

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

weekly worker



Jerry Hicks, rank-and-file candidate for Unite: no more of the same

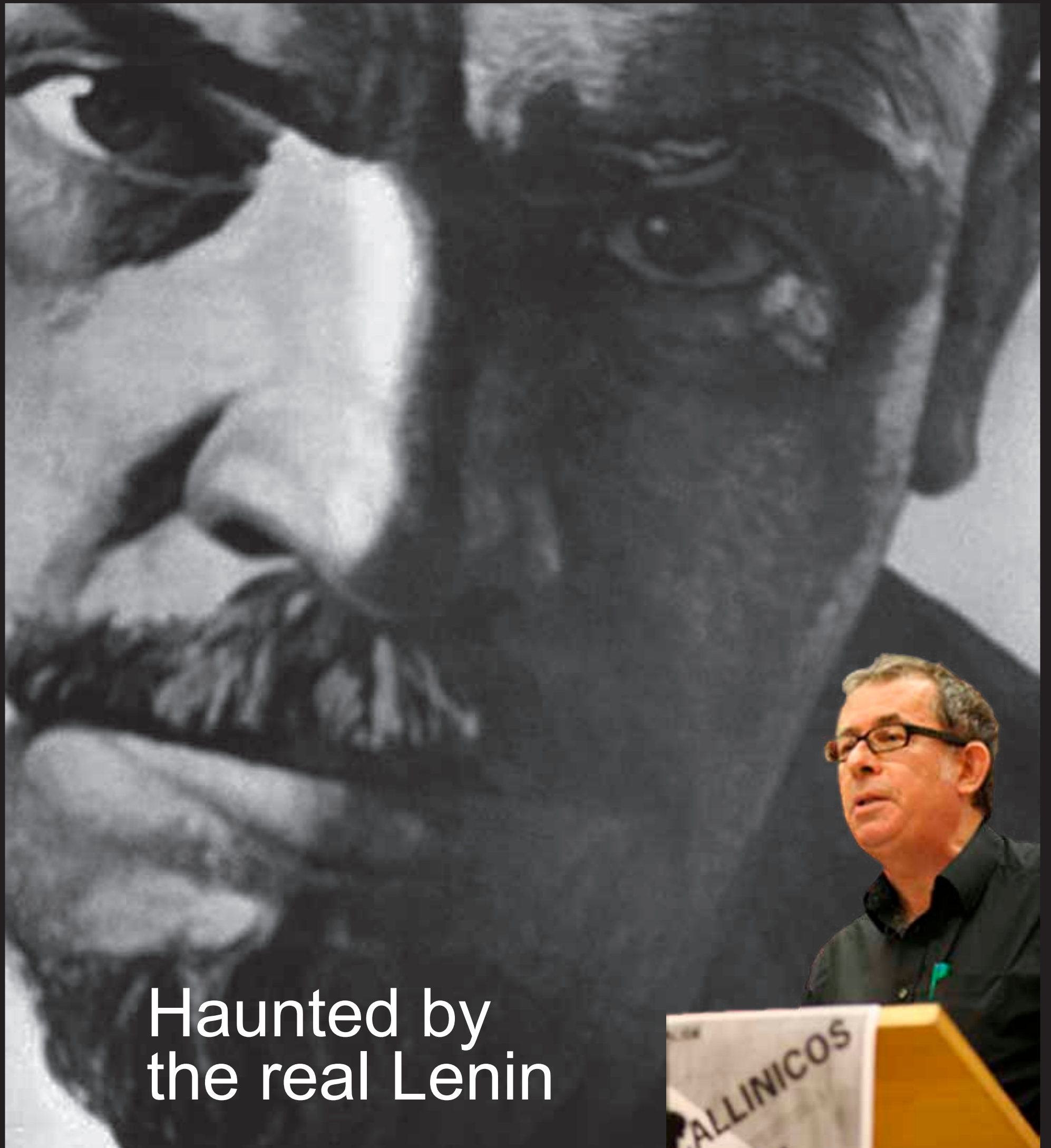
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the real Lenin

LETTERS



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

Alpha-male

Simon Wells wants us to believe there were no alpha-males during the period of primitive communism (Letters, February 28).

There are some important things about primitive communism which we ought to know. Firstly, its existence proves that the Marxist theory that communism is a result of advanced productive forces is erroneous. Secondly, there is no evidence, as far as I know, which proves that there were no alpha-males during the period of primitive communism. The need to hunt and defend the community from hostile tribes or animals would have made alpha-males a necessity. Finally, as a general rule most heterosexual women are not sexually attracted to non-alpha-males, who psychologically resemble females to them.

The problem is if we always focus on the negative side of the alpha-male we will miss the positive sides, such as leadership. The feminist assault on leadership, which the non-alpha-males like to join in with, needs to be exposed. The truth is that Wells is a feminist and wants to defend this nonsense in the face of historical truth and need.

Yes, the left has a problem with democracy, but it is not going to be resolved by resorting to feminism, as Wells wants, or by teaching men to become women, as the feminists want. When the crisis comes or, should I say, gets worse, it's not the women or feminist men who are going to save us from fascism, but the alpha-males on the left.

Tony Clark
London

Anti-politics

I very much enjoyed comrade Toby Abse's enlightening piece last week on the nature of the new electoral force in Italy and its media personality leader, Beppe Grillo ('Nothing left about Five Star', February 28) - an important corrective to what we saw in the *Socialist Worker* newspaper.

An article in this week's *Socialist Worker* describes Grillo, the 'brooks no democracy' comedian as a 'populist' (March 9) rather than calling the Five Star movement he heads "leftwing", as the paper did last week (March 2). However, Panos Garganas - the author of the commentary piece and editor of *Workers' Solidarity*, the Greek version of *Socialist Worker* - reminds us that "Surveys say over 54% of those who voted for Grillo define themselves as 'left of centre'."

As pollsters have noted in the UK, some of those whose votes have gone to the British National Party or UK Independence Party can be viewed as 'typical Labour voters', but this does not somehow indirectly confirm the hidden leftwing nature of those parties.

Garganas could, of course, have intended this quotation as a warning that without a clear alternative the most vile political freak-shows will fill the vacuum caused by the absence of a viable left, but he and *Socialist Worker* have no solutions. No lessons have been drawn from the experience of Rifondazione Comunista, which provided for a brief time a mirage attractive to the SWP, nor from the failure of Respect. Comrade Garganas concludes his piece by wishing that those who presently cast votes for Beppe can be drawn into yet another amorphous 'anti-capitalist' movement - which, one presumes, he and *Socialist Worker* believe wouldn't implode like Rifondazione or Respect.

"Building the revolutionary left in Greece, in Britain and across Europe can help make this happen," we are

told, meaning of course the building of the SWP and its international franchises. The problem here is that the 'revolutionary' SWP and the 'anti-capitalist' movements in general are basically the same, only the SWP is more heavily centralised organisationally. Like those movements, the SWP is 'anti-politics', although with a Marxist gloss and weekend speechifying about the socialist never-never.

In the present faction fight in the SWP, the central committee may complain about how unpolitical the moderates of In Defence of Our Party are in their factionalism, but this is bit rich, given the utter aimlessness of the SWP itself, which in the present seems to have no purpose, no strategy at all, beyond its regular activities and meetings. It is this lack of purpose, intrinsic to SWP-style politics, that is reflected in the circular, 'learn nothing' character of Garganas's article.

Weakness combined with aimlessness can easily lead to a kind of substitutionism, as we saw in *Socialist Worker*'s claim that the Five Star movement is "leftwing", on the grounds that it is anti-corruption and attracts some self-defined 'centre-left' voters. Everyone and anyone even marginally opposed to the present system, or even just a single aspect of it, can be welcomed as some kind of political alternative, which can be built on incrementally, perhaps even 'transitionally', step by step, until 'After Beppe, our turn'?

The finding of substitutes to take the place of open revolutionary Marxism will continue.

Jon Paige
email

Bacon

Chris Cutrone ducks, dives and weaves; but he does not answer the challenge in my previous letter: namely, to deal with Lukács's (and my) arguments as they actually are, not as he would like them to be (Letters, February 28).

Again, Lukács's *History and class consciousness* is recast as a "critique of the Second International", a subject on which it says almost nothing (five or so pages of polemic in the first chapter against Rudolf Hilferding and Max Adler, plus a few scattered and unenlightening footnotes); indeed a subject on which, as is clear from Lukács's later *Lenin: a study in the unity of his thought*, the author was pretty ignorant.

For pointing out the blindingly obvious - that Lukács is talking about, er, history and class-consciousness in bourgeois society as such - I am accused, on the one hand, of erecting a Chinese wall between bourgeois society and the Second International as a component of it, and, on the other (even more oddly), of artificially separating Lukács's account of history from his account of class-consciousness.

The first argument is simply facile - I do not and have never argued that the Second International existed in sublime separation from bourgeois society in general; only that Lukács's arguments are pitched at the latter, higher level of generality and *must be assessed as such*. They are much stronger on that ground, for what it is worth, than they are as a critique of Second International Marxism, which Lukács treats only in caricature.

The second argument, again, misses the point - of course history and class-consciousness are inextricably linked in Lukács's view; I argue only that his view of this relationship (the 'self-consciousness of historical reality' line) is ultimately idealist, and thus contrary to the core premises of what is properly called orthodox Marxism; indeed, contrary to Lukács's description of the latter as a "scientific conviction".

Instead, we face the oldest cliché

in the Hegelian Marxist book: "Hegelian and thus Marxist dialectics is not extrinsic to its object, but rather critically reflexive of it: how to understand history from within the process of historical development?" This, I am afraid, is a problem which tortures Hegelian Marxists exclusively. You do not hear many theoretical physicists tormenting themselves with the problem of understanding quarks, Higgs fields and the rest, while being composed and constituted by them. There is no search for the elusive 'Archimedean point'. They do the maths, do the experiments and get on with the rather unromantic business of incrementally improving our knowledge of the natural world.

Does this mean "the dialectic [is] ruled out of court?" No - because a scientific understanding of history requires understanding it as process, as the interaction of contradictory elements that are as distinct as they are inseparable. Dialectical thought, in one form or another, is rendered indispensable simply by the demands placed upon historical materialism by the nature of its object - just as the complex mathematical systems that form the core of theoretical physics are made necessary in that domain.

The proper and scientifically justified use of abstraction and analysis of contradictions is the difference between, say, viewing the present economic crisis as an incomprehensible calamity caused by a little dodgy mortgage trading, and viewing it as the outcome of determinate economic and political processes. (It is often joked that such is the predictive power of Marxism that we have foreseen 10 out of the last five crises - but that is still a better hit-rate than the big fat zero predicted by bourgeois economics.)

By conceiving dialectics in a strictly Hegelian fashion, however, Lukács commits himself to a far stronger claim for its utility than can be justified by reference to mundane reality (hence his hostility to 'facts' and experimentation, which is "contemplation at its purest"), which is that - in the form of Marxism, the imputed class-consciousness of the proletariat - it is the self-understanding of history. As I argued in my essay, this leads him necessarily to idealism, because nature must either be cleaved from or folded into history.

Even worse, history for Lukács then equally has its 'owl of Minerva', despite his criticism of this motif in Hegel. History may not have actually been completed, but we are told in no uncertain terms what that end will be. Are there "no self-contradictions and no need for self-overcoming transformations in the history of Marxism?" Cutrone asks. Of course there are - strip out the jargon and this is nothing more exotic than the scientific method - but in Hegelianism *as a method*, and thereby Marxism as it is conceived by Lukács, there *cannot be*, because the Hegelian method is an exercise in circular self-justification.

So much for Lukács. What words are put in *my* mouth this time? Apparently things are going from bad to worse - from having been some kind of "Lacanian-Heideggerian", I have now become "avowedly pre-Socratic!" It is as much a surprise to me as to anyone else, but then we seem to be faced with a sort of 'six degrees of Kevin Bacon' school of ideology critique here - viz, I quote Althusser, therefore I endorse Althusser's work in total, therefore I endorse his late enthusiasm for Epicurus and Heidegger *and simultaneously* his early enthusiasm for Lacan (a feat he never managed himself), therefore I am a pre-Socratic Lacanian-Heideggerian.

What a peculiar diagnosis indeed! After all, Lacan *was a Hegelian* - his work is full of the dialectics of this and that, and his principal 'innovation' in

psychoanalysis was to bring heterodox Hegelianism, via Alexandre Kojève, to the table (along, later, with Levi-Strauss's structural anthropology). The 'Heideggerian' component of post-structuralism comes later, principally through Derrida, a lapsed Sartrean.

Even worse is the small matter that Hegel himself openly advocated versions of pre-Socratic philosophy. The transition from being to becoming - which, according to one Georg Lukács, "contains the whole of [Hegel's] philosophy" - is in fact more or less directly lifted from an aphorism of the pre-Socratic Heraclitus.

