accountable leadership and membership rights a priority. This includes the right to form factions, the right to elect and recall organisers/full-timers (including the central committee and national committee), and to make the CC subordinate to the NC.

Justin Constantinou
SWP 'national member'

Not worthwhile?

Jack Conrad regrets in the CPGB podcast on 'SWP rebellion and feminism' that he has "not heard of any feminist movement raising radical demands for working class women". If that is true, how thorough was his research? There exist socialist and Marxists feminisms, to name but two schools which speak of class almost incessantly. Even the post-Marxist cultural studies variety cannot do without taking into account 'class' - or whatever it thinks constitutes class - as a key analytic component.

Now, you may argue this is all unnecessary, that it isn't going anywhere, even that it's harmful - and there are some good reasons to do so. But in order to criticise anything you need to at least be aware of its developments since the turn of the 20th century. To dismiss present-day feminism based on what you know about the Suffragettes is a bit like dismissing Lenin based on your knowledge of Fourier.

I do not agree with much of what the various feminisms have to say - least of all the 'Women always speak the truth (except when they disagree with me)' variety espoused by regular *Weekly Worker* letter-writer Heather Downs. Furthermore, I believe that much of what is known as 'gender studies' is profoundly hostile to sexual impulse and desire, which it attempts to squeeze into politically correct shapes. Its proponents say that sexuality is of the mind, yet in reality they prove themselves to be

as hostile to the mind as they are to sexuality. Their totalising responses to complex questions, not to mention their aggressive moralising, are poison to critical thinking.

Nonetheless, I find it hard to believe that no worthwhile conclusions can be drawn from the women's lib experience of the 1960s-70s, or that the vast body of literature that emerged on its back is devoid of any useful insights. Jack Conrad says that these days most feminism is restricted to academia. So what? The same was true of psychoanalysis, yet the best Marxists - including Trotsky - did their damndest to acquaint themselves with the theories of Freud (who was not known as a supporter of the proletarian struggle).

As has been stated elsewhere, second-wave feminism stepped in where the organised left had failed. Where Marxist groups accommodated feminist and other identity-centred groups, they compartmentalised them without attempting as much as a critical exchange. When the left rid itself of these groups, this occurred in a no less shallow fashion. The result is that we really do not have a lot to say about more recent developments in sex and gender relations. Is it absolutely out of the question that we might benefit from some of the knowledge accumulated in these movements?

We need to educate ourselves about all currents of emancipatory as well as pseudo-emancipatory thought - if only, as Lenin would put it, to find the kernel of the truth that the opponent is working with. To merely attack a caricature is to liken ourselves to the caricature our opponents draw of us: that of the historical re-enactment society that is not interested in applying Marxism as a tool to analyse the present.

Maciej Zurowski
email

Nothing learnt

The decision by the Con-Dem government to deploy over 300 troops to Mali and west Africa has been roundly condemned by the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition. Britain has decided to support what can only be described as a 'new scramble for Africa'.

This represents an escalation of Britain's military involvement in the region and shows nothing has been learnt from the disastrous invasions of Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya. It beggars belief that western governments are still pursuing the same policies and are prepared to spread the war on terror to a new continent. The consequences will be the same - more acts of terror against British and western people in retaliation, and massive casualties in west Africa. Foreign wars bring nothing but suffering, destruction and instability.

Pete McLaren
Rugby Tusc

Camouflaged

Steven Johnston once more criticises the Socialist Party of Great Britain (Letters, January 24). Alas, it is not the SPGB that accuses 'the pupil' of failure, but those who wish to substitute a party leadership - the teacher - for the working class - the pupil. Throughout our history we have adhered to Joseph Dietzgen's dictum: "If a worker wants to take part in the self-emancipation of his class, the basic requirement is that he should cease allowing others to teach him and should set about teaching himself."

When it comes to our and the left's mutually derisible election results, he certainly has not heeded facts and figures and, as a 'real man', he should end this childish game of who pisses the highest when it comes to

voting numbers before he embarrasses himself even more.

Steven should also be aware that, because the SPGB do not present the electorate with a list of proposals to reform capitalism, nor offer some charismatic personality as a candidate, but instead stand solely on the maximum programme of socialism, every vote for ourselves is a vote for socialism and not for piecemeal palliatives or a particular politician offered up as vote-catching bait. It is the false promise of mostly unachievable policies that voters have seen through.

The time for socialism will be right when the majority of people understand, desire and organise for such a society and not until. Surely that has been the most important lesson of history we have learned from bitter and painful experience. Socialism cannot be imposed. Nor can variants of capitalism be indefinitely camouflaged as socialism.

Alan Johnstone
 email

Deformities

I had always understood the Trotskyist dogma was that the change which occurred in Russia in 1928 was essentially a political one - the final defeat of the Left Opposition and their expulsion from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the deportation of Trotsky himself to exile in Russian central Asia.

It is true that there was a change of economic policy in 1928: the end of encouraging small-scale private capitalist enterprise under state control and moves to suppress the private capitalist class (Nepmen and Kulaks) that had emerged under it - a change of policy which the Left Opposition had itself urged. But that's all it was: a change of economic policy, not the "fundamental socio-economic change" that Moshé Machover claims (Letters, January 24).

There was no change in the management of industries in the state sector nor in the treatment of the workers employed in it, who remained wage-workers paid money for the sale of their labour-power and without even elementary trade union rights - a sector which Zinoviev (but not Trotsky) had described in 1925 as 'state capitalism'.

I can't see how the end of the New Economic Policy - with no change in the state sector - represented a change from what Moshé Machover calls "a bureaucratically deformed workers' state" (incidentally, a definition of a political regime) into a new class society. Either Russia after 1928 was still a 'deformed workers' state' (as Trotsky held) or Russia before as well as after 1928 was a class society (whether state capitalism or some new class society).

Adam Buick
 email

Productivity

Once again, David Ellis manages to read what I have written as the complete opposite of what it actually says (Letters, January 24). That is where he does not simply accuse me of saying things I never said at all!

For example, he says I described his call for the sharing out of work, and the provision of everyone, no matter how much work was undertaken, as "a capitulation to bourgeois right". I did no such thing. What I said was that in the absence of a revolutionary situation, where workers were able to implement direct workers' control in the workplace, there was no way such a demand could be implemented. As Trotsky points out, there is no reason the bosses or their state would voluntarily implement such a demand, and any workers' control would simply be a deal between the bosses and the trade union bureaucrats. It is either a reformist demand for such collusion against the workers or else it is

pisssing in the wind - what Marx called "revolutionary phrase-mongering".

Ellis then says that I am "especially anxious to tell us that the workers' state will not be able to pay a living wage". But again I said no such thing. What wages a workers' state would be able to pay would depend on the circumstances it found itself in. A workers' state, after all, presumes that we have not yet reached even the first stage of communism. It assumes that this state is still in existence because it needs to suppress the bourgeoisie's attempts at restoration either from at home or abroad.

Given the conditions it found itself in, the workers' state in Russia in 1917 could provide workers with nothing approaching a living wage, for example. But, if we are talking not about a workers' state, but a society, as Marx was describing, in the first stage of communism, then I would expect, as did Marx, not only that such a society would be able to pay a 'living wage', but that it would be in the process of abolishing the wages system. I would assume that the standard of living within such a society would be considerably higher than it is for workers now. But, as Marx points out, such a society could not pay workers the full fruits of their labour, as the Lassalleans believed, because for a start there are all those deductions from that product, which such a society needs to deduct, before any such distribution to workers can occur.

More importantly, the point that Marx is making is that even at this first stage of communism, such a society *cannot* distribute these products on the basis of need, precisely because it will not have developed the productive forces enough to achieve that.

Given that Marx believed that even a society at the first stage of communism could not distribute its products on the basis of need, and could *only* achieve this when it reached the higher stage, it is incredible that David Ellis believes that capitalism can. If that is the case, it rather undermines the basis for struggling for socialism. Why bother if, according to David Ellis, we can inscribe on the banner of modern capitalism the slogan, 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs'?

What is more, Marx believed that this would be possible only when cooperative labour had raised productivity to heights impossible today. Yet David Ellis believes that current capitalism can not only provide a living wage, but can provide for workers on the basis of their needs irrespective of how little work is actually done. If little work is done, then few products are produced. How exactly he believes you distribute products that no one has produced, he doesn't tell us.

Arthur Bough
 email

Regression

James Turley ('The antinomies of Georg Lukács', January 24) upholds Althusser against Lukács and so goes for a certain New Left doxa, while claiming that the New Left was essentially Lukácsian. Indeed, this is the 'materialism versus idealism' dispute, as filtered through the New Left, such that the Lacanian-Heideggerian trajectory of Althusser, Foucault *et al* becomes what stands for 'materialism', and the Marxist-Hegelian Frankfurt school trajectory becomes 'idealism'.

This involves some very distorting flattening of the issues, but suffice it to say that such postmodernist 'materialism' is to be found in the pseudo-Nietzschean/Heideggerian ontology ('logic of [material] being' and its supposed 'revelations') contra Hegelianism. This is the present 'common sense' that Turley expresses, and why he then must read Lukács as self-contradictory in certain ways.

Lukács's early Marxist works were only ever obscure to the New Left and so prone to bowdlerisation, and have only become more so since.

It is noteworthy that, in Turley's view, the only positive claim one is left with regarding Lukács is that, beyond a commendable "revolutionary *élan*", Lukács is good in his criticism of "Kant, Fichte and Hegel" (in the section, 'Antinomies of bourgeois thought' - part 2 of the 'Reification' essay in *History and class consciousness*).

But Turley thinks that the limits of Lukács's 'materialism', and hence of his 'Marxism', are with regard to how he conceives of the empirical experience of the working class in capitalism. This involves, according to Turley, a "short circuit", in which the "confrontation and struggle of employee with employer" is "already socialism", whereas Turley thinks that this neglects political mediations, in an "ultra-left" manner. But, while in Turley's characterisation it could, in fact it doesn't. Lukács was addressing how it was precisely in the struggle for proletarian socialism, in the era of the high point of Second International Marxism, that the problem of 'reification' manifested itself. For Lukács, 'reification' meant Bebel's and Kautsky's SPD, in theory and practice.

What makes Lukács's early 1920s works so difficult to read today is that we lack Lukács's object of critique. So his arguments become objectless and seem 'speculative' in the worst sense. We do not have the high Second International in crisis 1914-19 but something much worse in our political reality today. This makes it difficult to grasp Lukács's arguments.

In fact, Lukács was engaged in the self-critique of the crisis of Marxism in the collapse of the Second International and in the difficulties of reformulating Marxism as revolutionary politics by Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky, and their comrades in the Third International. But their failure was not due to an error in thinking supposedly condensed in Lukács. We lack the basis for the immanence of Lukács's critique of the newly formed Third International, why Lukács thought he was making a vital contribution to addressing the political problems of his time. And so Lukács's work appears as an 'intellectual' exercise in the most limited sense. But this merely projects the potential limitations of our own reading today onto the text, bereft of its original concrete context, the comparably high level of political disputes within the fledgling Third International 1919-22.

Ultimately, Turley cannot go beyond Lukács's own later self-criticism of *History and class consciousness*, in that Lukács had tried, mistakenly, to 'out-Hegel Hegel'. Hence, Turley cannot go beyond Lukács's own capitulation to Stalinism, as the 'material reality' to which theory must supposedly discipline and subordinate itself. In this view, Lukács's own later repudiation of his earlier work seems justified, but this is the justification of what happened to Marxism as 'critical theory' as a function of Stalinism. It became intolerable. To save his skin, Lukács had to change his mind. But the real alternative was to try to change the world, whose failure Stalinism both expressed and reinforced.

The question is, what happens to Marxism as critical theory when evacuated of its object of critique, when divorced from political practice? It disintegrates. But this was not due to the "antinomies of Lukács", but rather the degradation and liquidation of Marxism, and the resulting regression of history. The self-critique of Marxism - its 'Hegelian self-consciousness' - cannot make sense when there is no Marxism politically.

Chris Cutrone
 email

ACTION

CPGB podcasts

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

London Communist Forum

Sunday Febuary 2, 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 7 'The struggle for a normal working day' (continued).

Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Introduction to anthropology: an intensive study of mythology **Tuesday February 5, 6.15pm:** 'Human society, labour and nature: myths and realities'. Speaker: Gabriel Levy. 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.

Glasgow Marxist Forum

Thursday January 31, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Patrick Burgh Hall, 9 Burgh Hall Street, Glasgow G11. 'Capitalism in crisis'. Speaker: Hillel Ticktin.

Organised by Glasgow Marxist Forum.

In our shoes

Saturday February 2, 12noon: Demonstration to Save Birmingham youth service. Chamberlain Square, Birmingham.

Organised by Birmingham Against the Cuts:

www.birminghamagainsththecuts.wordpress.com.

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.

LGBT against cuts

Monday February 4, 6.30pm: Anti-austerity photo exhibition, Unite House, 128 Theobald's Road, London WC1.

Organised by SERTUC LGBT Network: Sertuc_lgbt@tuc.org.uk.