For clarity's sake, my interest in Althusser is in his militant defence of that 'vulgar' thesis, that ideology and science are epistemologically distinct and irreconcilably opposed; he defends it reasonably well in some places and terribly in others, and makes a series of interesting and provocative points along the way. I *do not* buy the 'materialism of the encounter', which Cutrone is so keen to pin me to; I *do not* buy 'Freud and Lacan', although his clandestine *critiques* of Lacan are interesting. As for Heidegger, the whole *point* of his philosophy is the exact reverse of the militant defence of the sovereignty of science - a straightforward irrationalist onslaught. I should not have to refute this 'charge'.

James Turley
London

Inspiration

At 4.25pm local time on March 5 Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez died.

Earlier in the day, a joint meeting of the government with the military high command and the country's 20 governors belonging to Chávez's Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela had decided to take a series of measures against the campaign of destabilisation and sabotage carried out by the oligarchy and imperialism. There were specific announcements of measures against the sabotage of the electricity grid and the sabotage of the economy.

It was also announced that two officials of the US embassy in Venezuela, the air attaché and his aide, had been expelled from the country for contacting Venezuelan active-duty military personnel with the aim of organising a conspiracy against the democratically elected government.

Although the government had already reported a deterioration in Chávez's health, with a new and severe respiratory infection, and Chávez had been battling cancer for the last two years, when his death was announced, it came as a shock. There are many reports of people breaking into tears in the streets or becoming silent. As soon as the death of the president was known, people started to gather in the centre of cities and towns across the country.

Thousands came to Bolivar Square in Caracas, from where they marched to the Miraflores presidential palace. They shouted slogans of defiance: "The people united will never be defeated", "They shall not be back" and "The struggle continues".

The Hands off Venezuela campaign was set up 10 years ago with the aim of defending the Bolivarian revolution led by president Hugo Chávez. In the last decade and even further back, Chávez and the revolutionary people of Venezuela have been an inspiration to all those of us struggling against imperialism, capitalism and for a better, more human world - socialism.

At this moment we would like to send our heartfelt condolences to the Bolivarian people and authorities. We make an appeal to the workers, youth and progressive people of the world to redouble our commitment to defend the Venezuelan revolution from foreign imperialist intervention and also from

its own internal enemies. As Chávez once said, the best way to defend the Bolivarian revolution is also to spread it to our own countries.

Long live the Bolivarian revolution!
Hands Off Venezuela! No volverán!
Hands Off Venezuela
London

Dear respected

The one socialist country standing up for itself and opposing imperialism is the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Its recent nuclear test shook US and world imperialism rigid. However the DPRK does not get the solidarity it deserves from the British left (including the *Weekly Worker*). Recently the *Morning Star* has refused to publish letters in support of the DPRK's nuclear test and in support of its stance against the US-inspired United Nations security council sanctions.

The nuclear test of the DPRK was a just and correct self-defensive measure taken by the DPRK government to defend its independence and sovereignty in the face of extreme measures taken by the US imperialists and their lackeys to deny the independent right of the DPRK to pursue space exploration. US and world imperialism conspire all the time to stifle the socialist system of *juche* established in the DPRK and restore the capitalist system in order to make the Korean people the slaves of the multinational corporations and banks.

It is a great thing that the DPRK has defied the threats and intimidation by the US imperialists and their marionette, the UN security council, as well as the pressure of those big powers that cooperate and compromise with US imperialism. By carrying out the test, the DPRK has shown that it is the most independent country on the face of the planet and that it is able to do and say as it wants. It is able to say what it likes and likes what it says! Other countries in the world cannot do this, but live in meek submission to US imperialism and the new world order of globalism. The nuclear test of the DPRK is a powerful and practical demonstration of the *juche* idea in action.

The US imperialists have no face to criticise the DPRK for its nuclear test when they have carried out over 1,000 nuclear tests, have used nuclear weapons twice and keep 1,000 nuclear weapons in South Korea. Others who are clamouring about the DPRK's test also have nuclear weapons and are therefore maintaining double standards.

The DPRK has become a socialist nuclear power of *juche* and will march powerfully along the road of *songun* to final victory under the leadership of dear respected marshal Kim Jong Un. The DPRK's nuclear test will inspire the oppressed peoples of the world in their struggle against US imperialism and gives a powerful impetus to the anti-imperialist independence cause.

If the US really wants peace it should revoke all security council resolutions against the DPRK and pull its troops out of Korea at once. However, instead of doing this, the US is going ahead with aggressive military exercises against the DPRK, namely 'Foal Eagle' and 'Key Resolve', which last for two months and involve up 10,000 US troops and even troops from the UK (under the guise of being "observers of the UN command"). The DPRK faces another round of sanctions from the US imperialists and their sycophants.

It is vital for British communists and progressives to show their solidarity with the DPRK. The DPRK's victory in the all-out struggle against US imperialism will be a great victory for the international communist movement and anti-imperialist forces.

Derмот Hudson
London

IRAN

Need our support

The Iranian new year is only two weeks away, but most Iranians do not feel like celebrating. As hundreds of workers protested in Tehran on March 4 against non-payment of wages, one placard summarised the mood: “99% are facing death”.

Non-payment of wages is only part of the problem: food prices have rocketed and even rents are beyond the means of the overwhelming majority. This week, Vahed busworkers took to the streets demanding better wages - and similar protests have taken place throughout the country. In Arak, angry workers set fire to tyres outside the factory gates. Last week farmworkers clashed with security forces near Isfahan in southern Iran, protesting against government proposals to divert water from the city. Peasants blew up the main pump taking water from Isfahan province to Yazd, before closing the main highway road near Khorasgan and setting fire to a number of buses.

Over the last few months, Iranian workers have stepped up their fight for a considerable increase in the minimum wage in view of the abolition of subsidies and spiralling prices - month-to-month inflation is running at around 70%. There is little reliable information about government proposals for next year's minimum wage. However, it is bound to be well below the government's own poverty line. It has been so for the last few years. For example, in 2010 the government announced that the new rate would be the equivalent of \$303 per month, but the same government had set the poverty line at \$800.

Every worker knows that the minimum wage does not even pay for accommodation for a family of four people. However, they also know that Iranian capitalists, supported by an Islamist state, use non-payment of wages as a systematic method of increasing profits. During the current Iranian year, workers have faced delays of six months or more before even the official minimum wage has been paid. Many have two or three jobs and work 12 hours per day, seven days a week, just to be able to pay for basic necessities.

The cost of medical services, including laboratory tests, has risen by almost 400%. Most medical equipment falls into the category of goods that cannot be exported to Iran due to sanction restrictions. But for the rich that is no problem. They are able to travel abroad for medical treatment, while the poor die from common ailments. Many sell their prescription, their place in the queue or even their organs in order to survive.

Thanks to sanctions, then, the economy is in serious trouble. Iran's oil exports are at an all-time low, having fallen to one million barrels a day, and oil income is down 46% compared to last year. Foreign currency reserves are seriously depleted. Corruption has also contributed to the economic crisis. In 2012, the Islamic Republic was one of the most corrupt countries in the world, according to Transparency International. The clerics and capitalists are busy sending money abroad and the currency is in freefall. Attempts to limit foreign exchange transactions have not managed to save the falling rial.

Given this desperate situation, it is not surprising that workers throughout Iran have taken to the streets to vent their frustration. Nor is it surprising that the 'reformist'-led green movement is trying to find allies amongst workers. A March 1 press conference in London featured Mansour Ossanolou, former leader of the Vahed busworkers' union,



Venting anger

as spokesperson on labour issues, with responsibility for organising “workers’ support” for the green movement.

The appointment came three weeks after the union had announced not only Ossanolou's dismissal from the presidency, but his expulsion from the union. Its short statement declared the union's opposition to his self-imposed exile, confirmed that the former president no longer held any union position and made clear that he did not speak on behalf of Vahed busworkers. The slogan was clear: ‘No man is above the union.’

However, this defection to the reformists, at a time of heightened workers' struggles, has lessons for the Iranian left and beyond:

1. Severe economic hardship, whether caused by economic crisis, sanctions or government mismanagement, do not necessarily lead to a turn to working class politics. In the absence of a clear political direction, at a time when the organised working class is weak, protestors express despair, but most see no end to the cycle of unemployment, poverty and devastation. Reformists and class-collaborators may gain from such a situation, but so may fascists and rightwing forces, who can just as easily recruit from the ranks of the working class.

2. We should combat the cult of personality and the role of the bureaucracy in our organisations. Ossanolou might have had a heroic prison record, but he always was an individualist, a maverick. But the left, both in Iran and internationally, went along with the elevation of his status, eager to please the Vahed union.

3. Workers' struggles must be political, especially under a religious dictatorship, and, although it was understandable that sections of the busworkers' union wanted to concentrate on economic demands, in order to reduce the possibility of arrests and other forms of repression, the left should have been more critical of Ossanolou's insistence on this apolitical syndicalism. As others have now pointed out, it is ironic that this ‘non-political’ worker activist is now

associated with the green movement.

As for that movement, or what remains of it, the attention paid to Ossanolou speaks volumes. After years of claiming that the greens represented the interests of the middle classes, that the vote they received was “more significant” than Ahmadinejad's because it was “cast by educated members of society”, they now have to admit, in this indirect way, that the force with the power to defeat the dictatorship, the force that has shown stamina in fighting the regime, year in year out, is the Iranian working class.

However, the opportunism of the green movement in trying to gain support amongst workers is likely to fail, with or without Ossanolou. Iranian workers are well aware that ‘economic readjustment’, massive privatisation, short-contract work, non-payment of wages, etc were as much part and parcel of ‘reformist’ economic policies under Khatami as they were Ahmadinejad.

As workers' protests take on a new dimension inside Iran, we are duty-bound to promote and support them. A number of labour activists are currently languishing in Iranian prisons, in far worse conditions than ‘reformist’ prisoners. We need to show solidarity with these workers - there is a real urgency in the need to act and form international support groups. What is required is the active participation of British rank-and-file trade unionists in support of Iran's working class. In this respect this call by Labour MP John McDonnell, a leading figure in the leftwing Labour Representation Committee, is very timely:

“The Labour Representation Committee is an affiliate of Hands Off the People of Iran and I call on others to support its important work. With the war drums beating again in the Middle East and the imperialist pressure on the working people of Iran growing daily, principled international solidarity is vital. Hopi is at the forefront of that activity and deserves the backing of activists and organisations in our movement” ●

Yassamine Mather

yassamine.mather@weeklyworker.org.uk

Ten wasted years? The anti-war movement since Iraq

CPGB public meeting, Calthorpe Arms,
252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1

Saturday March 9, 12 noon to 5pm

Speakers: **Moshé Machover**
(founder member of Israeli socialist organisation Matzpen);
Mike Macnair (CPGB)

Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk

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 March 10, 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 14: ‘Division of labour and manufacture’. Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Introduction to anthropology: an intensive study of mythology
Tuesday March 12, 6.15pm: ‘Against nature? Homosexuality and evolution’. Speaker: Volker Sommer.
St Martin's Community Centre, 43 Carol Street, London NW1 (Camden Town tube). £10 waged, £5 low waged, £3 unwaged. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: www.radicalanthropologygroup.org.

International Women's Day

Thursday March 7, 6pm: Trade union event, Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1. Support the struggle for Arab women's rights. Free, but registration essential: pbrown@tuc.org.uk. Organised by Trades Union Congress: www.tuc.org.uk.

Swansea against the NF

Saturday March 9, 11am: Protest against the National Front. Assemble Castle Square, Swansea. Organised by Unite Against Fascism: www.uaf.org.uk.

Stop the benefit cuts

Saturday March 9, 11am to 5pm: Conference, University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1. Organised by Campaign for Benefit Justice: www.benefitjustice.wordpress.com.

End the arms trade

Saturday March 9, 10.30am to 4.30pm: National gathering, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Organised by Campaign Against the Arms Trade: www.caat.org.uk.

Unite the Resistance

Glasgow Saturday March 9, 11.30am to 5pm: Conference, Renfields St Stephens, 260 Bath Street, Glasgow G2.

Manchester Sunday March 10, 10.30am to 5pm: Conference. Mechanics Institute, Princess Street, Manchester M1. Organised by Unite the Resistance: www.uniteresist.org.

No to the blacklist

Saturday March 9, 10.30am: Protest march, Meadowside, Dundee. Organised by Blacklist Support Group: www.facebook.com/groups/blacklistSG.

Can't pay, won't pay

Saturday March 9, 1pm: Mobilisation against pay-day loan companies. Peckham library, 122 Peckham Hill, London SE15. Organised by Can't Pay, Won't Pay: www.facebook.com/events/569400523088606.

Remember lost comrades

Saturday March 9, 10am: Miners commemoration march. Assemble Top Club, 6 Bungalow Road, Edlington, Doncaster. Speakers: Caroline Flint MP, shadow energy minister; David Douglass former NUM executive member. Followed by buffet lunch and entertainment. Organised by Yorkshire Main Commemorative Trust: <http://yorkshiremaincommemorativeustrust.webs.com>.

Socialist films

Sunday March 10, 11am: Screening, Renoir Cinema, Brunswick Square, London WC1. Frank Poulson's *Blood in the mobile* (Denmark, 82 minutes); and TG Ajay's *Before dark* (India, 33 minutes). Organised by London Socialist Film Co-op: www.socialistfilm.blogspot.com.

Gove must go

Wednesday March 13, 5pm: Demonstration, department for education, Sanctuary Buildings, 20 Great Smith Street, London SW1. Organised by London region NUT: www.teachers.org.uk/node/8189.

Visteon anniversary

Wednesday March 13, 10.45am start: Fourth anniversary demonstration and meeting, Unite House, 28 Theobald's Road, London WC1 for march to Westminster. Organised by Visteon Action Pensioners Group: www.visteonpensionactiongroup.co.uk.

Performing queer

Wednesday March 13, 7pm: Talk, Bishopsgate Institute, 230 Bishopsgate, London EC2. Organised by Bishopsgate Institute: 020 7392 9228.

No to austerity

Wednesday March 13, 6pm: Pre-budget rally, Emmanuel Centre, 9-23 Marsham Street, London SW1. Organised by Trades Union Congress: www.tuc.org.uk.

Why Labour should scrap Trident

Thursday March 14, 7.30pm: Discussion, Lord Nelson pub, Trafalgar Street, Brighton. Speaker: Joy Hurcombe (Labour CND). Organised by Brighton and Hove Labour Representation Committee: www.sussexlrcc.com/events.

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.

THE LEFT

Let's get this party started

The current Tusc model has failed, argues Nick Wrack

The 62 votes obtained by the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition in the March 1 Eastleigh by-election should cause everyone to reflect. It is not just a matter for supporters of Tusc. It raises important questions for all who want an alternative to the anti-working class policies supported by all the established political parties.

I want to make it clear that what follows is not a criticism of the hard work that is put into Tusc election campaigns. I know that supporters in Eastleigh will have worked extremely hard over the two or three weeks of the campaign. Daz Procter, the Tusc candidate, is an elected member of the RMT national executive and was an excellent candidate. I am not attacking any one person or group. I am criticising the strategy that underpins Tusc's electoral interventions.

In this article I argue that the current model is inadequate and ultimately counterproductive. All the hard work put in during elections produces smaller and smaller returns. Such a low vote leads to embarrassment and demoralisation, and reinforces the idea that the left is incapable of mounting any sort of serious electoral challenge. Getting such a low vote makes it harder to win the argument with those not yet convinced that something can be done.

That is not to say that a new left party would be immune from such poor results. That is part of the risk of standing in elections. But if there is a perspective for growth, for improvement and for building the project, such setbacks can be absorbed, the lessons learned and things can move on. When the low vote is set against a reluctance or refusal by some parts of Tusc to allow new forces to join and is combined with the absence of an individual membership structure, it can only convey the impression that, as presently constructed, Tusc is going nowhere.

It is true that Eastleigh was not favourable terrain. It is a Liberal Democrat stronghold - the Lib Dems held onto the seat notwithstanding the scandal surrounding Chris Huhne's departure and the party's involvement in the coalition government. But the model currently adopted by Tusc makes it almost impossible to obtain the best possible result, even in a more favourable constituency.

No organisation, whether it is Tusc or a new socialist party, can turn up two or three weeks before an election and expect to obtain anything but a derisory result. It will certainly not win the sort of vote that could be obtained if the whole of the preceding period has seen that organisation campaigning, agitating and arguing for its programme, involving itself in all aspects of working class struggle.

I have no doubt that members of the Socialist Party and the Socialist Workers Party are involved in all sorts of working class struggles. But they participate in those as SP or SWP activists with SP or SWP literature, promoting and recruiting to their own parties. This is indisputable. Their members justify this with various arguments that boil down essentially to the simple proposition that only their party has the answers.

There are consequences arising from that approach for any broader coalition or new party. It means that the work to build the bigger formation always takes second place. That is not to say that the SP or SWP do not put in time, effort and money into building Tusc. They do. But it is undermined

by the fact that once an election is finished they will turn their attention once again to their own party-building, and the Tusc profile will be relegated until the next election. You cannot build a successful electoral coalition or a new party on that basis.

Begin the process

There is little point in those of us who want a party formation bemoaning the attitude of the SP or SWP. Their political priorities are their prerogative. We should continue to work with them where possible, but we should not allow their agenda to set ours.

Building a new socialist party would in fact strengthen the whole of the left by bringing together all those who want a party that challenges Labour from the left, but do not feel inclined to join any on offer at present. No-one should underestimate the difficulties. Over the last 20 years a large scrapyard has been filled with the wreckage of previous failed attempts - the Socialist Labour Party, Socialist Alliance, Scottish Socialist Party, Respect.

These projects have failed for a combination of reasons. First is the massive pull of Labour, which persuades lots of working class activists that there is no alternative. Labour must be supported to keep out the Tories. This is a political argument that must be confronted. Voting for the 'lesser evil' may keep out the Tories, but will not deliver any prospect of change that benefits Labour voters. Second is the background of 30 years of defeat for the working class in Britain and abroad and the retreat of socialist ideas.

But the more immediate cause of the failure has been down more to the sectarianism of the various socialist groups, who all think they know the path through the woods: a refusal to work together for the greater cause of building a viable party; a lack of democracy and the unaccountability of prominent leaders; a failure to understand that there is no easy way to build such a new party. It will take patience and hard work. All involved will have to have a sense of proportion and perspective. No party can be built without disagreement, argument and dissent. It will take time to establish its own inner life.

Notwithstanding all the obstacles, the objective need for a new party is there for everyone to see. Everything that working class people came to

expect in the half-century following the end of World War II is being smashed to pieces - living standards, pensions, access to affordable homes, education and health. In short, the reforms of the welfare state are being wrenched away. And all the main political parties, including Labour, support this. Alongside this savagery comes attack after attack on the most vulnerable in society - the young, the old, the poor, the sick, the disabled, those out of work, those in overcrowded accommodation. All of this is prosecuted with the argument that there is no alternative; that the market dictates and that capitalism is the only possible way of organising the economy.

Socialists argue that there is an alternative. It is to eradicate capitalism and to construct a new society based on need, not profit. Here and now, resistance to austerity is vital, but it is only half of the answer. We need a political response to the economic and social attacks on us. The recent call for a People's Assembly is to be welcomed, but there is a real danger that it simply becomes a way to drive the anti-austerity vote towards Labour at the next election.

What we need is a political party that not only seeks to resist the attacks now, but also argues for a change in the way that society is organised. Such a political party would have to seek support for its ideas within society. This means standing in elections must be a part of its work. Undoubtedly, the votes it received initially would be generally low. But, as its profile increased and its arguments and policies became better understood, it could begin to make headway. Particularly if Labour forms the government in 2015 and implements austerity policies, such a new party could make significant strides forward. But it is important to try to lay the basis for that now. That is why the self-imposed limitations to growth set by Tusc are disappointing.

There are many socialists active in the Labour Party who argue that it can be won to the ideas of socialism. Whilst I do not agree with them, I wish them well. Socialists inside and outside Labour should collaborate whenever possible on practical issues and to argue for socialist ideas.

The Labour Party has never been a socialist party, but rather an uncomfortable marriage of liberalism and socialism. Ultimately liberalism triumphed completely. But it retains

its mass working class support and its trade union links. It is a capitalist party with a working class base and that base has to be won to the ideas of socialism. That is no easy task. And it certainly will not be accomplished in a short time. But the process has to begin.

Step forward

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition was an attempt to address some of these issues. It was formed as an electoral coalition to present an alternative at the ballot box. This, in my opinion, was a step in the right direction. The involvement of the RMT transport union in the coalition gave it a greater authority within the trade union movement and beyond.

It should be remembered that it has obtained some good results for a new formation - in 2012 it received 4,792 votes (4.7%) in the Liverpool mayoral election, over 10% in 14 local council elections and more than 5% in a further 39. These have been obtained with few resources and little name recognition, and indicate the possibilities of building an alternative on a much bigger scale.

However, the current model is preventing it from matching up to the possibilities. There is a problem in the fact that Tusc is a coalition created solely for the purpose of standing in elections. This means that it does not participate in its own name in any of the many working class struggles that are taking place in every town and city. It does not participate in the strikes and demonstrations against pension reforms or austerity generally, nor in the campaigns against the bedroom tax, against attacks on the disabled and a hundred other issues.

If Tusc were seen as a stepping stone or a transition towards a new party, then it would have some purpose. But it is increasingly obvious that this is not the case. There have been no developments in that direction. Individual supporters cannot join it. Supporting organisations cannot join it. This leaves the coalition comprising the RMT, the SWP, the SP and a small group of independent socialists organised in the Independent Socialist Network.

It means that the coalition can never significantly increase or expand. The Socialist Party has opposed the participation of Socialist Resistance on the national steering committee and suggested that it reapply when it has 1,000 members. There are no new partners on the horizon. Tusc is therefore condemned to remain at its present size. The consequence of this approach will be that it stagnates and ultimately goes the way of previous projects.

Tusc has no national apparatus and hence no national profile. Some comrades have complained about the lack of media coverage, but this is only to be expected. A small electoral organisation that does not even take itself seriously enough to appoint a press officer cannot really expect to be taken seriously by the media.

The only way that any new alternative organisation or party could force its way into the media is by developing a national profile. That would mean serious interventions in every national and local demonstration, strike, picket line, protest and meeting with leaflets, pamphlets and recruitment literature; a media strategy to promote spokespersons, putting out regular national and local press releases and a serious presence on social media. But primarily the

media will only pay attention when this organisation achieves something or does something of significance. They are not going to give us free publicity without good reason.

The current model is based on a misconceived project - certainly as seen by the Socialist Party, which calls for the trade unions to form a new mass workers' party. This is basically a replication of the formation of the Labour Party at the beginning of the 20th century. The concept is of a workers' party in which the SP constitutes the socialist wing. Where that leaves all the other socialists is anyone's guess.

The problem with this concept is, firstly, that we do not need a modern version of the old Labour Party. We need a socialist party. Secondly, the argument that we cannot move to any party formation until the trade union leaders so decide means that we will be waiting a very long time. No such step is going to be taken by any union this side of the 2015 general election and probably not for a long time afterwards. In the meantime, the strategy of sitting tight in Tusc and waiting for another union to break ranks with Labour is simply not good enough.

Bottom up

What we need is those socialists who see the necessity for a new socialist party to come together and to build it from the bottom up. This will be hard, but it is the only way. On the March 1 edition of the BBC's *Question time* film director Ken Loach argued that we need a new party of the left - a Ukip of the left, if you like. He has also argued this in a recent interview. We should rally to that call and help make it a reality.

Such a new party should commit itself to 'defend, extend and transform'. By that I mean that it should be with all struggles to defend past gains, such as the welfare state, the NHS, decent wages and safe working conditions. It should seek to extend those gains wherever possible. In the present economic conditions that would mean mobilising mass, militant action to obtain further concessions. But these campaigns should not be limited to economic issues alone. It should also take up the issues of democracy, civil liberties, war and peace, the media. Thirdly, it should explicitly proclaim that it seeks power in order to fundamentally transform society from the present capitalist system, that benefits only a tiny few, to one based on the democratic common ownership of the resources of society for the benefit of all. That is, it must be a socialist party.

This means the party must have an internationalist outlook and look to work with others, primarily across Europe, to bring about this change. There is no nationalist answer to the crisis we are experiencing.

This party must be completely democratic. There is no prospect of inspiring people to give their time, energy and money to an organisation that only exists at election time, which they cannot join and in which they have no democratic input on questions of policy and activity. It must have members who can democratically participate in the discussion on programme and practice. The members should elect the leadership, who should be accountable to the members.

All of this should be ABC and there is now an urgency to starting the process ●



Party people, not party poopers

SWP CONFERENCE

Divided they fall

The Socialist Workers Party leadership is attempting to divide the opposition. Taking the bait would be suicide, reckons **Paul Demarty**

The Socialist Workers Party's special conference looms ever closer. Though there are still a few aggregates to take place as I write, most of the delegate votes are in, and on any reasonable count victory is certain for the central committee on March 10 - unless god himself intervenes and strikes down 400 of their delegates with cholera (or, worse still, common sense).

The approach from the CC is uneven. In many districts, aggregates have been approached aggressively; those comrades in the In Defence of Our Party faction (IDOP) have faced a barrage of hysterical abuse. 'Dirty tricks', such as sabotaging the caucuses of the faction by anonymously cancelling room bookings (exemplifying the very high level of politics we have come to expect from the SWP leadership), have been in force. Meetings have been packed in order to prevent, where possible, any IDOP members from attending conference at all.

Elsewhere, however, a different tack has been tried. Alex Callinicos, the SWP's top 'red professor' and *de facto* leader, put on a scarcely believable conciliatory act at the West/North West London aggregate. "We are listening," he declared. There were "legitimate concerns" about the disputes commission's handling of the rape charge against 'comrade Delta', and its future shape. The comrade even mooted a "wider debate" on democratic centralism.

All of which is a marked change of tone from that which we have seen so far - which has consisted primarily of the leadership, its lackeys and deluded loyalists repeating the same nonsense over and over again, giving not an inch to their foes. Literally not an inch - because, no matter what IDOP comrades (and the more radical Democratic Renewal platform around Richard Seymour and China Miéville) said or wrote, the same mantra came back in reply, in spite of its increasing implausibility. It had three mutually incompatible premises: there is no SWP crisis; people do not care about the SWP crisis out there in 'the real world'; they only care about the SWP crisis in the 'real world' because of the 'disgraceful' behaviour of the oppositionists.