Socialist Policy Network

Tuesday February 5, 7pm: Meeting, Harold Wilson room, Portcullis House, Bridge Street, Westminster, London SW1. 'The crisis of democracy, rights and the state'. Speaker: John McDonnell MP.

Organised by Socialist Policy Network:

www.socialistpolycynetwork.ning.com.

End the housing crisis

Tuesday February 5, 7.30pm: Discussion, 5th floor conference room, Community Base, 113 Queens Road, Brighton.

Organised by Sussex Labour Representation Committee:

www.sussexlrc.com.

Save early years services

Wednesday February 6, 1pm: Anti-cuts demo, town hall, Pinstone Street, Sheffield S1.

Organised by Unite the Community Sheffield: www.facebook.com/UniteCommunitySheffield.

Ten years after Iraq

Wednesday February 9, 11am to 5pm: Anti-war conference. Friends House, 173-177 Euston Road, London NW1. £15 (£8 concessions).

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

Confronting war 10 years on

Saturday February 9, 11am to 5pm: International conference, Friends House, 173-177 Euston Road, London NW1. Speakers include: Owen Jones, Tariq Ali, Tony Benn, Jemima Khan, Seumas Milne, Sami Ramadani, Jolyon Rubinstein. £15 (concessions £8).

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

Socialist films

Sunday February 10, 11am: Screening, Renoir Cinema, Brunswick Square, London WC1. Julian Tiel's *Libya: the humanitarian war?* (France, 19 minutes); and Rossella Schillaci's *Other Europe* (Italy, 75 minutes).

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

Stop the cuts

Saturday February 16, 12 noon: March and rally. Assemble 12 noon, Centre for Life, Clayton Street, Newcastle, for march to rally at Grey's Monument, 1.30pm.

Organised by Coalition of Resistance:

www.coalitionofresistance.org.uk.

Socialist Theory Study Group

Thursday February 21, 6pm: Study of Marx's *On the Jewish question* (1843). Social centre, Next to Nowhere, Bold Street, Liverpool 1.

Organised by Socialist Theory Study Group:

teachingandlearning4socialism@gmail.com.

Economic crisis and reformism

Saturday February 23, 10 am to 5pm: Conference, St Clements Building, London School of Economics, Houghton Street, London WC2. Speakers: Hillel Ticktin, Michael Cox, Savas Matzas, Yassamine Mather.

Organised by *Critique*: critique@eng.gla.ac.uk.

CPGB wills

Remember the CPGB and keep the struggle going. Put the CPGB's name and address, together with the amount you wish to leave, in your will. If you need further help, do not hesitate to get in contact.

SWP

Apparatus gears up for war

This weekend's national committee meeting looks set to trigger a showdown, writes **Peter Manson**

The Socialist Workers Party leadership appears ready to launch an all-out offensive against the democratic opposition at this weekend's meeting of the SWP national committee.

Up to now the self-perpetuating central committee has held back from taking disciplinary action against members involved in opposition blogs, not least the two-week-old *International Socialism* site headed by *Guardian* writer Richard Seymour and regularly featuring science fiction author China Miéville. This temporary CC tolerance stands in marked contrast to the treatment meted out to four comrades involved in a Facebook discussion late last year, who were summarily expelled by email simply for exchanging ideas outside official structures and thereby forming a "secret faction".

But there can be no remaining doubt that the *International Socialism* comrades do indeed constitute a faction - and, of course, factions are banned in the SWP outside the three-month period leading up to the annual conference in January each year. On January 29 what can only be described as a factional statement was issued by 19 SWP members, including comrades Seymour, Miéville and Scottish historian Neil Davidson.¹

But now the CC could well use the February 3 meeting of the 50-strong national committee to clamp down on open dissent. The NC was elected at the January 4-6 conference and, although I recognise five names that could be considered critics of one sort or another, it consists overwhelmingly of comrades who are known for their loyalism. Of course, following the crisis sparked by the CC's treatment of the rape allegation levelled against former national secretary Martin Smith ('comrade Delta'), no-one can be regarded as a 100% loyalist any more - there are signs of wobbling everywhere.

As readers will know, oppositionists have been campaigning for conference to be recalled in view of the furore that has erupted. According to the SWP constitution, "A special conference may be called by the central committee or at the request of 20% of the branches. The decisions of a special conference are as binding as those of annual conference." Oppositionists believe there are 93 SWP branches and the CC has apparently confirmed that the trigger for a special conference is therefore 19. As I write, a total of eight branches have so far passed motions demanding a recall - together with 13 Socialist Worker Student Society groups, which do not have branch status. A further eight branches have passed critical motions that have stopped short of calling for a new conference.

But these are still early days and oppositionists are confident that many more branches can be won to the campaign in a relatively short time. No doubt that is why the CC has imposed an arbitrary deadline of February 1 - allegedly in order to give the NC time to distribute such motions before it meets. In the internal *Party Notes* issued on January 21, the CC announced: "After consultation with the chair of the conference arrangements committee, any motions for a recall conference have to be in by 5pm on Friday February 1. This is to make the NC aware of them." What has the conference arrangements committee got to do with it? Either there are enough branch motions or there are not. In reality, of course, the hope is to cut short the momentum for a recall. In the words of *Party Notes*, "We



Rebellion: bureaucratic rule must end

are not going to overturn the decisions made two weeks ago by a very open conference, the highest level of our democracy."

However, oppositionists have pointed out that there is no such deadline stipulated in the constitution. According to comrade Seymour, "We admit that the NC must be made aware of motions for a special conference passed by branches. But it can just as well be made aware on February 2, or February 28, or March 12, or any other date on which a branch chooses to pass such a motion."²

No doubt taking this into account, the CC amended its deadline statement in the following *Party Notes* (January 28): "After consultation with the chair of the conference arrangements committee, any motions for an immediate conference (which has been demanded by some motions) have to be in by 5pm on Friday February 1. *This does not affect any branch's rights*" (my emphasis).

I suppose we should be grateful for small mercies, but what exactly does the CC mean? If there are fewer than 19 branch motions, are Charlie Kimber *et al* implying that the call for an "immediate conference" will therefore fall and any further campaign will have to start from scratch?

Response

Comrade Seymour correctly points out: "The purpose of this is to use the national committee meeting as the base from which to attack the growing opposition among members, and end the dispute on the CC's terms. Those terms, made clear in *Party Notes*, are very simple. The central committee will stand by its train wreck of a strategy, and insist that the party endorse its indefensible position, even to the point of destroying the party's ability to be the effective, 'interventionist' force that the leadership claims to defend. There isn't even any sign of a minimal

gesture, such as removing 'comrade Delta' from party work - quite the opposite. Clueless and vindictive, they acknowledge no crisis, register none of the damage being done to the party's work, and offer no sensible lead."³

As comrade Seymour says, "This is the first sign of a coordinated response to this crisis by the central committee, and it is a response that aims to bring the membership to heel." But it was followed this week by the circulation to all SWP members of an unbelievably inept *Socialist Review* article written by the CC's main theoretician, Alex Callinicos (see opposite). Again the timing is unmistakable. The February 3 NC meeting is intended to 'draw a line' against all this 'factionalising' and put a stop to all opposition calls for democracy and accountability.

But what of the CC claim that the opposition wants to "overturn the decisions made two weeks ago by a very open conference, the highest level of our democracy"? This is false on several counts. First of all, the CC always does everything in its power in the run-up to conference to ensure that the event is stage-managed and that it will retain full control. Of course, this year it badly miscalculated when it tried to divert criticism over 'comrade Delta' through a special session at conference on the disputes committee handling of the case. It totally underestimated the outrage felt over the fact that the accused was 'tried' on such a serious charge by current and former members of the central committee - in the words of former *Socialist Worker* journalist Tom Walker, a "jury of his mates".⁴

So this year not everything went to plan, despite all the usual ruses, such as mobilising to ensure by fair means or foul that oppositionists are not elected as delegates at pre-conference district aggregates; expelling four comrades who *might* have been able to influence delegates; withholding rights

from the two officially recognised pre-conference factions, preventing their comrades from speaking at both aggregates and conference itself; denying members full information before and during conference about the central issue in dispute.

The idea is to put on a show of 'democracy' and 'unity' through the exclusion of dissent in order to keep the bulk of members on board. In this way, the CC is given a free hand to decide everything, while conference provides it with the near-unanimous rubber stamp. Fortunately, however, large numbers of SWP comrades have at last begun to see through this charade, as epitomised by comrade Seymour, who writes:

"According to the theory, conference discusses and decides (democracy) and then comrades, including those who opposed the agreed position, carry out the decisions (centralism). Fine: but what does conference actually decide? It is presented with a series of general perspective documents which are usually so bland and platitudinous that it is virtually impossible to disagree with them: the economic crisis is not going to be resolved, times are hard, but there are also opportunities, we must not be complacent over the threat of fascism, and so on. To agree with this kind of statement is not to make a decision over strategy or tactics, or anything specific enough for the CC to be held to account. The real decisions about actual policy - to establish united fronts, to join electoral coalitions - are almost always made by the CC itself between conferences, with conference asked to ratify them after the event."

While I would not go along with the idea that it is "impossible to disagree" with CC perspective documents - they usually contain large elements that are dubious, to say the least - nevertheless such a recognition of the disastrous SWP *method* represents a big advance (perhaps one should

resist the temptation to say, 'Better late than never').

Credibility

The truth is that the CC, despite its increasingly desperate efforts, is losing every last shred of credibility - in the eyes of its own members, in the eyes of those who are normally regarded as SWP allies, but who are now tackling members about the 'Sexist Workers Party', and in the eyes of former co-thinkers abroad. The US International Socialist Organization, which was once part of the SWP's 'international', has decided to end its discreet public silence: "Any bureaucratic measures to ban discussion of the biggest crisis the SWP has ever faced, including wholesale expulsions, will not end the crisis," it writes. "The outside world will only be more firmly convinced that this is a cover-up in an undemocratic and sexist organisation."⁵

Again, one does not have to agree that the problem is SWP 'sexism' - in my view it is not: the problem is its appalling, opportunist contempt for working class democracy, as comrades like Richard Seymour are now beginning to identify, and - very much connected to this - its programmeless opportunism. But will the CC listen to the voices of those who clearly desire a positive outcome in the shape of a healthier SWP? History tells us that it will not.

In view of the avalanche of criticism it has faced, the leadership has so far held its fire and there has been a kind of phoney war. No doubt it wants to reassert its control at the least possible cost to itself in terms of membership losses and influence over its periphery. But the signs are that it is now ready to act against the 'factionalists' - perhaps irrespective of the cost.

But the opposition should not lose heart. Comrades like Richard Seymour and China Miéville could still play an important role from outside if they are expelled, but, more importantly, others must be ready to step into their shoes. Branches and SWSS groups must continue to agitate around the key demand for a special conference. They must make no bones about the immediate decisions that such a conference should take:

- Recall the central committee and elect a national committee that includes all important SWP trends.
- The CC must be answerable to and recallable by an NC armed with real powers.
- Remove the ban on permanent factions - allow all members to freely associate and organise.
- Rescind all expulsions and suspensions of oppositionists.
- Open up *Socialist Worker* to the entire membership to facilitate full and frank public debate.
- Approach other communist and revolutionary socialist forces with a view to unity talks.

Contrary to what the CC pretends to believe, such measures would put the establishment of a real Marxist party, based on genuine democratic centralism, firmly on the agenda. ●

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Notes

1. <http://internationalismuk.blogspot.co.uk/2013/01/is-zinovievism-finished-reply-to-alex.html>.
2. 'Reply to *Party Notes*': <http://internationalismuk.blogspot.co.uk/2013/01/reply-to-party-notes.html>.
3. 'Reply to *Party Notes*': <http://internationalismuk.blogspot.co.uk/2013/01/reply-to-party-notes.html>.
4. 'Why I am resigning' *Weekly Worker* January 10.
5. <http://socialistworker.org/2013/01/30/the-crisis-in-the-swp>.

Professor Callinicos and the dark side

Finally a member of the SWP central committee attempts to defend its conduct. Paul Demarty wishes he hadn't bothered

By the time you read this, it will be the 11th hour - the eve of the bureaucratically imposed deadline for conference recall motions in the Socialist Workers Party, a *diktat* which has no basis even in the SWP's abortion of a constitution.

In order, presumably, to placate wavering elements and reassure them that the organisation is on course for a bright future, Alex Callinicos - almost the last intellectual on the central committee - has produced a defence of 'Leninism' for *Socialist Review*.¹ Entitled 'Is Leninism finished?', it is being rammed down comrades' throats with some enthusiasm, circulated via email to all members.

If it does not have the exact opposite effect to that intended, then you really have to fear for humanity as a species. A more fatuous, dishonest and flatly delusional exercise in arse-covering has not been seen for some time. Bringing *Lenin* into this sordid self-justification is an insult - to the much-calmned leader himself, and to any notion of intellectual integrity into the bargain.

Callinicos's article has a somewhat schizophrenic quality, taking up a number of threads which are frayed taken on their own, and do not bind into anything resembling a coherent whole - unless one reads between the lines. We have an argument for the continuing relevance of 'Leninism', which is the ostensible aim of the whole exercise; evasive references to the SWP's crisis, which are the *real* aim; and a pretty confused account of working class political history from 1968 to the present, whose purpose is something that needs to be unpicked in itself.

Parodying Bolshevism

On Lenin, it is the same old rubbish that the SWP has been touting since the International Socialist days; the Lenin of Cliff's eponymous four-volume study, memorably described by John Sullivan as resembling "a biography of John the Baptist written by Jesus Christ".

Callinicos writes: "What [revolutionary success] involved was the Bolsheviks acting as what is sometimes called a 'vanguard party'. They represented for most of their existence before October 1917 a small minority of the Russian working class." How were such long odds overturned? "The Bolsheviks collectively intervened in the struggles of the Russian working class. In doing so, they put forward proposals that would help to advance the struggle in question. But they simultaneously sought to encourage workers to recognise that they had to fight for political power and, to achieve this, to support the Bolshevik Party itself."

The first statement is, at best, misleading. It is true that - as any young organisation will inevitably be, especially under a regime of terror - *all* factions of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party were small for the first period of their existence. Come 1905 and that is simply untrue and from then in after. The 1912 duma elections, for example, saw the Bolsheviks sweep the board in the workers' curia. They went into February 1917 as a *mass party* (as did the Mensheviks). The majority they and their allies won over the year was achieved through exhaustive effort and vehement political struggle, yes - but they did not come from nowhere. They were not a sect of 1,000, dressed



Alex Callinicos: fatuous, dishonest and delusional

up as a party of 7,000.

The second statement is platitudinous, and therefore slippery. Taken at face value, the idea that *any* political organisation that wanted working class support would *not* attempt to 'advance struggles', let alone encourage people to take up membership, boggles the mind. Of course, the Bolsheviks were no exception; but neither were the Mensheviks.

Suggesting that this somehow constitutes the essence of Bolshevism is, in fact, mapping the SWP's self-image back onto the Bolsheviks. This, after all, is the SWP's basic *modus operandi* as such - raise demands that you imagine will advance the struggle (that is, get people excited); beyond that, tell them to join the SWP, so they too can try to get people excited, and tell them in their turn to join the SWP...

As a description of the Bolsheviks, this is facile. Comrade Callinicos might consider the enormous mass of paper and ink his supposed Russian ancestors dedicated to arguing about the character and content of their programme. Both things are the stuff of horror to any good SWP hack - wasting time *arguing*, and arguing about a *programme*, which can only ever serve to hold an organisation back from making the necessary about-turns! He might consider the ferocious arguments of Lenin against those whose whole political horizon consisted of exposures of factory conditions, just as SWP politics consists of a series of threadbare litanies against bad Tories, bad bosses and bad Nazis.

Packing a punch

Much of the rest of the article is taken up with what is ostensibly a polemic against Owen Jones and 'Donny Mayo', a recent SWP defector to Counterfire. This takes the form of a whistle-stop run-down of post-war history according to the SWP; an 'upturn' from 1968, a 'downturn' from 1979, and then a long hiatus of nothing much until the Seattle movement of 1999. This history, we are told, has led many to doubt the role of the working class in revolutionary transformation altogether; for such people, obviously, 'Leninism' is surplus to requirements. "One consequence of the form taken by the present radicalisation is that the

centrality of workers' struggles in the fight against capitalism is less obvious than it was in the past."

This leads Jones, on the one hand, to dedicate his efforts to pushing Labour to the left and turning it into an anti-austerity force; and the likes of 'Mayo', on the other, to venerate the post-Seattle movements *as such*. The latter is mistaken because, as Callinicos correctly points out, such movements are ephemeral. As for the Labour Party question, any attempt to transform it is doomed to failure - "the very nature of the Labour Party defeats its leftwing challengers. It is geared to the electoral cycle, so that discussion of policy and support for struggle are subordinated to the effort to win votes on terms set by the Tories and the corporate media." (This is a pretty weak critique of Labour, but we cannot go into it here.)

So why the SWP's 'Leninism'? It has to be said that Callinicos is being very, very crafty here. By *only* explicitly taking on forces to his right - whether Counterfire's soft movementism or Jones's Labourism - he can present the SWP as the last alternative standing. Evidence for this hypothesis is that even Jones admits that the SWP "punches above its weight"; Jones cites the millions who came out for the biggest Stop the War march, a little less than a decade ago, and - bizarrely - the "rout" of the English Defence League in Walthamstow by Unite Against Fascism, which bravely held a counter-demonstration after the EDL march was, er, banned by the police. (At least Jones was not stupid enough to cite the great "success" that is Unite the Resistance, much to Callinicos's annoyance.)

"Punching above your weight" only gets you so far, however. It was our own modest operation that got the SWP crisis into the bourgeois press, after all - but modest we remain, and so does the SWP. An eight-year-old kid may defeat a 10-year-old in a fight. But I don't think he will do very well against one of the Klitschko brothers.

Worse than Stalin?

The truly devious aspect of this argument has to do with the third thread - his attempt to deal with the

SWP opposition. These people never appear in person. He does not take on Richard Seymour, or China Miéville, or any of the other critiques which have surfaced. In some places, his shadow-boxing efforts are simply self-parodic.

"One thing the entire business has reminded us of is the dark side of the internet," he writes pompously. "Enormously liberating though the net is, it has long been known that it allows salacious gossip to be spread and perpetuated - unless the victim has the money and the lawyers to stop it. Unlike celebrities, small revolutionary organisations don't have these resources, and their principles stop them from trying to settle political arguments in the bourgeois courts."

The internet has given this argument its due respect, and leftie social media is full of *Star wars* stills with Callinicos's head Photoshopped over Mark Hamill's - fighting "the dark side of the internet". Yet this is part of his cheap rhetorical strategy. He is not, of course, accusing the SWP opposition of spreading 'gossip' - but he is not exactly *not* accusing them of it either.

And that, ultimately, is what the business with Jones and 'Mayo' is about. He presents the SWP opposition as a single facet of a great amorphous attack on "the party". He presents the only political alternatives to his own view as Reesite liquidationism (which he tolerated and *encouraged* for the best part of a decade) or Labourism, and leaves the reader to draw the conclusion that this is a comprehensive characterisation of his critics. Callinicos is fighting dirty; he is misrepresenting his opponents; he is doing *everything he can* to avoid a straightforward debate with them. To do so, after all, would be to concede that allowing debate outside of a defined three-month period does not necessarily lead to disaster - and thus he would already have lost.

This is because he is not a Leninist. Nobody with even the most superficial acquaintance with *what Lenin actually wrote* in the 1903-17 period - never mind his open clash with Kamenev, Stalin and Muranov in spring 1917 - could find the smallest justification for the political practice, let alone the internal regime, of today's SWP.

A strong collective response² to his document (with a whiff of comrade Seymour's style about it) from the *International Socialism* bloggers spoofs Callinicos's title: "Is Zinovievism finished?" they ask. That is closer to the mark, Zinoviev being a short-term ally of Stalin in 1923-24 and writer of the proto-Stalinist *History of the Bolshevik Party* - but again it is unfair. The ossification of the Bolsheviks in this period, and the errors of Comintern, cannot be laid on Zinoviev's shoulders alone, and indeed were not simply subjective 'errors'; and he was an on-off *participant* in the factional struggles against Stalin until his execution in 1936.

So is Callinicos more of a Stalin, then? (He certainly picked up the nickname 'Stalinicos' among embittered Americans around the time of the SWP's split with the US International Socialist Organization.) He has not resorted to rounding up and shooting his opponents. Yet even in this ballpark, unflattering comparisons are possible. It should be noted that the SWP regime is *less* tolerant of dissent than the Stalinist CPGB of old. In the latter organisation, it was common enough

in congress season for *some* kind of oppositional voice to be given more than a few pages to express an alternative view in the party press, in a confrontation designed to give the leadership the last word on whatever was at issue. District full-timers were *elected* rather than appointed from the centre.

The 'official' CPGB was a stitched-up, bureaucratic monstrosity - but the SWP, somehow, has developed *worse* internal norms. Dissent and disloyalty are completely identified. Full-timers are paid enforcers for the self-perpetuating leadership clique. The overall set-up is something like a mutant cross between a cult and a Mafia family.

Fragile things

To suggest that something like this is somehow an adequate organisation for making a revolution is worse than a joke. There is a reason why the Bolsheviks survived - and even grew - in times of the worst adversity to reach a point where they *mattered* when things opened up, while the SWP has waxed and waned strictly along with the times. There is a reason why the SWP, in fact, has been thrown into disarray by a few unproven allegations of sexual abuse.

The reason is as follows: the Bolsheviks were a *strong* organisation, not because they were a 'party of a new type' or any such nonsense, but because they took hard-headed and long-term perspectives, steered them in fierce polemic and tested them in the class struggle. The SWP, on the other hand, is fragile. It is fragile because its regime does not adequately deal with dissent - and thus tends to become apolitical. It is fragile because it adopts short-term perspectives, to be simply 'forgotten' when they do not pan out - which breeds cynicism. It is fragile because the line is not *won* among the membership, but imposed by what amounts to hired muscle - which breeds rank-and-file resentment.

All this can be summed up with one more citation. Callinicos once again wheels out the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste and the Fourth International as an example of what happens when you allow permanent factions - "members' loyalties [focus] on their factional alignments rather than the party itself," he warns - again implying that this is holds for the SWP opposition. Nothing could be further from the truth. The NPA imploded because of *what it has in common* with the SWP: its short-termism, its opportunistic obsession with narrow tactical questions, and so on. It could not cope with lean times, and neither can the SWP.

As for the democratic opposition: what is striking is *how much* 'party patriotism' its comrades possess, in spite of the bullying, the evasions and innuendos and lies; in spite of the litany of political disasters of the last decade; in spite of everything. We may fault them for many things, but not 'disloyalty'. Callinicos and his cronies do not deserve them. On the evidence of *this* article - this feeble, flatulent insult to Bolshevism - he certainly does not deserve to lead a revolutionary socialist organisation ●

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Notes

1. 'Is Leninism finished?' *Socialist Review* January 2013: www.socialistreview.org.uk/article.php?articleid=12210.
2. <http://international-socialism.blogspot.co.uk/2013/01/is-zinovievism-finished-reply-to-alex.html>.

AGGREGATE

Seeking a positive outcome

Michael Copestake reports on the January 26 meeting of CPGB members, where the SWP crisis dominated the agenda

The perhaps unsurprising topic under discussion at the CPGB members aggregate in London was the ongoing crisis in the Socialist Workers Party.

Introducing the session was John Bridge, who began by expressing his view that the present level of the crisis was, in a sense, actually quite unexpected. The SWP's pre-conference period at the end of 2012 had seemed to be going the way of just about every other SWP pre-conference period in recent times. The usual dissident suspects appeared in the *Internal Bulletins* - they had not got very far every other year, so why would this one be any different? The wheel was sleepily turning in its usual fashion, and then - an explosion, at the centre of which was the controversy around 'Comrade Delta', former national secretary Martin Smith, and the disputes committee hearing into allegations of rape. Into the mix was thrown the expulsion of the 'Facebook four' on trumped-up charges of 'factionalism' before conference.

Comrade Bridge stressed that in spite of the fact that delegates had turned up to the January 4-6 conference only half-informed as to the case of Delta and its handling by the central committee and DC, the vote only went the way the bureaucracy wanted by the narrowest of margins - 22 votes (and there were 18 abstentions). Delegates went to conference as loyal SWP members and in many cases returned to their branches as oppositionists.

The roots of the present crisis, the comrade said, lie not in 'macho culture' or 'sexism', but in what the CPGB and its forerunner, the *Leninist* faction, have been emphasising for years now: the bureaucratic centralism, programmelessness and economism which fosters an *instrumentalist* view of ordinary members by the SWP apparatus. Even the members of the 'official' CPGB got to elect their district full-timers, he stressed, who had to develop a relationship with the members they represented and keep their respect. This is why it is excellent, he went on, that the leading edge of the democratic opposition has drawn the focus of the debate onto wider democratic questions rather than just the appalling mishandling of the Delta case.

The only people who do not seem to have grasped that something has gone terribly wrong in the organisation are those same ultra-loyalists who thought that the debate and the information around it should be restricted in the first place (chair Karen Reissman, in closing the conference debate on the DC handling of the case, requested that delegates give nothing more than a short and vague outline of the session to their comrades in their report-backs) and who continued to believe that even *after* the explosion it could somehow still be ignored or contained.

All this boils down, comrade Bridge went on, to a crisis of perspectives for the SWP - a crisis which itself is part of the wider ongoing crisis of the far left as a whole. As with the 'official' CPGB or the Scottish Socialist Party, this could end very badly, resulting in a further diminution of our forces and deepening disillusionment. The organisation could effectively die, even though a husk bearing the name could continue into some kind of afterlife. He pointed to the small grouping going under the brand of 'Workers Revolutionary Party', but no-one doubts that in reality the WRP



Apparatus preparing to hit back

is dead.