Carrot and cudgel

Looking at other aggregate reports, it seems most SWP opposition comrades, outside the sacred circle of west London, are still being clobbered over the head with this nonsense. The anecdotes do not make for pretty reading: one comrade reduced to tears after the meeting, others stared down sociopathically by Michael Bradley. Alex Callinicos may have played down his aggression simply because accusing Pat Stack - the nominated opposition speaker - of treachery would not have gone down well with the SWP general audience.

All the same, the proffering of measly concessions in one district may be significant. It will not make a difference to the result at conference; but the SWP leadership is not so short-termist as to look only a week into the future. It knows that it stands to lose a lot of people over this.

Making such tokenistic concessions, of course, can have only one serious purpose. The CC wants to split the opposition. While there are



When the attack begins, act as one

many in IDOP whom Callinicos and co would like to keep on board, there are a good few who they will be glad to see the back of for good - chief among them comrades Seymour and Miéville. The CC wishes to split the opposition along its natural fault-line, between the 'soft' IDOP majority and the hardcore DR platform. To the soft oppositionists, Callinicos offers the nakedly implausible idea that they will be generously "listened to" - but also the implication that there is a future for them under the *ancien régime*, that they will not be turned into 'non-people' and frozen out of SWP life as a result of their 'disloyalty'. A quite dishonest implication - but the most dangerous lies are not those you tell, but those that people tell themselves.

It is - by the granite-faced standards of the leadership's conduct so far - a bold gambit. It inevitably begs the question of the opposition's response. It is clear that the writing on the wall is perfectly legible to the IDOP comrades. Already, after the first round of aggregates, sessions were being added to their final pre-conference national meeting to discuss how to "continue to fight" after the fateful day itself - the unspoken assumption being that March 10 will deliver the staged punishment beating for which it has been designed.¹

So what is plan B, comrades? Unfortunately, it seems so far that there isn't much of one at all. "Over the coming week, leading up to the special conference, we will be circulating a few articles written by faction members about how they see life in the party in coming months and how they believe the party can overcome its current difficulties," promises one circular; but all that has emerged since is an unsigned piece under the heading 'Where next?' - which does not stoop to actually proposing any particular line of march. Rather, it serves as a wry trailer for their discussion on the subject on Saturday.

In lieu of anything else, we are left with that vague commitment to "continue to fight", which falls

hopelessly between two stools. On the one hand, it would easily count as evidence of 'permanent factionalism' - a worse crime in the Alex Callinicos schema than mass murder; he and his cronies are certainly most unlikely to let a fight "continue" under their noses.

On the other hand, that is no reason not to fight - but the general approach of the IDOP majority so far has been premised on winning over 'wavering elements' by being terribly reasonable. We may assume that this is how they hope to "continue to fight", in which case it is as hopelessly inadequate a strategy for after this Sunday as it has been so far. The leadership has a whole apparatus of full-timers, which has long substituted for the initiative of rank-and-file comrades almost completely. The well-worn channels of the SWP's chain of command will inevitably be the best mobilisers of passive members, many of whom have been corralled into blocking opposition members from going to conference.

So the comrades lack plausible cover going forward, and equally lack - thus far - the kind of militant strategy that could sustain a fight in the face of the bureaucratic clampdown that awaits all those not satisfied by what DR comrades rather drily call "the conference of a special type". Yet they have at least one more chance to rectify this - they can change tack, radically, at their pre-conference meeting.

Filing in

One pictures the comrades filing into the meeting room - some dejected, despairing at the autocannibalistic course taken by the organisation to which they have dedicated countless hours; others frustrated; still others dreading the humiliation to come the next day; and a final group, which one hopes against hope will be the largest, who still have some fight in them. It is the latter who will have to galvanise the troops, and they will need a serious plan to do so.

To keep the fight alive, IDOP will

have to play to its advantages. Its main advantage, to put it bluntly, has always been numbers - and increasingly so, as the faction membership topped 500. In this context, as in so many others, solidarity is crucial - and it is obvious who is in direst need of it just now. Richard Seymour and China Miéville are transparently being set up for expulsion, and the hope will be, no doubt, that the other hard-core troublemakers will follow them away.

Taking Callinicos's bait, then, is suicide - at least if the IDOP majority are sincere in their desire to "continue to fight". It would mean - at best - acceding to a six-month ceasefire, during which time any remaining damage to the *apparat* would be repaired, and any remaining momentum for the opposition steamrollered by a renewed bout of characteristic SWP hyper-activism. This stitched-up, sick parody of a conference will then truly be where it all ended - the last moment of the last fight for the soul of the SWP.

Instead, the comrades should up the stakes - and close ranks around those threatened with expulsions. If Seymour is expelled, everyone from Pat Stack to Rob Owen should say, with one voice, then we all walk. If the SWP leadership is genuinely concerned about losing 500 members overnight (perhaps, even in their recent paranoid delirium, Callinicos and Charlie Kimber genuinely are), then they will blink. Frankly, they will be out of ideas.

If they do not, then they will quite simply kill their organisation - but in a sense they have already dealt the mortal blow, by determining that the grip of Alex Callinicos and his closest allies to the reins of power in the SWP is more important than the political authority of their organisation in wider society. The whole world knows, now, how they run things; how intolerant they are of the slightest challenge to their power; how pitifully small the SWP Potemkin village is compared to its ludicrous claims of 7,000-plus members. The two possible responses

to this situation are a visible and genuine attempt to radically overhaul the organisation (the task of the opposition); or a further retreat into the self-delusion of the Potemkin village.

This latter is the truth of the Callinicos-Kimber promise that 'great things can be done, if we only get over these internal squabbles'. The SWP crisis is a distraction from building up the resistance to the Tories and the far right, and so on, and so forth - so we had better get back to building Unite the Resistance and Unite Against Fascism!

This will be a tempting lure to many in the SWP opposition. The truth, however, is the reverse: Unite the Resistance is a *distraction from fighting the Tories*. It is not the next Stop the War Coalition, or the next rank-and-file experiment in the great 'IS tradition'. It is a stillborn front, in a long line of stillborn fronts, which exists more or less exclusively to boost the SWP's self-image. UAF is not stillborn, but its politics will never stamp out 'the Nazis', who will spring back precisely as long as capitalism survives. The fervent activity dedicated to this work - along with countless other minor SWP campaigns - is in reality *inward-looking* but just not smart enough to realise it. These campaigns certainly make zero difference in that much-vaunted 'real world' I hear so much about.

Filing out

Alternatively, if the SWP really does take a good long look at itself, and embarks on a serious round of self-criticism, the human resources are there - the talent and the energy - to *really* make a difference. It can only do so if the parish council of this Potemkin village is purged.

The raw material for making this happen are the same comrades we met earlier, filing into a meeting room. Let us now imagine them filing out - of the conference itself, in lieu of a serious commitment to seriously fight the sham results it has produced. Where do they go now? Some will stay in the SWP, in spite of everything, and become cynical. Some will leave, and be attracted to the many varieties of watered-down broad-leftism on offer, or anarchism, or some other ideology which represents more abrupt a dead end than the IS tradition itself.

A decent slice, regrettably, will be disillusioned to the point of overt and irreconcilable hostility to the left - and, where they do not take this attitude out of the movement altogether, will reappear as witch-hunters in the unions and the Labour Party (there are simply too many examples of this 'switcheroo', hailing from the SWP and elsewhere, for its likelihood to be understated here).

The leadership looks certain to win the day on Sunday - but it won the day at the national committee meeting a month ago, and we all know how that turned out. There is still time to fight - to save the SWP, and its members, from the different political oblivions that threaten them. Let us hope the opposition finds enough strength to do so.

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Notes

1. www.cpgb.org.uk/home/weekly-worker/online-only/caucus-documents-and-idoop-update.

SWP

Alex Callinicos: haun

Ben Lewis observed few signs of ‘revolt’ at last weekend’s SWSS day school

The March 3 ‘Revolt’ day school in London, organised by the Socialist Worker Student Society, was conceived of as a ‘mini-Marxism’ to sign up new activists sympathetic to SWSS and to provide new comrades with an understanding of the ‘International Socialist/Socialist Workers Party tradition’. Following on from another event in Manchester a week earlier, the school was an opportunity for leading SWP comrades to provide the usual openings on introductory questions (‘Why the working class?’; ‘What is exploitation?’) as well as on contemporary political themes. However, this event was not, and was never going to be, ‘business as usual’.

After all, as this paper has reported, SWP students have been at the sharp end of the ongoing factional battles. Many of the more spurious and underhand central committee tactics in the recent period have been directly aimed at SWSS groups, at least a dozen of which have spoken out against the ham-fisted handling of the rape allegations against ‘comrade Delta’.

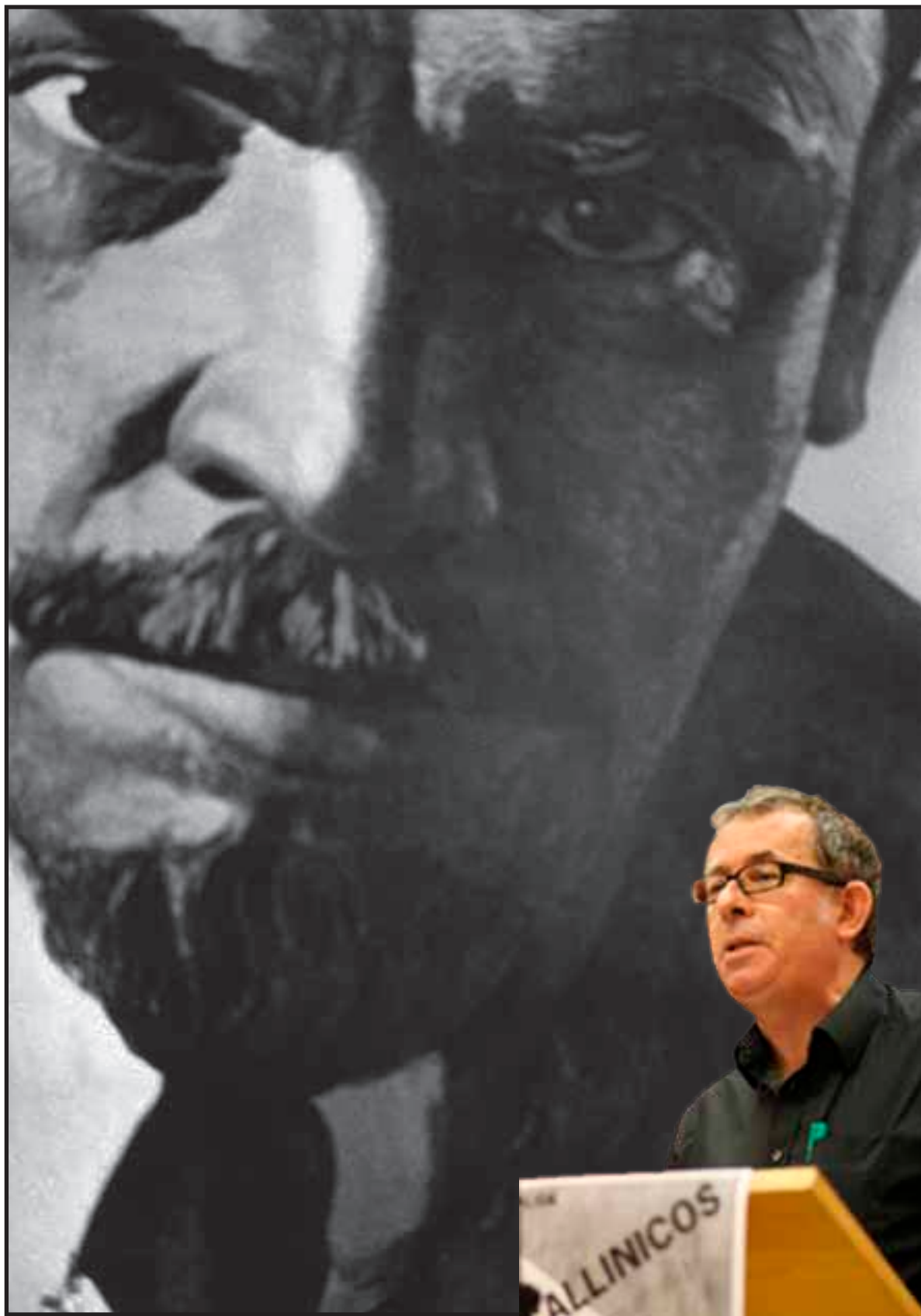
At the 11th hour, for example, leading SWSS member and dissident Jamie Woodcock was summarily removed as a candidate for the National Union of Students national executive committee elections. For similar reasons, Shereen Prasad’s nomination to the NUS NEC was also withdrawn late in the day. At an important time of local student union elections and campaigning, there has been talk of the national student office effectively breaking off all contact with local groups. Complaints have also been made about the organisation of the ‘Revolt’ school itself, with off-message student speakers suddenly replaced by CC loyalists.