Could the SWP be heading the same way? Comrade Bridge hoped not, but, unless there was a revolution within the SWP, he feared the worse. In his opinion, the more SWP oppositionists who name themselves in public, the better. That would embolden others, who would see that they are not alone. So far the most prominent who have come out remain Richard Seymour and China Miéville.

Comrade Bridge noted that the 50-strong SWP national committee that was elected at the conference *appears* to be loyalist-dominated, but this is somewhat speculative in view of the change that has taken place. In any case, it is highly unlikely that the present CC remains representative of the views of the membership. But we can probably expect some kind of ultimatum to the opposition coming out of the February 3 NC meeting - national secretary Charlie Kimber's has issued an utterly arbitrary bureaucratic deadline of February 1 for the submission of branch resolutions demanding the recall of conference. That and/or expulsions, either in salami slices with bogus 'concessions', or simply *en masse*.

Mass expulsions have happened before in SWP history, he reminded those present. Tony Cliff was willing to butcher his own organisation repeatedly in order to retain control. The influential *Women's Voice*, the SWP's 'answer' to feminism, was closed down in 1982, and the leadership has had no hesitation in taking the axe to various rank-and-file union groupings if it felt they had got out of control. All those who opposed the CC were simply expelled. Kimber, and many others in the SWP leadership, are of that school of thought, emphasised comrade Bridge. Thus the failure of the opposition to fight as hard as it can here and now would mean the likelihood of defeat.

In order to get a special conference 20% of branches have to pass motions demanding such. But, wondered comrade Bridge, is the information on the official number of branches available to every SWP member, or is it the private property of the CC? Could the CC just simply 'create' more branches if it wished? In any case, any conference is likely to be 'managed', should the CC permit one to happen. But the opposition should

not wait for the CC's permission if this is not forthcoming, he added. They should call the special conference themselves in that case. But that would amount to a *de facto* split, which is why the opposition must reach out to others on the left. The CC will not - cannot - indefinitely tolerate this outbreak of free thought and demands for the democratisation of the SWP's internal life.

Debate

In the debate that followed, *Weekly Worker* editor Peter Manson stated that, while it is excellent that at last SWP comrades are echoing the paper's own criticism of the organisation's bureaucratic centralism, he was pessimistic as to the likely outcome, simply because the opposition has yet to demonstrate an alternative *politics* to that of the opportunist leadership. This was illustrated by the fact that the CC's dismal perspectives documents were overwhelmingly passed at what was otherwise a relatively contentious conference.

I disagreed. It was hardly to be expected that an opposition would immediately emerge with a fully formed alternative politics. In his view the democratic questions had to be settled before a proper reassessment of the SWP's broader politics could take place - and in fact such a reassessment was in evidence in some of the critiques produced in the recent period.

James Turlay stated that despite the possibility that the CC will try to 'smear' opponents as being 'tools of the CPGB' we should continue to be open in our support for the opposition - Tom Walker, though now ex-SWP, chose to use the *Weekly Worker* as the platform for his resignation statement for a reason. He said that if, as we have seen, comrades who had previously been regarded as CC hacks can bring themselves to go over to the opposition, then there is indeed hope for the SWP as a whole. If someone like a Choonara or a Bergfeld were to openly do so - not an impossibility, he thought - then that could be a 'game-changer'.

For Sarah McDonald it was apparent that the CC does not *want* to expel prominent members like China Miéville and Richard Seymour, as they bring the group influence and

recognition beyond its social weight. If they had been 'ordinary' members, they would have been expelled in a flash. She agreed with others that the problem for the SWP was not its 'macho culture'. Her experience in the Scottish Socialist Party told her that anyone who dared to voice strong views or dissent was castigated as behaving in a 'macho' fashion, and that the term can be abused to close down the expression of differences - which nonetheless bubbled with even greater animation under the surface as a result. She noted that the SWP has plenty of female hacks.

In Tina Becker's view the SWP leadership is presently paralysed, but that when it does move it will be to initiate expulsions. Part of its weakness, in her view, is that the only 'big gun' from the old days left on the CC is Alex Callinicos. She agreed with James Turlay that we can take some pride for both the fact that Tom Walker came to us with his statement and the fact that in the arguments of the oppositionists we do hear strong echoes of what the CPGB has been agitating around for some time now.

Comrade Farzad was strongly of the belief that you cannot build a party around 'fighting sexism', that the failings of the DC in the case of comrade Delta were not due to the SWP failing to combat sexism. The root cause is the lack of democracy and the absence of any viable perspectives - a weakness which at the present moment also effects the emerging opposition. If the opposition does not have its own perspectives, perhaps the CPGB needed to put more emphasis on the question of programme in our interventions. She added that the disintegration of the SWP would be a disaster. Looking at the broader picture, comrade Farzad said that, despite the many reasons to be pessimistic, we must remind ourselves that, for example, the USSR is gone and that no-one seriously thinks that China is socialist, so we are at least free of burdens that previously hampered the development of a strong, democratic Marxist left.

Mike Macnair began by saying that, although we had not seen this specific moment of crisis coming, the CPGB had been saying for some time that a crisis of some kind was inevitable in the SWP, given its organisation model and opportunist

politics. In relation to other comrades' comments on the opposition's upholding of the 'IS tradition', he explained that the particular version of that tradition which appealed to them was the established model of the International Socialists/SWP prior to its 'Bolshevisation' by Tony Cliff in the mid-70s.

He noted that some SWP comrades may not have been happy about the organisation being 'Bolshevised', but that they stuck it out because at first they could point to an increased membership, then to the success of the Anti-Nazi League and later the anti-war movement - all of which have disappeared, leaving various competing forms of nostalgia for the popular fronts of the past.

On the supposed three main planks of IS tradition - the state-capitalist theory of the USSR, the permanent arms economy and deflected permanent revolution - the comrade noted that, in practice, Callinicos and the CC do not feel overly obliged to defend them. In reality all that is left that differentiates the SWP is the ban on factions and the bureaucratic 'interventionist' leadership.

The main issue, continued comrade Macnair, is the need for the SWP to break with the 1968 'New Left' paradigm: ie, the road to social revolution allegedly being based on the initiative of the SWP leadership in catching onto some hot, new, passing social movement, which justified empowering the CC at the expense of the membership. That the opposition still seem trapped within this exhausted *political* framework is a big potential problem.

Illuminating the workings of bourgeois justice, the comrade noted that, contrary to some popular television programmes, 90% of all convictions are based on confessions, not forensic evidence *per se*. The police can hold and question people until they confess. This is a power that any 'workers tribunal' set up to investigate crimes in the movement would lack, and at the end of the day we must concur with Lenin when he said that, inevitably, serious matters such as allegations of rape have to go to the courts.

Similarly, Jim Gilbert pointed out that a proper investigation would have looked into the background and past behaviour of those involved. There was an ingrained culture of bullying in the SWP and certain people had been protected and allowed to continue in their ways for many years by others in the hierarchy.

Responding to the discussion, John Bridge commented that it was highly unlikely that the opposition will immediately come out with what we would regard as excellent politics, and that so far we have seen a mix of the very good and advanced in some parts, and the pretty bad in others. He suggested that the opposition itself probably understands that it is unlikely to be able to win at a conference, and that this is why it must reach out to others on the left. Comrade Bridge affirmed that CPGB is correct to try and intervene in the debate about programme - for example, in advocating a Marxist party, as against the Syriza-type organisation that Richard Seymour seems to favour.

In short, CPGB comrades must seek to intervene, including at SWP public meetings in their area, and maintain our emphasis on the need for *politics*, the need for *programme* ●

ENERGY

Walking away from CO₂ commitment

The December report of the Commons energy and climate change committee was almost unbelievably absurd.

The first shock announcement was that every single energy and fuel bill payer in Britain would be hit by an average tax charge of £100 per annum. This would come *on top of* ever escalating fuel and power prices charged by the generators, which are set to continue rising year on year. The number of families living in fuel poverty is set to rise dramatically from its already unprecedented level. Deaths of the very young, very old and the poorest from want of power and fuel is certain to dramatically increase.

This additional tax, along with the fossil fuel tax, is supposed to fund the development of energy sources which do not produce CO₂ or greatly minimise their use. Mostly the government sees this as a blank cheque for wind turbines, the most expensive form of energy generation and also the most inefficient (and, some might say, the most environmentally destructive in visual terms). It will also subsidise the expansion of the nuclear industry despite long-made promises that the latter should be self-supporting. Nuclear power is more than 100 times more expensive than coal power and set to become more so, as uranium deposits are exhausted through increased demand.

However, there was one glint of light for the almost extinct British coal mining industry when the clean coal project at Hatfield Main (Doncaster), based on carbon capture and sequestration (CCS), was shortlisted in October for the next stage of the government's announced £1 billion funding prize for the best system of CCS and clean coal energy production.

The Hatfield project, apart from its related clean coal-powered energy park and production of hydrogen for public vehicles and other potential transport systems as a by-product, has produced power with virtually *no* CO₂ emissions (and a reduction of 90% in all other emissions). The European Union was so impressed that it declared it the very best of all the schemes being developed in Europe and probably the world, and advanced half a billion euros for the plant's development. Private investors raised another quarter of a billion pounds, and the operators declared that the plant would be up and running within two years of the government's awarding of the necessary funds. However, in its announcement the energy committee declared, without giving any reason, that such funds should *not* now be awarded to Hatfield. What small sums are available should go toward wind estates and nuclear.

The decision to close down five of the remaining 19 coal power stations in Britain and *not* invest in the clean-coal station at Hatfield is based on the idea that if we stop generating CO₂, here, global CO₂ production will fall and we can all breathe more easily. There are two things wrong with this. Firstly a slightly parochial one: coal in its current form supplies a minimum of 30% of UK power, and at times of peak demand up to 50%. Taking out coal capacity without any replacement by any other reliable source means, of course, that at times of peak demand, in cold weather, the already hard-pressed and creaky energy generation system will fail and power cuts will add to the already expected rising death rates from systematic fuel poverty. The other point is that Britain's contribution to world CO₂ emissions is negligible these days, while coal production and consumption around the world is rising. Coal provides 50% of the world's power and CO₂ emissions are rising. But the government does not



Coal power: ~~clean~~ it clean

seem to understand that there is no border keeping 'British air' inside the parameters of the island and others people's air out.

Recently, the International Energy Agency (IEA), which promotes alternatives to fossil fuels, claimed that "coal's share of the global energy mix continues to rise, and by 2017 coal will come close to surpassing oil as the world's top energy source."

Other facts from the IEA 2012 factsheet are:

- Coal demand is growing everywhere, with the exception of the USA, where the anti-coal lobby has had some success in halting its growth.
- The world will burn around 1.2 billion more tonnes of coal per year by 2017: ie, more than the current annual coal consumption of the United States and Russia combined.
- China has become the largest coal importer in the world.
- India is on the verge of becoming a major coal consumer. It has massive coal reserves and insufficient energy for its population of over 1.2 billion.
- Australia looks set to regain its position as the world's biggest coal exporter, currently held by Indonesia.

So suppose, thanks to the government's energy fund, that the whole island is covered in wind turbines and six new nuclear power stations are built (with all that means in terms of everlasting pollution). That will have a minuscule effect on global warming - and at the cost of secure energy supply and rising deaths. The world will continue to consume coal and produce CO₂.

The Hatfield system, which could provide major clean-coal exports, can, on the other hand, be established within two years of development. It could be on stream worldwide between two and five years, with the potential of cutting world energy CO₂ emissions by over 70% and in effect 'solving' the problem,

at least until workable renewables can be established and developed. That the government has actually walked away from its commitment to cut world global emissions in the name of cutting global emissions is something it cannot be allowed to get away with.

How does the decision affect energy supply and prices here? Had Hatfield's project been funded and started generating clean power, there would be no excuse for the fossil fuel/CO₂ emission tax. Power generated from this project could be up to 50% cheaper than any other fossil fuel source and more than 100% cheaper than nuclear or wind turbines. Passed on the consumers, this would produce a 'dash to coal', as consumers switch to clean-coal power. It would spark a new prospect for long-term investment in the deep-mined coal industry, with everything that means for jobs and manufacture - not to mention the likelihood that the National Union of Mineworkers would ride back from the jaws of hell into a new-found strategic strength.

Against all of this, why on earth would even this coal-hating, mining-phobic government *not* award the funding to the clear winner? At first I came up with a thousand and one conspiracy theories along predictable lines to explain this. But the truth is simpler. The Hatfield project is ready right now: it requires the funding immediately, unlike any of the other projects. What has now emerged is that the treasury did a smash and grab raid on the £1 billion 'prize'. It has gone - disappeared like fairy gold in the night. The project will almost without doubt now either fall flat from want of funding, or else somehow will have to be put on hold until the 2015-20 spending review.

So the decision is even more deeply anti-social and irresponsible than we thought. British deep-coal mines could

well all be closed because of the dead weight of fossil fuel taxes and ongoing coal power station closures. The chance to make a serious, scientific impact on global CO₂ emissions will be missed right at the moment when it is needed most. Once this 'market' and demand for clean-coal generation is lost to far less efficient versions, and nations across the world commit to heavy infrastructure investment in them, the window of opportunity will have been lost.

Meantime, Hatfield Main's MP is ... Ed Miliband, while the shadow energy minister, Caroline Flint MP, sits in the neighbouring Don Valley constituency, where the Doncaster

coalfield is situated. Have we seen anyone jumping up and down? Have we seen a Labour amendment calling for restoration of the fund to Hatfield? No, and I doubt we will: Labour has *no* energy policy - certainly not one which is remotely relevant to mining communities, unions, consumers or anyone else. It is largely locked into the same short-sighted, eco-liberal policies which the Tories peddle. Why am I surprised? ●

David Douglass

Notes

1. www.iea.org/newsroomandevents/pressreleases/2012/december/name,34441,en.html.

Fighting fund

Correct me

Well, that's the first time that's happened. At the time of writing (the evening of January 30) we have received *exactly* £1,500 towards our January fighting fund. In other words, readers and supporters have ensured we have reached our target - which is, yes, £1,500 - with one day to spare!

The pick of this week's donations comes from comrade AG, who is based in Italy. He sent us a cheque for €200, which I assume is for his *Weekly Worker* resubscription, with a little to spare - €100 actually! That works out as £86 towards the fund. Then there was comrade MC who seemingly paid his £5 monthly PayPal subscription twice. When we emailed him to point this out, he told us to cancel the sub, so I'm counting his £10 in our total too!

He was among 13,138 internet readers last week, by the way.

Another nice little cheque came from KC, who sent us £25, while TR and LL both wrote one out for a tenner. Finally, standing order donations over the last seven days totalled £192 - special thanks to JT (£75), DS (£35) and PM (£30).

So - correct me if I'm wrong - this week £333 came in, all told. Add that to the £1,167 we already had and ... Can you fault my maths? In fact we still have a day to go before the February fund begins. Anyone fancy making a PayPal or bank transfer?

Robbie Rix

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

EUROPE

Tory civil war deferred

Cameron may have thrown a slab of red meat to the Eurosceptic right, but his problems are only just beginning, argues Eddie Ford

After being delayed by the Algerian hostage crisis, David Cameron finally got to deliver his 'big speech' about Europe at the London headquarters of Bloomberg on January 23. What he said has potentially profound consequences for British politics, both in the short and long term. Crucially, he promised to hold a "simple" in/out referendum on European Union membership after the next general election - "it is time to settle this European question in British politics", he declared. Indeed, it would be a decision on the UK's "destiny". A historic moment. After all, he added, if Britain left the EU it "would be a one-way ticket, not a return" - undoubtedly a true statement.

In the speech, Cameron laid out his opposition to the pledge in the original 1957 founding treaty of Rome to create an "ever-closer union". This is not Britain's goal or objective, he stated, and it would much better if the treaty specifically said so - that is, "freeing those who want to go further, faster, to do so, without being held back by the others". What some would call a two-speed Europe. Far from being impossible, Cameron argued, a new settlement for a 'flexible' Europe could be achieved by fully implementing the 2001 Laeken declaration - which said power should be passed back to member-states if they desire. But instead, Brussels has been pushing for ever greater centralisation.

In the long run-up to the referendum, which will not be held until at least 2017, Cameron will be fighting to "renegotiate" London's relationship with the EU bureaucracy - and nothing will be off the table when he puts forward demands for the repatriation of a series of powers to Britain, even if he did not spell out in his Bloomberg speech exactly what sort of powers he would like to see the UK reclaim. If successful in renegotiating membership terms, having gained major concessions from Brussels, he would then campaign with all his "heart and soul" for Britain to remain in the EU - presumably taking on the Murdoch press and those in his party who just want to get out of the EU come what may, regardless of any negotiations or the circumstances.

Cameron also spelled out his wish to extend Britain's opt-out from aspects of the EU's working time directive - the *bête noire* of Eurosceptics and British bosses. According to him, it is "neither right nor necessary" to claim that the integrity of the single market or full EU membership requires the working hours of British hospital doctors to be set in Brussels "irrespective of the views of British parliamentarians and practitioners". British bosses should be allowed to exploit workers in Britain without any outside interference.

Naturally, Cameron will be seeking a "mandate" from the electorate for a referendum in the next election. He heavily implied too that if the Tories had to form another coalition, he would make a referendum an essential condition. As for those both inside and outside the Conservative Party who want to hold a referendum before the election, or even immediately, Cameron thought they were offering up a "false choice" because Europe was set to radically change following the euro zone crisis and it would be "wrong to ask people whether to stay or go before we have had a chance to put the relationship right". The



David Cameron: short-term advantage, but ...

distinct message being that he would be working overtime to mend the broken relationship between Britain and the EU.

Wrapping up his speech, Cameron said he understood "the appeal" of Britain going it alone and was "sure" the UK could survive outside the EU. But he warned that the British people must think "very carefully" about the implications of withdrawal for the country's future prosperity, not to mention the possible detrimental impact on British influence at the "top table" of international affairs. For him, there is "no doubt" that the UK's continued clout in the corridors of Washington, Beijing and Delhi - despite the sad fact that the British empire no longer exists - is precisely due to it being a "powerful player" within the EU. He might have a point.

Very noticeably, Cameron has refused so far to be drawn on whether he would campaign for a 'no' vote if he failed to secure the desired changes in the coming negotiations. This would see him end up chasing after the same votes as the Pujadist United Kingdom Independence Party, which he described not so long ago as a "bunch of fruitcakes and loonies". Rather, the line is that failure is not an option. The plan will be fulfilled. Nothing can go wrong. As he slightly haughtily told the BBC, "Who goes into a negotiation hoping and expecting to fail?" No, Cameron insists that Britain's future lies inside a "changed" EU.

Hero?

Of course, David Cameron was hailed as a conquering hero by rapturous Eurosceptic Tory MPs - you almost expected him to be carried into parliament high on their shoulders with Queen's *We are the champions* blasting away in the background.

Bernard Jenkin, a Eurosceptic veteran - one of the 'Maastricht rebels' who defied the party whip to oppose the treaty - said that Cameron's commitment to the referendum is "historic" and praised his speech for setting out some clear principles: the "importance of national parliaments, the importance of legitimacy and the repudiation of ever closer union is very significant". As you might expect, he said he would vote to exit the EU if there was no "fundamentally new relationship".

London mayor Boris Johnson chirped that Cameron was "bang on", given that what "most sensible people want is to belong to the single market, but to lop off the irritating excrescences". Meanwhile, Stewart Jackson, who was an aide to then Northern Ireland secretary Owen Paterson before the Tory Commons

rebellion on Europe in 2011, tweeted: "I was sacked as PPS for advocating an in/out EU referendum in 2011, but it's now official party policy. That's politics, folks."

However, not everything is rosy in the Tory garden. Ian Birrell, former speechwriter to the prime minister, wrote on the *Conservative Home* blog that Cameron's speech was "padding wrapped around a stick of political dynamite" and "possibly the biggest gamble" of his career. Furthermore, Birrell worried that Cameron's pledge to hold a straightforward in/out referendum was "not throwing a slab of red meat to the right" - more like "giving them the keys to the abattoir".

There lies the rub. Thinking purely in the short term, like most bourgeois politicians do - there is the small matter of the next election to consider - Cameron may have played a brilliant hand on January 23. For some time the UK Independence Party has been riding high in the polls and there is the frightening possibility - and not just for the Tories - that Ukip could come second in the European elections. At the very least it will beat the Liberal Democrats. Therefore Cameron's strategy is to steal Ukip's clothes - and their votes.

His in/out referendum pledge is clearly designed to do that. And opinion polls conducted after his speech suggest he may be having some degree of success. A range of surveys showed the Tories up by two or three percent, although they still lag behind Labour by between six and nine points.

Not only that: his speech has gone some way to ameliorating his internal problems with "the bastards" - to use John Major's affectionate term for the Eurosceptics crowding the Tory backbenches. The problem, needless to say, is that are more "bastards" now than there were under Major. So Cameron needs to placate them by making out that he is one of them - a fellow Brussels-basher, not a cheese-eating surrender monkey. Hence the 'big speech'. Followed by his new-found status as a Churchillian hero. Cameron has surely increased his chances of winning the next general election, perhaps even becoming a prime minister with an absolute majority - away with the irksome coalition, replaced with true blue Toryism. Cameron is not guaranteed victory, of course, but every expectation is that the printed media and capitalist class will rally behind him and the Tories at the next general election. The establishment, at the end of day, always *prefers* the Tories - a much safer pair of hands when it comes to defending class privilege.

But it is a totally different picture if you view things in the long term.

Cameron's problems are only just beginning. The plain fact of the matter is that mainstream politicians of all political hues in Germany and France - and the core countries as a whole - want *greater* centralisation and "ever closer-union", not less. Look at the referendums that were run and rerun in Denmark and Ireland. The elites were not satisfied until they got the result they wanted - ie, support/acceptance of the Lisbon treaty. Then there was the fiscal pact which came into force on January 1 this year for the 16 states that had completed ratification. The very last the EU political elite and the Euro-bureaucracy wants is a major renegotiation of the Lisbon treaty - let alone more troublesome referendums. And will David Cameron be able to secure a radical renegotiation of EU rules? He will not be allowed to cherry-pick what he wants from Brussels, even if Angela Merkel has made conciliatory noises about being open to a "fair compromise".

In which case, what happens in 2017-18? As Ed Miliband has repeatedly asked Cameron - if you only get what suspiciously looks like European crumbs, then how exactly are you going to vote in a referendum? If the Tory Eurosceptics do not get what they want from Cameron, they will rebel - and maybe get rid of him. Unlike Labour, the Tories have never been sentimental about their leaders.

In some respects, the modern-day Conservative Party has been haunted by the European question in the same way that they were haunted by the Corn Laws throughout the 19th century - a running sore. True, deeply rooted political parties are only destroyed by big movements in history. But with the formation of the EU, the euro, Lisbon treaty, the fiscal pact etc, we are witnessing a major shift - the reorganisation of world capital. In other words, we are not dealing just with an ideological phenomenon generated by a historic memory of two world wars - though that is certainly an important factor. Rather, the driving force is hard-hearted economics - Germany needs to keep the euro project going. Therefore it needs more political, financial and fiscal centralisation (and less democracy), otherwise the crisis will come home to Germany. To prevent working class resistance breaking out on the streets of Berlin, Hamburg and Dusseldorf the German ruling class need to impose financial discipline and 'fiscal consolidation' upon Greece, Cyprus, Spain, Portugal, etc - not let them hang out and do their own thing, Cameron-style.

And Britain's relationship to the US is crucial when it comes to understanding the European question. The UK is a sort of transatlantic power - playing Sparta to America's Rome, helping to fight its wars (Vietnam excepted). When Britain entered the original European Economic Community, it naturally promoted the US agenda for Europe, which was to expand the EEC/EU, but only on a *confederal* basis - effectively leaving it weakened and unable to challenge US hegemony. But, of course, this was not in the interests of France and Germany. Yet, however history eventually spans out, the European question is essentially about the geopolitics of a declining, but still hegemonic, US - not just Nigel Farage, loonies and "bastards".

Dismal

Frankly, the left in Britain has a dismal

record when it comes to Europe. Yes, the International Socialist tradition which spawned the Socialist Workers Party briefly flirted with the idea of a united Europe. 'Official communism', on the other hand, can do little better when it comes to 'theory' than cite Lenin's 1916 polemic against Karl Kautsky's 'united states of Europe' slogan. Not unreasonably, viewing the horrors of imperialist carnage, Lenin argued that to advance such a slogan at that time was either ridiculous or utopian. But it is worth reminding ourselves that the Communist International had no problems adopting Trotsky's slogan of a 'united socialist states of Europe' in 1921 - only abandoned by the Soviet bureaucracy as it increasingly embraced national socialism.

The bulk of the British left notionally reject the 'Stalinist' doctrine of socialism in one country, but actually advocate it on an operative level. Therefore most left groups, Trotskyist or otherwise, look around the world and think the solution is to be found in a left or workers' government coming to power in one country or another - whether through elections or a spontaneous upsurge by the masses - and implementing a left Keynesian programme. One idiotic expression of this left nationalist outlook is the slogan, 'Take the power!' - directed towards Syriza in Greece. Luckily, Syriza did not win the election.

For orthodox Marxists, as opposed to 'official communists' and many supposed followers of Leon Trotsky, the problem remains the same - capital exists on a global level and has to be superseded at its most *advanced* point. Meaning that we need a revolutionary strategy that takes into account history, political consciousness and also the reality of material/economic wealth. Without such a perspective, we are doomed to failure.