For me, the ‘Revolt’ event itself underlined how the SWP really will take a big hit if it loses the core of its student cadre. ‘Revolt’ obviously suffered from the breakdown in relations between SWSS and the parent body on a number of levels. Firstly, the event was small, with no more than 90 attending. Considering that both SWSS and the SWP place greater emphasis on the numbers they mobilise than on political clarity and education, this is not insignificant. It is hard to tell whether the low turnout was due to disgruntled SWSS members boycotting the event, a breakdown in the student office or simply the general fate of SWSS in the present period.

Secondly, it was badly organised. SWSS events often see orchestrated interventions from the floor - usually to hammer home the ‘line’ or to draw out the speaker on a particular issue that the leadership wants to emphasise. As it was, though, the opening speeches were often met with a rather embarrassing silence. This ensured that the discussion from the floor was dominated by me (apart from two International Bolshevik Tendency members, I was the sole non-SWSS member/supporter present, as far as I could tell) and this or that full-timer/longstanding SWP member that also happened to be in the audience.

Greece and Syriza

The first session was on ‘Crisis, perspectives and revolution’, with three panel speakers. While there was much talk about the crisis, there was unfortunately very little about perspectives or revolution. Interestingly, the student speaker was Shereen Prasad, the comrade whose NUS candidature had been blocked.



Alex Callinicos: dreadful history

She gave a well-delivered, if slightly one-sided and optimistic talk about the prospects for resistance, stressing that it was now incumbent upon SWSS to build student-worker networks, so that “when the attacks come you can respond”. Correctly, she also stressed the need to fight in the NUS. Her comment that “this is why we have stood strong candidates for NUS elections” drew some ironic laughter from a group of student comrades in the audience, but unfortunately none of them got up to argue against the manoeuvres to which SWSS had recently been subjected. A shame.

For a comrade of such obvious talent, CC member Esme Choonara really did talk a lot of nonsense. From the ‘Millbank moment’ through to the November 30 2011 strikes, etc, everything was going forward and it was all so simple. There was no real assessment of revolutionary perspectives - simply an attempt to pep up new recruits. Nor was there any attempt to deal with the current

weakness of our movement generally - for her it is this “vicious, rotten government” that is “weak”. One wonders how long a government has to last before it is *not* weak.

The most interesting opening was given by Petros, a Greek SWP member and councillor for Antarsya, the ‘anti-capitalist’ electoral coalition. He described some of the devastating effects of austerity in Greece, and reminded comrades of the enormous levels of struggle there of late, with around 30 general strikes reflecting the deep anger in society. In terms of going forward, he rightly stressed the need to look to our own strength, not ‘above’ to the capitalist state. We should be building workers’ control and self-defence organisations against the far-right Golden Dawn, fighting for laws that would ban sackings, cancel the debt and nationalise the banks. Significantly, he took some time to criticise the left-reformist grouping, Syriza.

In terms of the SWP leadership’s

‘message’, coming down hard on Syriza was a common theme throughout the day. This is no surprise, given that the prominent SWP oppositionist, Richard Seymour, has written favourably about this very successful left-reformist grouping.¹ As far as they go, the SWP leadership’s criticisms are reasonable: the hopes that so many revolutionaries are placing in Syriza are sowing enormous illusions. But what perspectives in Greece, then? Could a Greek left government ‘go it alone’ in the face of capital flight? And what about the tiny matter of Greece’s relationship to the EU? When discussion was opened up to the floor, I raised some of these questions on ‘perspectives’.

Comrade Petros’s response made clear that his critique of Syriza did not simply concern its illusions in forming a capitalist government in Greece, but also that it had, so he claimed, made clear that it was no longer willing to discuss *pulling out* of the EU and the euro: it was going to

stay in. So it became clear that his ‘anti-capitalist’ programme for Greece (in the SWP world there is no such thing as a Marxist programme) involved withdrawing from the EU and leaving the euro, taking on the banks and so on. Greece is “not a big country, but it is not small - it is part of the euro”, he stressed. So, while it might not be a question of socialist revolution in Greece today, we can’t act simply on the assumption that there will not be “world revolution tomorrow”. So that’s settled, then ...

Responding to my question about left parties and elections on these shores, comrade Choonara was desperately uninspired and uninspiring: unity of the left is not about “gathering together for warmth”. There are lots of ways you can unite the left, she said. It is “breadth” that unites people. Cue a list of several front organisations like Unite Against Fascism, at whose annual conference the day before Owen Jones and Ken Livingstone had spoken, for example. This breadth unites, and then the strategic questions arise when people move into struggle and feel an expression of their power. But how are we going to exercise our power? After all, while the SWP is now currently keen on clamping down on “reformist illusions” in Syriza, it is worth noting that, when it comes to its electoral political practice, it has done *nothing but* spread reformist illusions at the ballot box: Respect, Left Alternative, Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition and so on. Has the CC now come to the conclusion that revolutionaries should stand for parliament on a revolutionary platform, then? No, the answer is more self-styled SWP ‘united fronts’, ie, uncritically tailing the forces of ... reformism.

The next session I attended was ‘Is capitalism becoming less democratic?’ The most notable aspect was how little the speaker had to say about how to *advance* the cause of democracy in the here and now. I asked him about the kind of democratic demands that should be championed by our movement today, in order to win what Marx and Engels called “the battle of democracy”. What could we learn from the *programmes* of classical Marxism, which foregrounded the struggle for democracy, the republic, the armed people, annual elections, etc? This prompted Jo Caldwell, one of the newly elected members of the SWP CC, to roll out the hoary old ‘Peace, land and bread’ myth of the Bolsheviks in April 1917. What they mobilised the masses around, you see, were these three very simple demands, which in and of themselves were “not very revolutionary”, but in the actual context of a system that could not deliver them, became so.

If I had a pound for every time I have heard this nonsense, then the *Weekly Worker* would probably be a daily ... Yet, given the lack of discussion from the floor, I was able to respond to her, saying that these were simply *slogans*, behind which stood the Bolshevik political *programme* and strategy, something that had been painstakingly developed and updated since 1903, with demands such as the arming of the people, the distribution of land to the peasants, the republic, etc, etc. Comrade Caldwell left the room and so was unable to come back on this.

In summing up, however, the speaker noted how the SWP was flexible, with different demands at different times. For example, it called for “Troops out now” in 2003, and “We won’t pay for their crisis” in 2008. Yet,

nted by the real Lenin

once again, these are *slogans*. Slogans can, and will, vary at different times - even on a daily basis, when it comes to particular struggles. Yet slogans cannot substitute for programme, for strategy. Indeed, the former have to flow from, and be informed by, the latter, openly showing people what we stand for and how it links to our aims to bring about the rule of the working class majority.

Stalinist caricatures

The session that everybody was particularly relishing, of course, was Alex Callinicos's presentation on 'The politics of Leninism'. The advice of the student organiser who urged, "It would be good if everybody *didn't* go to Alex's session" - ie, at the expense of the others running at the same time - was not heeded: I would say that around 80%-90% of those at the school were crammed into this session.

Comrade Callinicos spoke in a composed and clear manner. There was to be no talk of "lynch mobs" and so on. It was a "dogmatic mistake", he argued, to see Leninism as a general theory. For him there were many Lenins: the one who supposedly wanted a party of full-timers in *What is to be done?* and another who then completely changed his mind on this in 1905, for example.² This was just one of several historical inaccuracies given in his talk, but it was nothing compared to what was to come.

Despite the comrade asserting that he was out to argue against the "Stalinist caricature" of the vanguard party, he did a fairly admirable job of repeating the usual Stalinist origin myths and fairy tales from Uncle Joe's infamous *Short course* (1939). He contrasted "those like Karl Kautsky", who believed in a party of the whole class, like Syriza (!),³ with Lenin's concept of a vanguard party. You see, for those like Kautsky (and presumably Marx and Engels in the early 1880s, then?), the vision was one of "broad parties" that reflected the *class as a whole*, leading to a lack of distinction between "party and class".⁴ This is unforgivably poor history. Unlike Syriza, the Second International was built on the basis of *Marxist programmes*. Of necessity, the Erfurt programme of 1891 and the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party programme of 1903 were not 'broad'. They excluded anarchists, 'state' socialists, 'socialists of the chair', syndicalists - not to mention other ideas present in the "class as a whole".

Mentioning the question of the elections to the duma parliament, comrade Callinicos stressed the tactical flexibility of Lenin's approach, which could entail quite sharp turns and varying approaches in attempting to influence, and win, the majority. These rapid shifts, according to comrade Callinicos, did not make Lenin an opportunist, because he had "central Marxist principles" and a "fundamental confidence" in them. No doubt Lenin was confident. Yet again, the question of where those firm principles were crystallised - ie, in the party's *programme* - is a complete blind spot for the comrade. Presumably they simply existed in Lenin's head and party members held him accountable in this way?

In 1917, when the Bolsheviks suddenly became a "mass party" and took power, they *had* to have public debates - "of necessity", as Callinicos put it. Precisely because he sees so many chops and changes in the Bolshevik's *strategy*, he cannot see the obvious connection between the *open* and *public* approach to party debate in its publications, right from the small

groups around *Iskra*, through to the mass party of 1905, and beyond to the heights of state power.

For Callinicos, there are three stages in the democratic-centralist process: discussion (albeit, unlike with Bolshevism, restricted to internal channels); majority decision (with no public articulation of where the majority and the minority in the party could be found); and then full implementation of the decision (without the possibility of publicly accounting for and criticising it afterwards). The idea that there could be a serious and open debate in the pages of *Socialist Worker*, as in publications like *Iskra* or *Pravda*, is pure anathema to Callinicos. Yet, as one critical SWSS member, Amy, put it from the floor, "Different decisions require different levels of debate." You can't just rely on the "blind faith" of activists in the party, but actually need to "win them politically". She added: "We shouldn't be afraid of having discussions on democratic centralism." Quite right.

I highlighted some of comrade Callinicos's absurd historical claims, such as his equation of the Social Democratic Party of Germany or the RSDLP and Syriza. I also questioned his mechanical understanding of how decisions are made and carried out. What if the decision made was wrong? How would Lenin have argued for a second revolution in April 1917 if he was a member of the SWP? Did he wait until autumn for the 'pre-conference period' of three months and agitate behind closed doors? No, there were public debates and discussions, conflicting articles in the party press and so on. At best, I said, the SWP's 'Bolshevism' was based on post-1921 practice, where the party banned factions under the extreme pressure of the civil war and profound economic dislocation. Limiting factions to *internal* debates for three months per year was a *de facto* ban on factions altogether. This was not historical point-scoring, I added, but absolutely crucial to political strategy today: the SWP will never become a revolutionary party that can lead millions if this is its approach.

Following this, a SWSS member also raised the question of 1921 and the ban on factions. Did those conditions really apply to Britain in 2013? Was it really the case that the SWP was about to be massacred by White generals? He also made some very good criticisms of the SWP's fetishisation of the slate system for the election of the CC and alluded to several Stalinoid features of SWP organisation.

CC member Judith Orr won the prize for being the only speaker to roll out the phrase so beloved of bureaucratic centralists: "We are not a debating society." Neither is the SWP "a co-op" - "we want to lead". As if the kind of sharp and rigorous clash of ideas associated with Bolshevism preclude *leading* many millions of people to change the world, a politically sophisticated class that is aware of all political developments in the party and beyond, and thus able to *liberate itself*, not be manipulated into power by the 'clear line' secretly formulated and then injected into the masses by *Socialist Worker* each week.

Moreover, *genuine* leadership requires the constant questioning, testing and correction of the party line from its membership and the class more generally. Take a recent SWP *slogan* as an example: what about the leadership's call for "All out, stay out" during the public sector strikes of 2011? Is it anti-Bolshevik to perhaps publicly criticise this slogan after it had become apparent that the strikers actually were keener

to go to the pub for a few pints than to storm the barricades and initiate an insurrectionary general strike to 'kick out the Tories'?

Surely a discussion on such a question, and the attendant issues it raises for Marxist political strategy more generally, would be educational for the hard-working activists who had gone out and agitated for it (only to see it fail), for the trade unionists, shop stewards and pickets coming into contact with Marxist ideas and - last but not least - for the SWP 'leadership' that issued such nonsense in the first place? Instead it has just been buried and repressed, like an embarrassing childhood memory. Yet winning communism needs the truth, which is best achieved in the conditions of open, frank and fraternal debate.

Permanent faction

Responding to me and the SWSS comrade who raised the question of the civil war, Callinicos made an interesting point: while it might be legitimate to discuss whether we should organise like the Bolsheviks in 1921 today, the *difference* between the Bolsheviks in 1921 and the SWP today was that the latter *does* allow factions, although only for three months per year. Although he did not say so, these factions must - again unlike Bolshevism - keep their business *within* the party at all costs.

Reiterating a point by comrade Orr, he asserted that the existence of permanent factions tended to make comrades judge political issues not on their merits, but through factional spectacles. The Bolsheviks were not characterised by permanent factions, he claimed, but there were constant realignments and shifting factional alliances, whereby figures like Nikolai Bukharin might be with Lenin at certain times and against him at other times. This is, of course, true. Factional lines - as well as decisions on whether certain positions were outside the remit of the party's programme, warranting expulsion - constantly changed. Politics is an art, not a science.