Yes, of course, revolution could first break out in a Mexico, Brazil, Iran or India - you would almost expect it. But that would not decisively tilt the world balance of forces towards the working class. They would still remain trapped in poverty and this would hardly convince US workers to emulate their example. While such a workers' revolution in a 'weak link' could act as a spark, Europe would be a totally different story. Workers in Europe will probably not be the first to make revolution - though looking at Greece, Spain and Portugal you do wonder - but an all-EU, continent-wide revolution, would turn the world upside down. Become a beacon. The EU is the largest economic bloc on the planet and a revolution in Europe would probably see capitalism finished within a decade or less.

The left must break from national socialism - and the belief that what is bad for capitalism can only be good for us, so the break-up of the EU must be desirable. Sorry, comrades, this is a foolish and potentially disastrous illusion. To stand any chance of winning the prize, we need to constitute the working class as a conscious, *independent*, class - a future ruling class.

Concretely, we do not fall for either the 'yes' or 'no' choice in Cameron's "simple" in/out referendum. We say no to the capitalist EU bureaucracy and to British nationalism. Our call is for European working class unity around a programme for extreme democracy, socialism and communism ●

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FILM

How to distract the masses

Ben Affleck (director) *Argo* 2012, general release

A *Argo* is a fiction within a fiction, which is based on a true story, as a statement at the start of this film tells us. But, as with all fictions, the truth that it tells grinds a particular axe. In this case, it is the (vain) glorious, long-kept secret of how six US embassy staff were smuggled out of Iran under the noses of ayatollah Khomeini's Revolutionary Guards in 1979, just a few months after his forces had gained control of the country following the toppling of the shah.

Director Ben Affleck flaunts his credentials as a Middle East studies student at the start of the film, with a brief on-screen mention of British and US imperialist attacks on Iran's democratic Mosaddegh government. The joint CIA and Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) Operation Ajax coup in 1953¹ ousted Mosaddegh and cemented their creature, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, on the peacock throne. It is little wonder that Iranian popular hatred of the 'great Satan' (USA) and the 'little Satan' (UK) continues to this day. But we need to place the film more in the context of its times.

'Anti-imperialist'

Immediately after the February 1979 Iranian revolution, with the shah having fled into exile and then allowed into the USA with a life-threatening illness, the National Front government became alarmed at the radicalisation that was growing apace, especially in the workers' movement. Mehdi Bazargan², Khomeini's first prime minister, looked with dismay at this development, fearing it was getting beyond his government's control; he recalled later: "We wanted rain, but we got floods." Driven by fear of the masses, liberal factions within the regime capitulated to the political takeover by the clergy. And once this particular genie was out of the bottle, the growth of clerical authority devalued the National Front's secular politicians to the point of exclusion.³

In the summer of 1979, Khomeini had declared a *fatwa* against the Kurds in Iran, accusing them of waging war against Islam, and set about taming Kurdistan. By autumn, nine months after the revolution defeated the shah's forces, class struggle was continuing to grow: crucially for the economy, for example, oil workers had embarked on a series of new strikes. As well as in Kurdistan, national minorities were also rebelling in Turkman Sahra and oil-rich Khuzestan (home to many of Iran's Arabs and one of its wealthiest provinces); and women were militantly resisting attempts to enforce wearing of the veil in government offices and public places.

Against this background, strategists within the religious state decided to stage an 'anti-western' spectacle, although it was opposed by the Bazargan government from the start. This turned out to be the 'spontaneous' occupation of the US embassy in Tehran, purportedly by students and other Islamist militants, which began on November 4 1979.⁴ The stated aim of the protest was the demand that the shah should be returned to Iran to stand trial instead of receiving medical treatment in the USA. Manifestly, however, it was an action that proved decisive for the Islamists in diverting attention from the growing popular struggles and provided a means of achieving the consolidation of the Islamic Republic.⁵ Immediately after the embassy was occupied, the government declared



Rescue operation: Tony Mendez (Ben Affleck)

a state of emergency - on the basis that the USA might launch a military attack in retaliation - and this became the ideal pretext for crushing all rebellions and protests.

Sadly, if not sickeningly, much of the left in Iran and beyond was found wanting at this point. Tudeh, the 'official communist' party, and the Fedayeen Majority⁶ - both in effect Soviet client parties - declared the embassy occupation and hostage-taking 'an anti-imperialist act', as did the People's Mujahedin of Iran.⁷ Indeed, this was the position of 'official communist' parties around the world. But infamously it was a lead that was also followed by most Trotskyist groups both inside and outside Iran, including some that called for unconditional support for the 'imam's line'. These organisations inately judged the Iranian regime to be progressive for its anti-US stance, failing to comprehend that such a *reactionary* anti-imperialism could even exist.⁸ So it was that opposition to the regime inside Iran was left to the Fedayeen Minority⁹, Komala¹⁰, Peykar¹¹, a few Maoist groups, and to some extent Rahe Kargar.¹² It was these groups that concretised opposition to the takeover of the US embassy.

'Humane'

And so back to *Argo* and its reading of the beginning of this whole sorry process. Of course, by now we are used to seeing an idiosyncratic or even rogue CIA operative pop up in Hollywood movies and US television production. It is therefore almost to be expected that the almost unkempt Tony Mendez (Ben Affleck) would kick over the traces at some point. That he does so at the instant when his superiors want to abort the rescue operation, which he has worked his nuts off to set up, is well placed to instil the audience's admiration of his courage and humane individuality.

Clearly by that point in the film we are intended to want him to succeed in saving the six men and women. They have, after all, been cleared for the purpose of our consciences as wholly non-clandestine (ie, not spooks, not complicit in torture, etc), but merely clerical and administrative visa workers. Therefore, their lives being in danger, we must hope that the brave if quirky CIA man will do his level best to protect them, must we not? Indeed, flawed though the

state's agencies may be, are they not our guardians against evil and the evildoers? After all, in the end, from among their ranks emerge the dependable good guys ... and so on.

Production values are undoubtedly high and *Argo* does have its moments. In particular, the by-play between makeup artist John Chambers (John Goodman) and producer Lester Siegel (Alan Arkin) encapsulates Hollywood dry wit and cynicism. But these moments are few and far between.

Factually, there are questions about the film's depiction of the situation in Iran as the embassy occupation started. For example, we see the six disguised embassy staff met with antagonism as they walk with Mendez in the bazaar. But those who were in Tehran in 1979 have recalled that foreigners, including Brits and Americans (the late anthropologist and revolutionary Frank Girling¹³ amongst them), could walk the streets and even mingle freely among those demonstrating daily outside the US embassy without being berated or threatened. This was, after all, a time when the Islamic regime was keen to win friends and influence people through its 'anti-imperialism'.

Several others have commented that it was untrue, as is stated in *Argo*, that the British embassy in Tehran refused to give the six shelter. But even if true, as a physical representation of the 'little Satan', the UK's embassy there would hardly have been a safe haven: paranoia toward Britain has always been high within Iran.¹⁴ And anyway the accents of the six were nowhere near Received Pronunciation, which was why the Canadian embassy was a better fit.

More important, though, were inaccuracies in the finale. As journalist Robert Fisk recalls,¹⁵ having also been in Iran at the time, it was most unlikely that the Revolutionary Guards at Tehran airport had computers. In fact, Fisk also declares that the identity of the fleeing six was never discovered by the Iranian regime - something that the film suggests was painstakingly achieved - and thus the consequent final pursuit down the runway is complete fiction: nothing like it ever happened. As the closing escape sequence is probably the most engaging and thrilling part of *Argo*, this is something of a difficulty for the film's overall impact and especially for its veracity, which is so clearly and

definitely claimed at the start.

Whether, as some claim, the Canadian authorities actually did much more to aid the six escapees leave Iran than the CIA ever did is moot. What is indisputable is the decades-long involvement of foreign covert agencies in Iran. The CIA taught the shah's Savak secret police how to torture, after all. And let us not forget that it was Jimmy Carter who made the CIA more secretive by presidential decree: "One of his first actions was to tighten severely access to information about CIA covert operations and plug up potential leaks."¹⁶ That is why it is only now, a full 33 years after the Tehran embassy occupation, that the release of details of this episode has been permitted - in a controllable manner, using quasi-fictional means. Information management using white, grey and black propaganda is how such state agencies express an important part of their remit.

Argo joins a long list of fictionalisations that, despite their more or less complex modes of realisation, serve bourgeois state propaganda needs. Crying 'Leave no-one behind' has been explicit in characterisation of heroes such as Mendez in US mainstream movies dealing with conflict from before World War II, through Vietnam, to the conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia. So the fact that the theme is continued in *Argo* is unsurprising, especially when it serves to restore lost sheen to the CIA, thanks to a seemingly leftfield individual. At the end of *Argo*, prodigal son Mendez is welcomed back to Langley with open arms, transgressions forgiven.

Back in Iran, though, the situation for the working class and all those being crushed by the regime was to become worse. Marking the defeat of the revolutionary movement, the Islamist regime launched a bloodbath in 1981: an all-out attack on the Mujahedin, which had been a supporter of the embassy occupation, and other opposition groups. Even at this point Tudeh, the Fedayeen Majority, and sections of the Trotskyist Fourth International still continued to support and defend the Islamist government at home and internationally. So it was beyond irony when the regime's attacks were broadened out in 1983: it then became the turn of members of Tudeh, the Fedayeen Majority, and the pro-state Trotskyist groups who

were themselves arrested by the very forces they had hitherto supported.

While the Iran embassy hostage crisis was to drag on very publicly into 1981, it was nonetheless to fulfil a secret purpose for the USA. The hostages had become pawns in political shenanigans between Iran on one side and Israel and the USA on the other. By covert agreement with US Republicans, who visited Iran in 1980 specifically for the purpose of negotiating it, the Iranian regime agreed to delay the release of the hostages until after the US presidential elections in November of that year, in order to boost the chances of Ronald Reagan. Reagan was thus able to puff himself up as the strongman who would make Iran let them go. It worked: the hostages were actually released on his inauguration day (January 20 1981!).

Later, as we know now, the subsequent holding in the Lebanon of western hostages by the Iran-backed Hezbollah was ended as part of an elaborate deal whose negotiating roots were in those earlier hidden contacts between the US and Iran's Islamist regime. In 1986 the Lebanese newspaper, *Al-Shiraa*, exposed the whole sordid Iran-Contra arms-for-hostages affair: under this deal, hostages in the Lebanon were exchanged for Israeli weapons to help Iran fight its 'anti-western' war against Iraq. Iran paid for these weapons by depositing funds into Swiss accounts belonging to the vile Nicaraguan Contras as well as shipping oil to Israel. So much, then, for Israel as the bugbear *par excellence* for the Iranian regime!

And so much for the Iranian regime's hatred for the 'great Satan', to whose tune it has been perfectly prepared to dance - as long as it was not a performance seen or heard by the mass of Iranians ●

Jim Moody

Notes

1. Remembered as the 28 Mordad 1332 coup, using the Iranian calendar.
2. First Iranian head of the National Iranian Oil Co under the Mossaddegh government.
3. The National Front remains the semi-legal opposition inside Iran, calling for liberalisation of the Islamic regime. But its offices are periodically raided and its presidential and parliamentary election candidates are invariably disqualified for failing the religious criteria set by the Council of Guardians.
4. Fifty-two US citizens were held hostage for 444 days, until January 20 1981.
5. Following a national referendum, Iran became an Islamic Republic on April 1 1979; Khomeini was named supreme leader in December 1979, a few weeks after the occupation of the US embassy.
6. Organisation of Iranian People's Fedayeen (Majority).
7. Originally an Islamo-Marxist group, it is currently the main element of the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI).
8. When war with Iraq broke out in September 1980, these groups called on workers to stop their strikes and for all opposition forces to rally behind the 'anti-imperialist' government.
9. Fedayeen Organisation (Minority) publishes *Kar* outside Iran: <http://aghalyat.no-ip.org>.
10. Komala is the Kurdish branch of the Communist Party of Iran, which publishes *Workers' Voice* (www.cpiran.org/English/English_index.html).
11. Also called the Marxist Mujahedin, it was a secular splinter from the People's Mujahedin of Iran. It is no longer active.
12. Organisation of Revolutionary Workers of Iran, which publishes the journal *Rahe Kargar*. It split in 2009.
13. Private conversations between Frank Girling and Yasmine Mather.
14. An idea lampooned in Iraj Pezeshkzad's popular 1973 novel *Dā'i jān Nāpol'on* (*My uncle Napoleon*).
15. www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/ben-affleck-argo-and-a-chilling-portrait-of-suspicion-and-vengeance-in-postrevolutionary-tehran-8459100.html.
16. "Turner's 'born again' CIA" *Covert Action Information Bulletin*, reproduced in P Agee and L Wolf *Dirty work: The CIA in western Europe* Zed Press, London 1978.

REVIEW

Confined within the framework of Stalinism

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

The Communist Party of Great Britain enjoyed for many decades the reputation for being a relatively stable organisation in the otherwise fractious world of leftwing politics. During the time when most other communist parties were throwing up oppositional currents led by senior cadres (and out) on a regular basis, not one member of the CPGB's central committee departed to join a Trotskyist or other critical Marxist group.

The fraught year of 1956 apart, there was little evidence to the casual observer of much dissension within the CPGB until it started to tear itself apart very publicly from the late 1970s. Nonetheless, there were several occasions when opportunist policies pursued by the party leadership provoked sharp criticism from within the membership. This book, an expanded second edition,¹ investigates the manifestations of radical opposition to the CPGB's leadership that arose during the decades following World War II, trends which the author considers have been either overlooked or poorly dealt with in most of the historical studies of the party.

The CPGB's abject class-collaborationist approach during World War II after Hitler turned on the Soviet Union in June 1941 required its members to support Churchill's national government, break strikes, encourage maximum output and otherwise ignore class divisions in British society. This caused not a few problems for party members, not least when their workmates defied the wartime all-class consensus and took strike action. When the party leadership continued with these policies after the war had ended, following the logic of the perspective that the wartime 'big three' Anglo-US-Soviet alliance would continue into peacetime, there was an angry response that was demonstrated in a succession of letters to the party's press and which manifested itself quite boldly at the party's 18th Congress in November 1945. The leadership was criticised for having called for a peacetime coalition government; for having failed to "give clear and correct political leadership to the party on the serious political errors that led temporarily to the liquidation of the American Communist Party" - that is, Browderism; for having dissolved the party's factory branches;² for having a "lack of clarity as to the role of the party in the period ahead, particularly in relation to the Labour government"; for failing to expose Labour's weaknesses, especially in respect of its reactionary foreign policy; for failing to give any real leadership to the working class; and for minimising the differences between communism and social democracy (pp20-26).

Defending at the congress his political report that justified these policies, the party's general secretary, Harry Pollitt, conceded that a mistake had been made in respect of calling for a peacetime coalition government, rather fudged the question of Browderism, but held fast on all the other issues. His speech plumbed the depths of cynicism when he blithely



Harry Pollitt faced opposition, but was it an avalanche?

dismissed the problems faced by party members as they implemented its policies - "If some of our comrades were in difficulties on the docksides, well, communists are always in difficulties and we have to be prepared to face them and to stand up against them" (p21) - deliberately overlooking the fact that communists were usually unpopular with the press and employers for supporting strikes, not with their fellow-workers for strike-breaking. It is a pity that Parker does not quote more of Pollitt's blustering response, as his words, redolent of the worst rightwing Labour hack, reveal the party leadership's anger at being challenged from below on matters of no little importance:

I am going to face you with the direct issue and I do not propose you shall get away with anything. You are either in favour of the line of the report, or of the line that has been expounded here of mass strikes as the only way to realise the workers' demands. If the latter, I warn you, you are playing with fire that can

help to lose the peace and reduce this country to ashes. Nothing is easier in the present situation than strikes, and our comrades should be much more guarded ... You can get a strike in the coalfields tomorrow, if you want it. Will it advance the working class movement of this country, or the perspective of our nation being a first-rate nation in the family of united nations?³

Although the strength of feeling of the dissident members was evident, it is nonetheless difficult to gauge accurately the extent of this outburst of criticism. The way in which Parker's depiction on p15 of a "broad-based opposition" and of a "large section" of the party's rank and file being "in revolt" drops off to just "a section" of the membership in the next paragraph and on the next page, and then revives to an "avalanche" on p32, rather suggests that our author is not sure of its actual dimension.

The CPGB's leadership claimed to have "decisively defeated" its critics at the congress (p26), but opposition to its

continued rightwing policies flared up again within the party and, somewhat bizarrely, from the other side of the world, when the Communist Party of Australia, for reasons that remain obscure, sent its British comrades a sharply critical letter.⁴ Parker states that the opposition that emerged in 1947 was considerably smaller than that in 1945, and was to an extent confined to Hertford and Welwyn Garden City. He shows how the new critics upbraided the party leadership for having "virtually abandoned Marxism" or for making use of only those bits of it which were "acceptable to the petty bourgeoisie" (p32), but unfortunately we do not have repeated here the full extent of Eric Heffer's leftism when the future left Labour MP implored that "we must never forget that social democracy is not the opposite of fascism, but its twin".⁵ This lurch into a pure 'third period' diatribe must have made the leadership's successful counterattack all the easier, although Parker is certainly right when he suggests that it was the fact of the CPGB's leadership being "reluctantly

yanked to the left" as a result of the radicalisation of the international communist movement after the inauguration of the Cominform in late 1947 that defused this round of criticism (p33). Nevertheless, this was not the last spark of leftism, because in late 1950 Pollitt was warning that the party had to "root out ... the last remnants of sectarianism", and he condemned members who had opposed voting for the Labour Party in a recent by-election in Leicester.⁶

Antagonism

It is clear from the examples so far given that, although these instances of discontent did not cohere into an organised challenge to the party leadership, the grounds nonetheless existed for a potential antagonism between those members who took seriously their party's ostensible commitment to Leninism and the leadership when the latter promoted a reformist approach that distorted it in theory and contradicted it in practice. These tensions were largely latent during the 1950s, despite the overtly reformist nature of the party's programme, *The British road to socialism*,⁷ but they came into the open in the early 1960s when the discord between Beijing and Moscow was given an ideological colouring with the Chinese leadership's defence of Stalin's record against Khrushchev's criticisms of him and its condemnation of the Soviet leaders' "revisionism" - that is to say, revising Leninism in a reformist direction - gave critics in western communist parties the ideal opportunity to hurl the same accusations at their party leaders, who combined their own formal adherence to Leninism with programmes that bore a distinctly reformist air about them.

The first organised anti-revisionist group in Britain was the somewhat clumsily named Committee to Defeat Revisionism For Communist Unity. Its leading figure, Michael McCreery, had for a couple of years been elaborating a critique of the CPGB's reformism, and the group emerged publicly in late 1963 with a manifesto that urged CPGB members to oust the current party leadership for its support for Khrushchev and for betraying the working class. It suffered from the perennial problem facing oppositionists - whether or not to break openly from the parent body. It was also pretty much bankrolled by the well-heeled McCreery, who died of cancer in 1965,⁸ and it did not long survive his early death and the inevitable ideological and organisational problems that it encountered.

Nevertheless, by the mid-1960s, and especially after the start of the Cultural Revolution in 1967, Maoism was a growing trend within the CPGB, particularly within the Young Communist League. It even reached the CPGB's executive committee, where Reg Birch, a leading leftwinger in the Amalgamated Engineering Union, came into conflict with his colleagues because of his developing Maoist views. In late 1966, Birch joined the editorial board of a Maoist journal, *The Marxist*, which was

What we fight for

rapidly denounced by the CPGB's London District Committee. He then stood for AEU president, although the party leadership was backing former member Hugh Scanlon, and was heavily defeated. Birch found himself suspended from party membership in January 1967 for three months, and in the autumn of that year he publicly set about forming a new organisation, which was launched in 1968 as the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist).

Accounts of Birch's career differ widely: according to one, he became a Maoist in a fit of pique as a result of the AEU debacle; according to another, he had been a longstanding oppositionist. Parker shows that the AEU affair was just one episode in his political odyssey, and that the actual record is somewhat less clear-cut. The CPB(M-L) loyally backed China, but shifted its allegiance to Enver Hoxha's Albania after Mao's death in 1976.

Next to be discussed is almost certainly the biggest current of opposition to have emerged within the CPGB: those members who by the early 1970s were concluding that the increasingly parliamentary and openly reformist course of the CPGB was intimately connected with its veering away from the necessary commitment to the Soviet Union. The CPGB's EC condemned the Soviet overthrow of Alexander Dubček's reforming regime in Czechoslovakia in 1968, and this led to grumbles amongst party members who still held Moscow in high esteem and who considered that it really desired a more militant approach on the part of overseas communist parties. Eddie Jackson, the main force behind the shadowy Appeal Group, had long opposed the parliamentary orientation of the *British road to socialism*, whilst the rival tendency that formed the New Communist Party broke from the CPGB in 1977 over the overtly reformist approach that was subsequently sanctified in the 1978 version of the party's programme.

'Out of step'?

Parker points out that, just like Eric Heffer and his co-thinkers in the late 1940s, these pro-Moscow oppositionists held to the "naive standpoint" that the CPGB leadership's opportunism was "somehow out of step" with the Soviet party, an illusion that "hobbled pro-Soviet oppositionists down the years" (p27). The Appeal Group was especially upset when it learnt that Moscow was in favour of the CPGB's general line. It should not have been such a nasty surprise, as in 1964 general secretary John Gollan had publicly stated that his predecessor, Pollitt, had actually discussed with Stalin the draft of the first edition of the *BRS*, and that the finished work had been published in *Pravda*. One could not have had clearer proof of head office approval than that. Even in Stalin's day Moscow wanted the CPGB to have a reformist programme: these oppositionists were merely fooling themselves.⁹

One can add that those drawn to Maoism demonstrated the same sort of worship of a supposedly revolutionary state, and a clue to the attraction of Maoism can be found in official Chinese appeals to Stalinist orthodoxy against Khrushchev's "revisionism".¹⁰ If one had subscribed to the revolutionary image projected by Stalin's Soviet Union, and if one felt that it had been betrayed by his successors, then it was not difficult to transfer one's allegiance from the Soviet Union to another state that continued to promote that image. This state worship merely served to store up problems, as the policies of the Chinese bureaucracy proved as blatantly opportunist as those of Moscow. The further policy shifts after Mao's death led many Maoists

to repeat the whole sorry experience at a higher level of absurdity by abandoning their now dashed hopes in China and transferring their allegiance to Stalin's memory to Enver Hoxha's Albania.

Parker does not look at the subsequent evolution of the NCP, but it is interesting to do so in the light of what he writes of other anti-revisionist trends. The NCP did eventually break from its Brezhnevite orientation after the collapse of the Soviet bloc in 1989-91, and has effectively adopted the Maoist analysis that sees the rot in the Soviet Union setting in after the death of Stalin. With no places left in the former Soviet bloc worthy of the name 'socialist', it was obliged to look further afield for a sponsor, and, after an abortive flirtation with the now-defunct People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, settled upon North Korea as the country in which socialism is being built, and it has duly obtained Pyongyang's official franchise for Britain.¹¹ However, a senior member of the NCP informed me that there is a feeling afoot within the party that the rot started during the popular front period; this is surely a bit risky, as backdating it any further puts the group at risk of aligning itself theoretically with Trotskyism, and, as we shall see, the NCP has already had some bother in this respect.

The last group discussed in this book is the one which emerged within the NCP, and which now operates as the Communist Party of Great Britain, the original CPGB having been wound up in 1991. This group is unique amongst post-1945 oppositions within the CPGB in that, under the influence of the Turkish oppositional communist Rıza Yürükoğlu, it started along a course that resulted in its elaborating a critical analysis of the entire history of the movement. Turfed out of the NCP in 1980-81, it published *The Leninist* magazine and soon evolved positions somewhat reminiscent of the Trotskyist movement, and was - not without justification - duly accused of such a sin by those still adhering to the Stalinist traditions. Of course, this cannot solve all the political problems facing a Marxist group, and whether today's CPGB has escaped the customary pitfalls of leftwing groups remains to be seen (those of us who experienced the CPGB's conduct in respect of the Campaign for a Marxist Party will have our own opinions on that), but its development of a critical attitude towards Stalinism demonstrated an unusual open-mindedness on its part. So far as I can tell, this is the first example of a grouping (as opposed to individuals) in Britain doing this since the Balham Group declared itself for Trotskyism eight decades ago.

In his introduction, Mark Fischer complains that Trotskyist groups customarily wrote off the CPGB as irredeemably counterrevolutionary, which led them to ignore the many working class militants in the party and thereby left them under the spell of Stalinism. Although there is some truth to this, the problem was not merely on one side of the divide. Parker shows how hostile Moscow loyalists were towards Trotskyism (p76). Trotskyists did at times cooperate with CPGB members in unions and broad campaigns, but the latter's protective attitude towards the Stalinist states was a constant stumbling block; those in the CPGB most likely to criticise the Soviet regime were the Eurocommunists, but, as they recoiled from anything that smacked of 'ultra-leftism', they were as hostile to Trotskyists as their party rivals.

Stifling culture

Entry work in the CPGB was very difficult, as, apart from the long-ingrained antipathy to 'Trots', it was against party regulations to organise

discussions between one branch and another, let alone to set up a faction, and in any case the whole culture of the party militated against critical thought and far-reaching discussion. This book shows how the party leadership would use every trick in the book to deal with the mildest opposition. Even in the later days when the supposedly liberal Eurocommunists were in charge, their much-vaunted democratic credentials were proven to be bogus when they carved up their party rivals in pure Stalinist style.¹² Any Trotskyists attempting entry work in the CPGB would have received short shrift.