Yet what created the necessary trust for revolutionary unity to be forged and reformed was *precisely* the democratic culture of Bolshevism, where there *were* public disagreements in the party press on a whole range of issues. In the SWP this culture is lacking because those mechanisms are simply absent. More importantly, there *is* a permanent faction in the SWP. It is one that undeniably judges political issues in factional terms, especially now: it is the *leadership* faction, with its control of the party press and its *appointment* of full-timers and organisers. (In this regard, the SWP's democratic credentials come a shabby second even to those of the Stalinist 'official' Communist Party of Great Britain - no mean feat.)

The session was interesting. It hinted at the kind of debate that *should* be the norm in our movement. Had there been more time allocated, with comrade Callinicos and others able to respond on several occasions, then it would have helped to clarify matters even more. Nonetheless, this was the first time that I had seen Alex Callinicos challenged in a direct way by members of his own organisation, which is surely a welcome development. Moreover, while many SWSS members may have looked on, slightly embarrassed, when I was in full flow against their leader, others later thanked me for speaking out.

After all, those questioning comrade Callinicos's approach certainly have the weight of history on their side. Surely the elementary facts are clear,

not least as we have shown over 30 years of publishing: the 'politics of Leninism', as defended by Callinicos and others, essentially boils down to a *sect caricature*. Only the naive new recruit or the self-delusional hack can dispute that the Bolshevik Party before 1921 was consistently characterised by *open* debate and *public* political struggle in the party press, meetings and so on.

Most intelligent leftwingers now at least recognise that fundamental disjuncture between the SWP and Bolshevism. The bigger question that those of us committed to a mass, revolutionary Marxist party now have to confront is how to break the false dichotomy that knows nothing other than a (caricatured) 'permanent minority' sect outlook passed off as 'Bolshevism', on the one hand, and a (caricatured) 'broad party' version of the Second International on the other. Both are dead-ends.

Although the SWP version of Bolshevik history overlaps with Stalin's on several points, it would be wrong to call the SWP a 'Stalinist' organisation outright. Rejecting the need for any kind of programme, it is a peculiar bureaucratic hybrid of pseudo-Stalinism and anarchism, with a small, bureaucratically organised *permanent minority* seeking to influence and control broader fronts and 'movements'.

This explains the emphasis on 1968 and (on a more ridiculous level) the organisation waiting around for the next 'Millbank moment' in student politics.

Student fightback

The final session I attended, on the role students can play in the class struggle, was significant if only for the fact that it was the *exact opposite* of the Callinicos session, with only about 10 people present. Given that this was a student event, one would perhaps have expected more. However, the session was led off by none other than comrade Caldwell, interestingly introduced as an SWP "student organiser" rather than CC member. One possible explanation for the small attendance is that there

was a boycott by students expressing solidarity with those ousted by the CC.

If this is true, then the decision to stay away, and not actively intervene in the arguments, reflects some of the limitations of the current SWP opposition more generally. The lack of fight - or lack of sense of 'revolt', if you will - is perhaps a result of the dominant political culture in SWSS. In normal times, SWSS 'politics' consists of a very brief discussion about the "weak" government, etc, before moving onto the 'real business' of who is going to give out the leaflets, run the stall and so on.

So we should perhaps not expect dissident students to get up and directly challenge their leaders straight away: in such a tradition, raising critical questions is often tantamount to treachery. Nonetheless, more experienced members like comrades Woodcock and Mark Bergfeld (the former student organiser and CC member, who was not even *present* at the Callinicos talk, for example) should surely be taking a *lead* in stepping up and arguing back at all possible forums.

All of the problems faced by the SWP at the present time were on display at this event: its short-termism, its programmophobia, its bureaucratism and its aversion to the serious and fraternal exchange of ideas necessary for us to move forward. In short: its continuing malaise is inexorably bound up with its *lack* of Bolshevik perspectives and its dogmatic reliance on rotten methods ●

Notes

1. See P Demarty, 'Seymour in Greece' *Weekly Worker* January 24 for some background to this discussion.
2. For a solid refutation of this approach, see LT Lih, 'Lenin disputed' *Historical Materialism* No18, pp108-74.
3. In this, comrade Callinicos sings from the same hymn sheet as the Spartacist League. With a fairness and even-handedness typical of the Sparts, they rather desperately try to pass me off as a member of the Syriza fan club, simply because I have argued that the left has a distorted understanding of the Second International, and therefore Bolshevism. See: <http://spartacist.org/english/esp/63/neo-kautskyites.html>.
4. The title, of course, of Chris Harman's famous essay, available online at www.marxists.de/party/harman/partyclass.htm. Quite what all the fuss is about regarding this essay, particularly in light of modern research, is somewhat beyond me.

Fighting fund

A favour

It is not often that we get a lot of online readers in the first part of the week. That is because the *Weekly Worker* is published on Thursday and by Monday or Tuesday most people have read the current issue.

So I was surprised when I saw that on Tuesday this week (March 5) there were no fewer than 2,593 visitors (compared to 15,188 for the whole week). But then I realised that March 5 was the first full day that the Socialist Workers Party's *Pre-conference Bulletin* was available on our website. Of course, for the SWP, internal debates on vital political questions are regarded as top secret - they are no business of anyone outside the organisation itself. Class-conscious workers have no right to know how the would-be vanguard party that aims to lead them to revolution conducts its business.

Of course, we at the *Weekly Worker* have a different view. All debates (except, of course, those invoking genuine security concerns) should be held in full

view of the class, so we are actually doing the SWP a favour by helping them apply that principle.

Fortunately lots of comrades agree with us. And they show that by donating to our fighting fund. However, despite £85 received on the last day of February, we didn't quite get the £1,500 we need every month just to meet our running costs. Thanks to MD, CC, RL, AR, PM and SP, our total last month went up to £1,421.

And March has seen us off to a good start. EJ transferred his usual £50 on the first of the month - the day when we also receive the biggest number of standing order donations - 15 of them, totalling £207. Finally JD added £25 to his subscription cheque. Thanks to everyone for getting our March total up to £282 in less than a week ●

Robbie Rix

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

DEBATE

Lukács reloaded

Dealing with the complex legacy of Georg Lukács demands something more sophisticated than treating him as an honorary member of the SWP, argues **Lawrence Parker**

James Turley's supplement on Lukács was an interesting and thought-provoking read ('The antinomies of Georg Lukács' *Weekly Worker* January 24). Indeed, I think the CPGB owes a debt of gratitude to the comrade, in that his contribution can be counted as the only really serious intervention on the subject from one of its members since the 'star' of Lukács began to wane in the organisation.

Up until the early 2000s, majority opinion in the CPGB was, of course, extremely critical of the legacy of Lukács, but his earlier works, *History and class consciousness* (HCC) in particular, were given some respect. This has seemingly changed and I have been frankly appalled at the some of the ignorant nonsense about Lukács ('elitist', 'obfuscatory', 'not worth reading' and so on) that has been spouted in various CPGB forums over recent years (I exempt comrade Turley from this charge).

The leader of this particular pack has been Mike Macnair. I have some time for Macnair as a thinker and a writer, but on the subject of Lukács (or Althusser, or the Frankfurt School and so on) you can pretty much guarantee a heap of parrot droppings each time you put your money in the slot. The issue with comrade Macnair is that I have not read anything resembling the recent supplement (which actually attempts to dissect a piece of work from Lukács) emanating from his keyboard. What I have read is material looking at the work of John Rees on Lukács, which is then used to debunk Lukács.¹ I do not have the space to go into this in more detail, but I would respectfully suggest that using John Rees as a means to master Georg Lukács is rather like using Jimmy Savile as a means to master Stoke Mandeville Hospital.

When John Rees (or Alex Callinicos, etc) pontificate, as they do on, for example, Lenin, there is a whole battalion of CPGB writers on hand to illustrate the ways they are wrong; if the Socialist Workers Party writes about Lukács (in its own degenerate manner) then this is seemingly taken as absolute truth and the last word on the subject. Why would we take anything the SWP writes at face value (particularly with a subject as complex as Lukács)? Well, we would do this if it was simply convenient to smear Lukács through guilt by association with the SWP, because he is deemed a threat (wrongly, as I will argue) to the project of rehabilitating the practice of the Second International centre.

Turley adds another note of complication, in that his motivation is partly based upon salvaging what he can of the Althusserian tradition. Emaciated visions of *History and class consciousness* have long been the philosophical gruel of this camp (I know - I have eaten it enough times). However, I do not see many of Turley's comrades buying into this particular motivation and, if anything, there is even more enmity and incomprehension directed towards Althusser, as he simply cannot be made to fit into the 'What is the next link in the chain?/How can we bend the stick, this month?' instrumental rationalisations that more obscure theoretical debates in the CPGB get smothered with sooner or later.

I am not writing as a follower of Lukács or his career. I do not self-define as a 'Hegelian Marxist'. *History and class consciousness* certainly does

border on irrationality and mysticism with the idea of the proletariat being the identical subject-object of history, and it certainly is no surprise to me that comrade Turley finds a whole host of crap in the book. However, I think *History and class consciousness* is still a brilliant work, but it simply does not fit into the Stalinised, instrumental way that the left approaches such texts. I try and treat all such works as unrealised - something like a painter's sketch, where you are alive to brilliance, but perceive the flaws. While following Karl Korsch's idea that philosophy needs to be realised, I agree that we should not sign up for 'philosopher kings' and that such a realisation would be hesitant, partial and in constant flux.

But, while it is a worthy exercise to dethrone our monarchs, I would be wary of another trap. Macnair and Turley want to knock Lukács off the (absurdist) pedestal of the 'philosopher of Lenin', but in doing so they have been trying to make him into a sort of useless philosophical jester. This shares the errors of the 'philosopher king' rationale: someone is being disposed of so that other figures in the Marxist historical canon (Althusser, Kautsky) can rise up again. Maybe they will not be kings, but there will certainly be some writers that are more equal than others, know what I mean?

'New Left' method

Turley writes: "For Lukács - as he survives for us today - has a 'second life', with the emergence of the 1960s-70s 'New Left'. His persistence as a theoretical touchstone to this day is a product of the 1960s as much as the 1920s, not least because it is the

1960s generation of Marxists who are most clearly indebted to him." It is completely correct to locate a fault-line in this generation's adoption of Lukács, which suffers from its inability to perceive *History and class consciousness* as merely one of many points of departure, or, to paraphrase Trotsky, not a closed circle, but a loop: one end moving into the past; the other into the future.

The problem for the so-called 'New Left' is that, in general, it has been unable to locate *History and class consciousness* in this movement, which results in a fixing of and fixation on *History and class consciousness*. Part of the issue behind this is that the 'New Left' was instrumentally concerned with constructing a set of frail, sect orthodoxies, which, in the case of Lukács, led to a suspicion of his 'ultra-leftism' in the period before *History and class consciousness*, while the works of the mid-1920s were suspect because of his support for Stalin's faction in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (despite the fact that all of Lukács's post-*History and class consciousness* oeuvre has an enormously contradictory relationship to 'official' communism - see below). So the 'New Left' was left with an *History and class consciousness* freeze-frame, a snapshot, which it was forced to endlessly pore over in its dark towers. Unfortunately for Turley, his presentation is implicated in this method, in that *History and class consciousness* is taken for granted as the ultimate point of departure for understanding Lukács. While

I accept that this is an advance on taking John Rees as the last word on the subject,

this inability to establish any dialectic in relation to Lukács himself leads to a flattening and distorting effect in Turley's account.

Turley argues: "In particular, the directly political content of *History and class consciousness* is indebted most heavily to the 'mass action' left of the socialist movement, which hit its moment of greatest plausibility during the post-war, post-October revolutionary wave which spread across Europe." However, he then moves on to partially contradict this statement, by discussing, quite correctly, the fact that Lukács's leftism had begun to unravel by the time of the publication of *History and class consciousness* in 1923. But, for Turley, this process of unravelling has no consequences for *History and class consciousness* itself (at least none that I can see).

Unfortunately, as I have previously pointed out in debate with the comrade, his account of this process is fundamentally garbled. In response to the specific point that *History and class consciousness* was a continuation of an earlier ultra-leftism, Michael Löwy points out that Lukács had substantially recast at least two of the essays ('What is orthodox Marxism?' and 'Class consciousness') for its 1923 publication with the 'watershed' moment coming in the middle of 1920, when Lenin's *Leftwing communism - an infantile disorder* pamphlet appeared.²

For example, the following passage was inserted into the 1922 version of 'What is orthodox Marxism?': "Do not let us forget either that every attempt to rescue the 'ultimate goal' or the 'essence' of the proletariat from every impure contact with - capitalist - existence leads ultimately to the same remoteness from reality, from 'practical, critical activity' and to the same relapse into the utopian dualism of subject and object, of theory and practice, to which revisionism has succumbed."³ Helpfully (or I guess unhelpfully for comrades Turley and Macnair), Lukács briefly tips his hat to *Leftwing communism* in the footnote to this point, suggesting that he saw it (rightly or wrongly) as of a piece with Lenin's work. Attentive readers will also note that such passages do not lend themselves very easily to the idea of 'mass action' leftism with its undertone of conspiracy behind the backs of the proletariat.

Dislocated

It might be helpful if, at this point, I give my own view of what is going on in *History and class consciousness*. Lars T Lih has argued that Lenin had a 'heroic' scenario of the revolutionary party inspiring a genuine mass movement (and a mass conscious party) of the popular classes (as opposed to the traditional Trotskyist perversion of this, which involves a tiny minority manipulating the befuddled masses). My take on Lukács in 1923 is of an activist who was starting to absorb Lenin's standpoint, which means that *History and class consciousness* is essentially transitional and internally dislocated. The full flowering of his engagement with Lenin's 'heroic scenario' was, in my reading, not in *History and class consciousness* at all, but in the later, and also problematic, *Lenin* (1924).

One can see this 'heroic' perspective clearly flowering into life in an essay such as 'Class consciousness' (dated 1920, but, as pointed out above, recast for publication in 1923). The arguments

presented here are infused with the idea of the *objective possibilities* (not the mundane, sociological realities pored over by Lukács's critics) inherent in the proletariat and proletarian class-consciousness: "Only the consciousness of the proletariat can point to the way that leads out of the impasse of capitalism."⁴ What a contrast with the petty tyrants of today's left with their lamed and incremental view of working class consciousness ('Keep it simple for the workers' and so on)!

Other points, such as where Lukács discusses examples of reified consciousness in relation to empiricism and abstract utopianism could stand as good (if rather abstract) injunctions against the practice of today's proponents of the 'mass strike': "In the one case, consciousness becomes either a complete passive observer, moving in obedience to laws which it can never control. In the other, it regards itself as a power which is able of its own - subjective - volition to master the essentially meaningless motion of objects."⁵ So, when comrade Turley talks of the "semi-anarchist, mass-action leftism that informed *History and class consciousness*" or "its status as the expression of Lukács's philosophical voluntarism, rather than his 'realistic' political activism", we have to reply that this is not just factually incorrect, but *undialectical nonsense of the first order*.

As for the so-called 'followers' of Lukács included in comrade Turley's grisly litany of modern-day Hegelian villains (the new 'Holy Family'), well, he can scarcely be asked to answer for their heresies; any more than Lenin should be held to account for Alex Callinicos. Of course, Lukács's account of class-consciousness is somewhat abstract and flawed, and it is quite correct for Turley to reproduce a quote from Lukács's 1967 preface to *History and class consciousness*: "... what I had intended subjectively, and what Lenin had arrived at as the result of an authentic Marxist analysis of a practical movement, was transformed in my account into a purely intellectual result and thus into something contemplative. In my presentation it would indeed be a miracle if this 'imputed' consciousness could turn into revolutionary praxis."⁶

However, at least Lukács's preface is trying to come up with a balance sheet of *History and class consciousness*; to determine what of it belongs to the past and what links it to the future (even if sifting his rather notorious double-think becomes somewhat tiresome and counterproductive). In other words, he is thinking *dialectically*; Turley (in what is an entirely appropriate metaphor for his theoretical practice) is concerned merely to "nail the coffin shut", to fix Lukács as an immobile, inert concept among exterior objects.

Comrade Turley is utterly precluded from seeing any movement in his subject (away from 'ultra-leftism' and, imperfectly, towards Lenin's 'heroic' perspective for the proletariat), partly because, as already noted, there is little or no sense in his piece of what proceeded and what followed *History and class consciousness*; and partly because, in the current 'CPGB version' of Lukács, as he has many followers in the SWP, he simply must be made up as a straw man, on which to hang all the anti-democratic fallacies of the 'mass strike' theory. In reality, as many of us saw years ago, the SWP's adoption of Lukács (partial and fallacious as it was) was a howling *contradiction* in relation



Lukács: transitional

to its practice in the real world: there is no simple and neat homology between its philosophical adoption of Lukács and its other nefarious practices. In that light, the CPGB's current 'orthodoxy' stands revealed as a rather naked and unimpressive instrumentalism.

These problems reach an absolute farcical pitch when Turley turns his attention to what, to my mind, is the sharpest (although, again, thoroughly *transitional*) essay in *History and class consciousness*: 'Towards a methodology of the problem of organisation'. Turley, clearly underwhelmed, writes of this: "The bulk [of the essay] is based around rather obtuse philosophisations of that 'Leninist party' form which emerges from the early Comintern. In this respect, some arguments are perceptive and illuminating (on the relationship between discipline and bourgeois individual freedom, in particular); others simply recapitulate classic 'mass action' arguments against the Second International centre, albeit obscured by Hegelian jargon." At the very best, such a statement could be read as ambiguous and grudging; at its worst it is downright misleading.

The first point is a historical one. This essay is dated September 1922, long after the 'watershed moment' of *Leftwing communism*. And it shows. It is crystal-clear that we are not dealing with a pure ultra-left any more. For example, Lukács dismisses both right and left critics of the united front tactic in the following terms: "The debates about a united front demonstrated that almost all the opponents of such a tactical manoeuvre suffered from a lack of dialectical grasp, of appreciation of the true function of the party in developing the consciousness of the proletariat. To say nothing of those misunderstandings that led to the united front being thought of as leading to the immediate reunification of the proletariat at the level of organisation."⁷

To move on to the substantive point of this: did Lukács "simply recapitulate classic 'mass action' arguments against the Second International centre"? No, he did not do this, simply or otherwise. In substance, he reprised the arguments of the Second International centre (of which the Bolsheviks were part) against a sectarian view that abstracted the struggle of the party from the struggles of the class into a modern-day Blanquism; to that end his arguments are not without import today.

The problem with this for the unwary was that Lukács was obviously confused in regards to the political physiognomy of the Second International: he reads the Bolsheviks as always having been on the left, as against Kautsky and the centre, which is obviously incorrect.⁸ However, that misunderstanding should not obscure what he was actually saying. And certainly 'Towards a methodology of the problem of organisation' bears similar 'transitional' markings to the rest of *History and class consciousness*. Thus Lukács does argue: "The Russian Revolution clearly exposed the limitations of the west European organisations. Their impotence in the face of the spontaneous movements of the masses was clearly exposed on the issues of mass actions and the mass strike."⁹ But by the end of the essay, what we understand as the contemporary implications of this theory of mass actions and mass strikes, of political sects bobbing along and manipulating the unconscious masses into 'power', has been thoroughly emptied out (although the trace of its *form* remains, as a trap for the unwary).

Shifting

I think the following three quotes exemplify his shifting perspective, his clear anti-sectism and the fact that Lukács is determined not to yank the party and a *conscious* proletariat into undialectical poles, despite the necessity of defending, dialectically,

the organisational independence of the Communist Party.

The formal, ethical view of the sects breaks down precisely because it cannot understand that [the party and masses] are unified, that there is a vital interaction between the party organisation and the unorganised masses. However hostile a sect may be towards bourgeois society, however deeply it may be convinced - subjectively - of the size of the gulf that separates it from the bourgeoisie, it yet reveals at this very point that its view of history coincides with that of the bourgeoisie and that, in consequence, the structure of its own consciousness is closely related to that of the bourgeoisie.¹⁰

If the sect acts as the representative of the 'unconscious' masses, instead of them and on their behalf, it causes the historically necessary and hence dialectical separation of the party organisation from the masses to freeze into permanence.¹¹

The struggle of the Communist Party is focused upon the class-consciousness of the proletariat. Its organisational separation from the class does not mean in this case that it wishes to do battle for its interests *on its behalf and in its place*. (This is what the Blanquists did, to take but one instance.)¹²

The issue with 'Towards a methodology of the problem of organisation' is assuredly not that it recapitulates "classic 'mass action' arguments against the Second International centre". The problem arises from the diametric opposite: the partial reiteration of the Second International centre's arguments against sectism, and implying that the various communist parties (Russian and international) were now the carriers of those values in the context of 1922, means that the essay (as Debord correctly stated) reverted, in that context, to the status of an empty state ideology (one that was further developed a couple of years later in *Lenin: a study in the unity of his thought*). In the Soviet Union, the dialectical unity of party and class was being increasingly restricted to the formulations of its propagandists and thus Lukács, against his will, succumbs to ideology.

On the topic of reification and Lukács's conception of totality, I feel that comrade Turley has been sadly led adrift by his Althusserian inheritance, and this works back onto his reading of the 'Reification and the consciousness of the proletariat' essay in *History and class consciousness*. (I do, however, take on board Turley's recognition that Althusser's take on 'totality' has its problems; indeed, one of the weird paradoxes of this debate is that I suspect, from various conversations, we have come to broadly similar conclusions on Althusserian Marxism.)

Turley writes:

... why on earth should the commodity have such an extraordinary power to colonise everything? In order to ensure its continued existence as a mode of production, capitalism needs to return enough people to work every day to reproduce themselves, as well as a parasitic class of exploiters on top of them. It does not need to colonise anyone's soul - in fact, it has been much happier, in a good many situations, to leave that job to the priests (and 'secular' inheritors, such as the mass media), who - after all - know one or two things about colonising souls.

In Lukács, this all-conquering power of the commodity is simply *assumed*. It is a perfectly ra-

tional assumption *on the basis of Hegelian idealism*, where the totality is embodied homogeneously across its particular elements. Althusser and his school called this the 'expressive totality', and it can be crudely likened to a stick of Brighton rock: wherever you break it, the same message is written on the cross-section ... Nonetheless, the prognosis he offers is pertinent: the various instances of society - the different spheres in which that complicated animal we call the human has its existence - lose their own specificity. They become reducible one and all, via various degrees of mediation, to a single principle.

But this principle, in a cruel twist of the dialectic, is condemned to lose its explanatory power. If commodity fetishism/reification accounts for the stupidities both of Mitt Romney and Joseph Ratzinger, then it cannot provide a satisfactory account of either.

Is the all-conquering power of the commodity assumed in the manner of reducibility to a single principle? To argue this line means ripping apart *History and class consciousness* and viewing its constituent parts in frozen isolation (a practice Lukács rather eloquently destroys on a number of occasions). In 'What is orthodox Marxism?' Lukács writes: "We repeat: the category of totality does not reduce its elements to an undifferentiated uniformity, to identity. The apparent independence and autonomy which they possess in the capitalist system of production is an illusion only in so far as they are involved in a dynamic dialectical relationship with one another and can be thought of as the dynamic dialectical aspects of an equally dynamic and dialectical whole."¹³

A few points become clearer from this. First, the Althusserian critique of Lukács's 'expressive totality' (which can "be crudely likened to a stick of Brighton rock: wherever you break it, the same message is written on the cross-section") is not worth the paper it was written on: he was obviously aware of the danger of merely identifying different societal spheres in a simplistic and undialectical manner. Also, the emphasis on *dynamic* interrelationships means it would be very surprising if Lukács merely *assumed* the power of reification in the manner Turley ascribes - he is not setting up a fixed category of 'reification' that we can pore over in isolation and bloodlessly define.

This Althusserian muddle can partly be explained by confusion over the *object* of Lukács's critique and the nature of that critique itself, which, in an exquisite irony, Turley crudely solders together so that "wherever you break it, the same message is written on the cross-section". It is perfectly true that the process of reification is seen by Lukács as *expansive*: "The divorce of the phenomena of reification from their economic bases and from the vantage point from which alone they can be understood is facilitated by the fact that the [capitalist] process of transformation must embrace every manifestation of the life of society if the preconditions for the complete self-realisation of capitalist production are to be fulfilled."¹⁴

But this power is not *assumed* - Lukács foresees a time when the 'natural' forces of 'the market' come to an end: "In its unthinking, mundane reality *that* life seems firmly held together by 'natural laws'; yet it can experience a sudden dislocation because the bonds uniting its various elements and partial systems are a chance affair even at their most normal."¹⁵ Lukács was, of course, mercilessly critical of the abstraction, quantification and alienation inherent in capitalist society but, whatever

the crudities of *History and class consciousness*, his critique was not the mere methodological equivalent of what he was being critical of.

Turley, in what I presume is another Althusserian lurch, this time back towards ascribing 'relative autonomy' to various societal spheres, queries why the commodity has the power to colonise everything. Isn't it, after all, the churches and mass media that do a rather better job of this? And can commodity fetishism/reification account "for the stupidities both of Mitt Romney and Joseph Ratzinger"?

In the flat, fixed and undifferentiated spectacles through which Turley views Lukács, then the theory of commodity fetishism/reification clearly cannot account for anything much. The dialectical reality of *History and class consciousness* is somewhat different. Lukács identifies a clear trend towards quantification in capitalist society that blurs distinctions: "The distinction between a worker faced with a particular machine, the entrepreneur faced with a given type of mechanical development, the technologist faced with the state of science and the profitability of its application to technology, is purely quantitative; it does not directly entail *any qualitative difference in the structure of consciousness*."¹⁶

But this shift also entails the division of labour: "This enables the artificially isolated partial functions to be performed in the most rational manner by 'specialists' who are specially adapted mentally and physically for the purpose. This has the effect of making these partial functions autonomous and so they tend to develop through their own special laws independently of the other partial functions of society...."¹⁷

So Lukács is acutely alive to the issue of differentiation and specialisation, which precisely flows from the expansive totality bewitched by the commodity, and thus his theory emphatically does provide a framework to account "for the stupidities both of Mitt Romney and Joseph Ratzinger".