There is also the awkward fact that entry work by Trotskyists in communist parties in the 1950s had led to their adapting to the very politics from which they hoped to wean party members, or otherwise becoming lost to Trotskyism. The example of Michèle Mestre in France was not at all positive, as she rapidly became a Stalinist hack, zealously rooting out any signs of oppositional activity within the party's ranks. John Lawrence joined the CPGB, and, whilst acting heroically during the St Pancras rent strike, ended up as an anarchist. Later on, when the Revolutionary Communist Group started to sniff around the newly formed NCP on the basis that it represented some sort of ready-made vanguard of the working class, it rapidly adapted to Stalinism, and has ended up effectively beached in Havana, cheerleading the Cuban regime.

Taking these obstacles into consideration, and noting the small size of today's CPGB, one suspects that even with a more adept tactical approach to the old party's militants, there was very little chance of drawing to revolutionary Marxism many more than the relatively small number of them who were won to Trotskyism over the decades.

To return to the main subject of this book, Parker recognises that a thoroughgoing critique of opportunism in the CPGB necessitated a far deeper investigation of the Soviet Union and the 'official' communist movement than those embarked upon by the bulk of oppositionists within the party. They were reacting to the rightwing politics that were the *consequences* of Stalinism and, when confronted by a left turn on the part of the CPGB, as in 1947 with the establishment of the Cominform, or with the promotion of a more radical approach by Beijing after China broke from the Soviet Union, then they either returned to the fold or became the local franchise of another Stalinist state.

A full-scale critique of opportunism would necessarily have investigated the relationship between these politics and the diplomatic requirements of the Soviet regime, and - so long as the critics kept an open mind - this would inevitably have hit upon the adoption in 1924 of Stalin's dogma of 'socialism in one country'. And this would have opened the door to critical Marxist analyses, whether of the Trotskyist, left communist or other varieties. It would mean recognising that under Stalin the Soviet Union

degenerated into a society ruled by an anti-communist elite, and that the People's Republic of China was ruled by such an elite from the very start.

This book makes the important point that with the exception of the faction behind *The Leninist*, the post-war oppositions were all fatally limited by their confinement within the framework of Stalinism, and for that reason they were unable to make the theoretical progress that was necessary for them to reach an authentic form of Marxism ●

Paul Flowers

Notes

1. The first edition, *The kick inside: revolutionary opposition in the CPGB, 1960-1991*, was published by Rotten Elements.
2. This was a common complaint of radical critics in the CPGB. Space forbids a discussion of this, but Parker is correct when he points out that this change in the party's structure was not a cause of opportunism within the party, and adds that the existence of factory branches had actually helped to reinforce the long-running division in the party between trade union and political work, which assisted the rise of opportunism in the first place.
3. W. Gallagher and H. Pollitt *Communist policy for Britain* London 1945, p34.
4. The Communist Party of Australia was one of the very few CPs that had enjoyed a reasonably positive experience during the 'third period' of 1928-34, and it has been suggested that this explains the habit of the party's leadership that came to prominence at that time to display decidedly left standpoints in later years (T. O'Lincoln *Into the mainstream: the decline of Australian communism* Westgate 1985, p38).
5. *World News and Views* February 1 1947.
6. H. Pollitt *Peace depends on the people* London 1950, pp17-18.
7. The first edition of *The British road to socialism* appeared in 1951, the second in 1958.
8. A delightful irony is that, at the time of his death, McCreery combined his activities as the leader of 'anti-revisionism' in Britain with giving lectures on economics at evening classes at the University of London for employees of the ministry of labour.
9. In the first edition of this book, Parker stated that "by pretending that the Soviet Union was somehow in tune with anti-BRS sentiments, such comrades had a political comfort blanket" (p47). I suspect that this has been modified because their belief in Moscow was not a pretence, but was actually firmly held. Nevertheless, the end result was the same: reality cruelly stripped away their "comfort blanket".
10. For example: "One after the other, all the revisionists and opportunists who challenged revolutionary Marxism-Leninism have collapsed in the face of the truth and have been spurned by the people. Bernstein was a failure and so were Kautsky, Plekhanov, Trotsky, Bukharin, Chen Tu-hsiu, Browder and all the others. Those who are launching the new attacks on revolutionary Marxism-Leninism today are just as overbearing and arrogant; yet, if they continue to turn a deaf ear to all advice and persist in their wrong course, it can be said for certain that their end will be no better than that of the old revisionists and opportunists" (Foreign Language Press *More on the differences between comrade Togliatti and us: some important problems of Leninism in the contemporary world* Beijing 1963, pp192-93).
11. Oddly enough, this is where another formerly Maoist then pro-Tirana organisation, the Revolutionary Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist), has ended up, its illusions in Albania shattered after the death of Hoxha. In a surprisingly ecumenical spirit, this notoriously sectarian group now holds joint meetings with the NCP on the wonders of North Korea.
12. This writer witnessed a telling example of this when seated on the press bench at the CPGB's 40th Congress in 1987. The Eurocommunist-dominated executive committee was clearing out many of the party's long-standing union activists, and was rejecting their appeals to congress and either suspending their membership or expelling them altogether. A smiling Euro in a pink boiler-suit pronounced the sentences with considerable glee, and announced to howls of laughter from her fellow factionalists that, although the EC had not received an appeal from Liverpool Nalco official Judy Cotter, it was nonetheless rejecting it.

The kick inside



The inner-party struggle in the Communist Party of Great Britain after World War II has rarely been given proper consideration.

This book sheds important new light on factional struggles inside the post-war CPGB and is vital for an understanding of the party's political crisis, as it moved toward dissolution in 1991.

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■ **Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.**

■ **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'.**

■ **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.**

■ **The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote.**

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

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

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

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

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

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Going both ways: Israeli general election

Implosion and polarisation

The results of the general election held on January 22 are tricky to summarise, mainly because of the inherent complexity of the country's 'three-dimensional' political map. I will not dwell on this here, but refer the reader to the analysis in an article I co-authored with comrade Ein-Gil following the previous election. In that article we also explained Israel's system of proportional representation.¹

Let me just recall one important caveat: when you see an Israeli party described in the media as being on the 'left', 'centre' or 'right', take it with a large pinch of salt: in Israeli political discourse these terms do not refer to the party's position on socio-economic class issues, but its attitude to Zionism, expansionism and militarism.

Two of the most salient changes in the composition of the 120-seat knesset are in the Zionist hard-line and fanatic part of the political landscape. Prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu's gambit of forging an alliance with his thuggish foreign minister, Avigdor Lieberman, ended disappointingly for the dreadful duo: their hard-line bloc dropped from 42 seats (27 held by Netanyahu's *Likud*, plus 15 by Lieberman's *Yisrael Beiteinu*) to 31.

Where did the lost 11 seats go? It is hard to tell; but they seem to have moved in two opposite directions. Perhaps five of them were gained by the religious and fanatic Zionist party, *Habayit Hayehudi* (Jewish Home), led by the capitalist, Naftali Bennett, which previously had three seats and will now have 12. Four of the nine extra seats gained by this party have come most probably from the equally obnoxious National Union, which had four seats in the outgoing knesset: the NU split and the majority of its members joined *Habayit Hayehudi*. The remaining votes lost by the Netanyahu-Lieberman bloc, worth up to six knesset seats, were dispersed in less hawkish directions. Some of them probably went to the new *Yesh Atid* (There is a Future) party, of which more anon.

Another major change is the implosion of *Kadima* (Forward/Eastward), the hard-line party with a hypocritical mask, founded by Ariel Sharon as a split from the *Likud*. In the outgoing knesset, *Kadima*, led by Tzipi Livni, was the largest party, with 28 seats. But, having failed to be re-elected leader, Ms Livni now copied Sharon's manoeuvre, split *Kadima* and founded a new party, *Hatnu'ah* (The Movement), which won six seats in the new knesset. The rump of *Kadima* barely squeezed in, with two seats (the least possible number, since a party that gets less than two percent of the valid votes is disqualified). So 20 seats won by the old *Kadima* have been lost. Where did the votes go? Mostly to less overtly hawkish parties, including the new *Yesh Atid*.

So, in sum, the old hard-line votes were polarised: some went to the even more fanatically Zionist end of the spectrum, but a greater number shifted in the opposite, relatively more moderate direction.

Vacuous centre

But the greatest sensation of the election was the achievement of the secular and allegedly centre-left new

party, *Yesh Atid*, which came out of nowhere to become the second largest party, with 19 seats in the new knesset. Its leader, Yair Lapid, has been described as a man of many parts; journalist, author, TV presenter, film actor, editor and director; PhD student. In reality he is a smooth-looking and smooth-talking demagogic windbag, whose prolific writings are riddled with embarrassing factual howlers. His meteoric success is due to his cunning ploy of exploiting the frustration and disillusionment of the so-called 'middle class': large sections of the petty bourgeoisie and white-collar workers.

These strata are being economically squeezed by the neoliberal policies of all previous governments since the 1980s. They would like to live in Tel Aviv as if it were a prosperous European or American city, far from any colonial conflict. Lapid sold them the fantasy they crave: affordable housing and education, a higher standard of living, lower taxation and a more equal sharing of the 'national burden'. This greater equality would be achieved by abolishing the exemption from military service of ultra-orthodox young men studying in *yeshivot* (religious seminaries).

About the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the occupied territories, the alleged threat of Iranian nukes - about these worrying topics Lapid took great care to say as little as possible. But on the rare occasions when he did venture to comment on these subjects, what came out was common Zionist racist bilge: he does not care what the Arabs want, he said: "What I want is not a new Middle East, but to be rid of them and put a tall fence between us and them." The important thing, he added, is "to maintain a Jewish majority in the Land of Israel."²

This repellent, slimy character is now the kingmaker of Israeli politics, as it would be difficult to form a stable coalition without him. But he no doubt has his price, and Netanyahu may well be able and willing to pay it.

Yesh Atid is not the only party to capitalise on the socio-economic discontent that had manifested itself

spectacularly in the mass protests of summer 2011. The Israeli Labour Party is one of the most rightwing parties bearing such a name. But Shelly Yachimovich, a former journalist recently elected leader, has had the nous to nudge Labour a tad to the left, at least verbally. This paid off. During the 2011 protests, political parties were shunned, as the protestors refused to identify with any existing party. But, now that the demonstrators have dispersed, some of their self-appointed and media-anointed leaders - journalists Stav Shaffir³ and Merav Michaeli⁴ and former student union chairman Itzik Shmuli⁵ - joined Labour and have been duly elected to the knesset. The party won 15 seats, two up from the previous 13.

An even greater success was scored by Meretz, a 'soft'-Zionist, social democratic party, member of the Socialist International (in which the Israeli Labour party is a mere observer). It doubled its knesset seats from three to six. One of the three new Meretz MKs is an Arab, Issawi Farij, an accountant.⁶ (Apparently the Zionism of Meretz is soft enough for him not to mind too much.)

The outgoing knesset had 17 Arab members. Seven of them (of whom six were Druze) were collaborators, members of Zionist and even ultra-Zionist parties. Of these, only one has been re-elected: a Druze member of Lieberman's faction. (Arabs of the Druze religion are officially regarded in Israel as a separate, non-Arab ethnic group. Some of them are used as collaborators, in exchange for certain limited privileges.)

The new knesset has 12 Arab members. Apart from Lieberman's collaborator and the new Meretz MK, the (moderate Islamic) United Arab List has kept its four MKs; the secular Arab Balad also retained its three; and the reformist Communist Party has kept its four MKs, three of whom are Arabs.

What now?

Netanyahu, severely bruised but still leader of the largest knesset party, will

have the very tricky task of forming a governing coalition. Whatever the outcome, we can hazard some cautious tentative predictions.

First, the shift away from the hawkish extreme of the political spectrum will make an Israeli attack on Iran (without active US encouragement) less likely.

Second, the so-called peace process with the Palestinian leadership is unlikely to be renewed and if it is it will lead nowhere, as before: the 'two-state solution' is no longer realistic, so there is little to negotiate about. In any case, all Zionist parties except Meretz are opposed to the creation of a sovereign Palestinian state west of the river Jordan. The only difference between them is the tactics they favour for preventing it. The fanatics of *Habayit Hayehudi* flatly oppose any negotiation. The others diplomatically pretend to favour negotiation, but either do their utmost to torpedo any attempt to get it going (Netanyahu's preferred ploy) or agree to negotiate, but do everything to prolong it.

process indefinitely (Labour's tactics).

Third, the most immediate problem the new coalition will face is the state budget it will have to submit to the knesset in the spring. It transpires that, according to the Bank of Israel's analysis, the state deficit is almost twice as big as originally projected, and the bank requires the government to raise taxes and apply major cuts to the budget.⁷ This is exactly the opposite of what kingmaker Yair Lapid promised his gullible voters. It may well drive masses of incensed Israelis back to the streets in renewed protest.

● **Moshé Machover**

Notes

1. 'Israeli aggression and 3D politics' *Weekly Worker* April 30 2009.
2. 'Lapid: I want to be rid of the Arabs': www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/164389#UQGSbKWJh.
3. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stav_Shaffir.
4. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Merav_Michaeli.
5. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Itzik_Shmuli.
6. <http://meretz.org.il/representatives/issawi-farij>.
7. *Yedioth Ahronoth* January 23: www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4336126,00.html.



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