Stalinism

Finally, it is probably necessary to say something on the rather depressing topic of Lukács and Stalinism. Turley does not deal with this in his critique (and I largely agree with his comments, as against the 'capitulation' dogma of Chris Cutrone).¹⁸

A few weeks back, sympathisers of the CPGB were sent an email ('Notes for action', January 24) introducing comrade Turley's critique with the join-the-dots line that Lukács was "the favourite Stalinist of a number of leading members of the SWP". This is horseshit on a number of levels. First, as you would hope the writer of this charming epithet would realise, the SWP generally does not praise Lukács on any level after his 'capitulation' to Stalin in the mid-1920s. Second, if Lukács did become a 'Stalinist', then it was of a very peculiar stamp.

On one level, there is no way to prettify Lukács in the mid-1920s. By choosing Stalin's faction and the illiterate politics of 'socialism in one country' (which a man as erudite and cultured as Lukács must surely have known were complete nonsense), he effectively maimed his politics. Right up until his death in 1971, he still stuck to mealy-mouthed logic-chopping on subjects such as the Moscow trials (he maintained that he personally found the trials to be monstrous, but was tactically neutral on the broader political issues involved). This means that anybody who self-identifies themselves as 'Lukácsian' or as a follower of Lukács across his entire career risks making their politics almost entirely useless for the 21st century. That much is clear.

However, to make that correct

judgement there are a host of countervailing factors to take into account. Lukács always had his own line and appeared to view his career as an underground guerrilla war against the Stalinist bureaucracy. Most of his works from the 1930s onwards, couched in Aesopian language, can be read as indictments of this or that 'official' communist inscription - an obvious example being his rearguard defence of critical reason as against the irrationality of the Soviet ideological conjuncture.

Towards the end of his life Lukács did become a much more outspoken critic of 'actually existing socialism', but the tactical choices he had made earlier in his career still maimed his outlook. As he bluntly put it himself, "I have always thought that the worst form of socialism was better to live in than the best form of capitalism."¹⁹ Unfortunately, this absurd outlook meant choosing the worse kind of bureaucratic police dictatorship; in Terry Eagleton's brilliant critique "... Lukács gibbed at Stalinism's dreary philistinism and privately winced at its pathetic 'socialist realism'. A lonely, aloof Hegelian, he became the Idea that entered upon real, alienated existence - the heart of a heartless world, the soul of soulless conditions, and indeed, at base, the opium of the people".²⁰

But here is another thought: I have heard plenty of comrades mouthing off about their own anti-Stalinist credentials and using Lukács as a kind of whipping boy to prove their impeccable revolutionary moral fibre. However, this stance ignores the fact that Lukács was an active opponent of the Soviet-inspired police dictatorship in Hungary, particularly after his participation in the Nagy government of 1956. Of course, it would not have been Lukács if there had not been a strong dose of naivety in regards to the potentiality of the bureaucracy to ethically reform itself. Thus, for example, Lukács subscribed to the bizarre illusion that the Warsaw Pact would protect Hungary from western and Soviet interventions.²¹

Lukács was eventually captured by the Russians and held prisoner in Romania, a process under which he refused to submit to a demand to denounce his comrades and came out with a great deal of honour. On this occasion, there was to be no lying 'self-criticism': "My interrogators said to me that they knew I was no follower of Imre Nagy and so there was no reason why I should not testify against him. I told them that as soon as the two of us, Imre Nagy and myself, were free to walk around Budapest, I would be happy to make public my opinion of all of Nagy's activities."²²

For those tempted to smear Lukács as just another run-of-the-mill Stalinist or, at best, a mere capitulator: think *hard*, comrades, and think *long* ●

Notes

1. See M Macnair, "Classical Marxism" and grasping the dialectic' *Weekly Worker* September 11 2003.
2. M Löwy *Georg Lukács - from romanticism to Bolshevism* London 1979, pp172-75.
3. G Lukács *History and class consciousness: studies in Marxist dialectics* Cambridge (Mass) 1975, p22.
4. *Ibid* p76. Quotes are all with original emphasis.
5. *Ibid* p77.
6. 'Preface to the new edition (1967)' in *ibid* pp xviii-xix.
7. *Ibid* p322.
8. *Ibid* p302.
9. *Ibid* p297.
10. *Ibid* p321.
11. *Ibid* p322.
12. *Ibid* p326.
13. *Ibid* pp12-13.
14. *Ibid* p95.
15. *Ibid* p101.
16. *Ibid* p98.
17. *Ibid* p103.
18. Letters *Weekly Worker* February 21.
19. 'Interview with New Left Review' in G Lukács *Record of a life* London 1983, p181.
20. T Eagleton *Walter Benjamin or towards a revolutionary criticism* London 2009, p84.
21. I Eörsi, 'The right to the last word' in G Lukács *Record of a life* London 1983, p21.
22. G Lukács *Record of a life* London 1983, p132.

INTERVIEW

Not more of the same

The Provisional Central Committee of the CPGB is urging support for **Jerry Hicks**, the rank-and-file candidate in the Unite election. Peter Manson spoke to him about his campaign and perspectives

What are the main differences between you and Len McCluskey?

One of the main differences is related to the failure of Unite and other trade unions to take on and defeat the anti-union laws. Everything, in my view, comes back to that reluctance or inability that leaves us so vulnerable to government attacks as part of their austerity agenda for the crisis that we didn't create.

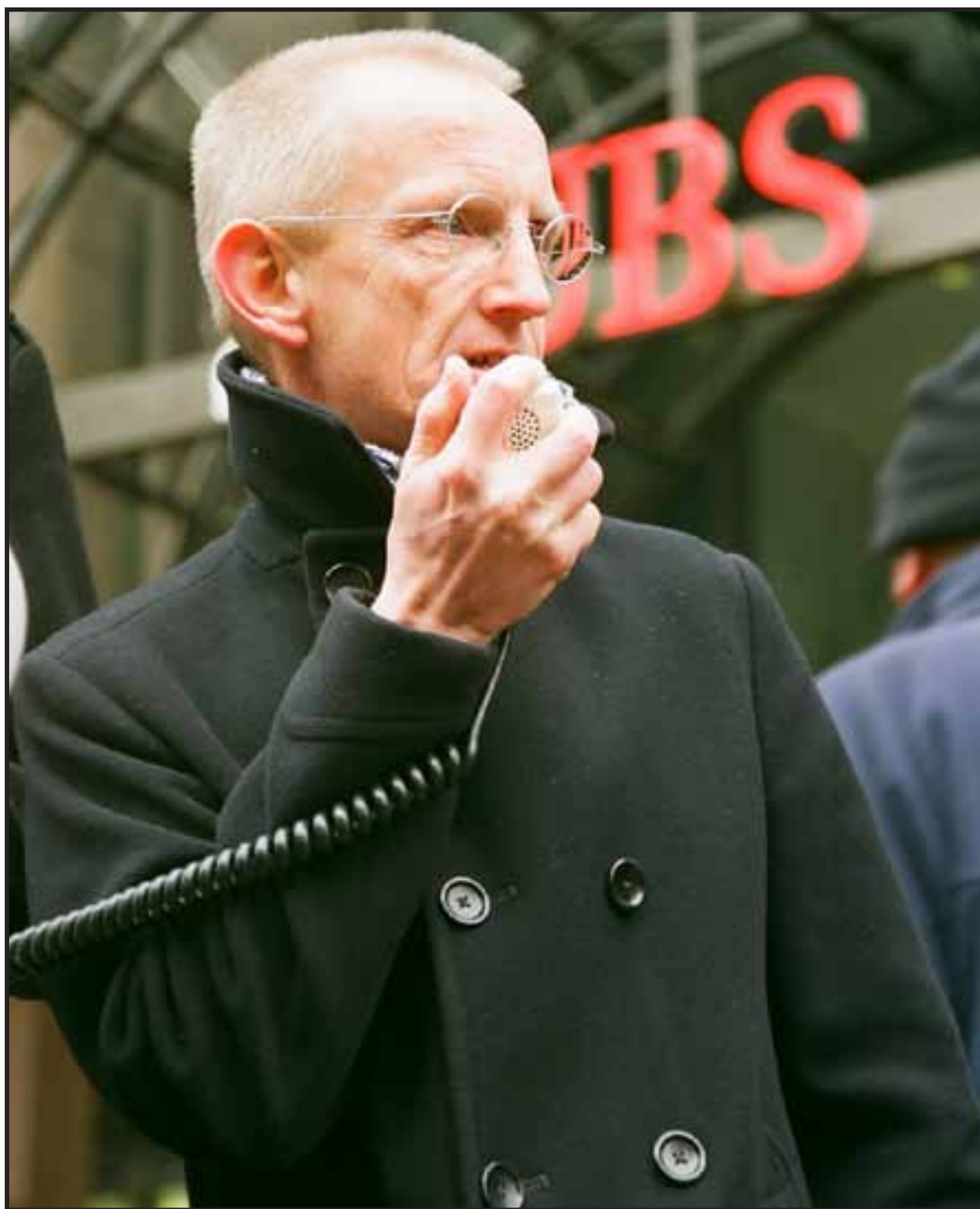
Len McCluskey was an assistant general secretary for many years. Before that he was a high-ranking officer in the Transport and General Workers Union. The buck stops somewhere. I'm not saying this to attribute blame, but these people get fine salaries - I'll come on to that in a moment - and they like to bestride the national stage, but they don't take responsibility for their inaction.

These anti-union laws were brought in by Thatcher and, to their shame, left unchanged by Labour in 13 years (three terms and two prime ministers - all backed by the T&G, Amicus and Unite). In fact, from 2001 to 2011 £41 million was donated to Labour, yet the anti-union laws were not repealed. I know who is to blame - Thatcher, who brought them in, and Labour, which left them unchanged - but the problem is that the TUC and the big unions did virtually nothing to overturn them.

So one big difference, I think, is that if McCluskey is re-elected we will see more of the same, in that the current leadership don't have the confidence to take them on and don't believe we can really bring about change. We have seen militantly fought disputes, but the opportunities are not seized to smash the anti-union laws. For example, Vestas on the Isle of Wight provided a golden opportunity to join the occupation during that hot summer of 2009 - we did have 14 Unite members there. But because it was an occupation, which had been criminalised and was illegal, although the eyes of the world were on it, Unite was nowhere to be seen.

That was under a Labour government with a young environment minister, Ed Miliband - who Len McCluskey backed, along with Unite, to the tune of £100,000, to become Labour leader. I think that Unite could have joined that occupation, its general secretary standing on the roof alongside the occupiers - that could have forced things to a head. Labour, clutching our millions, would have taken that factory into public ownership, renationalised the East Coast rail network when National Express reneged on their franchise, and subsequently nationalised banks to the tune of trillions of pounds. So nationalisation of Vestas was eminently possible. That would have saved the factory - 600 workers would still be there and instead of 14 members I think we would have had 600. We probably would have had around 6,000 on the Isle of Wight and an extra 60,000 countrywide.

The second opportunity was the Olympics. Unite failed both under Labour and then the Con-Dem government to recognise and maximise that opportunity, which I would do. That is going to be key if we are to survive as a class. I am pleased that £500 was won for London busworkers, but we could have used the opportunity of the Olympics in other ways. It was a project that could overrun financially, but not time-wise.



Jerry Hicks: strike experience

We should have met with the workforce and made the argument that the blacklisting of workers was illegal and that they should be offered jobs. If we had won that, then we could have taken on the laws relating to 'secondary action' - for instance, if we had a stoppage on the Olympics project in support of a fight against hospital closures; after all, construction workers sometimes have accidents and require accident and emergency centres. Workers must have the right to take secondary action. In my view, job losses, cuts and privatisation have a 'secondary action' effect.

So I say we must seize the opportunities to take on and defeat the anti-union laws. Such actions would make every single member, every single trade unionist and actually everyone in the country a lot more confident in resisting and defeating the austerity attacks.

Another big difference, as I see it, concerns the hundreds of Unite officials, who are all appointed. McCluskey says they are appointed by a panel of an elected national executive. That might be true, but that is only a handful of people. One of the biggest criticisms I hear when I travel the country is that often the appointed official is "not from our industry" and doesn't know the sector. Sometimes

they're there one month and gone the next. Irrespective of those arguments, I believe that *members* should choose who represents them. So I am in favour of the election of all Unite officials. Indeed I feel that principle so strongly that when I was offered a regional officer's job in 2003 I refused. By contrast, McCluskey's union career includes 30 years of appointments - he went from being a clerk in the docks to a paid union officer.

During those 30 years I was an elected rep, then senior rep; I have been on strike, both official and unofficial, and involved in occupations. Now I'm not scoring a point - I'm *making* a point. I share the experience of a million and a half members who aren't on jobs for life and six-figure salaries. They are at the sharp end in the workplace and they face the daily 'modernisations' and 'productivity measures' of the employers. I experienced all that 'go faster, work harder' at Rolls Royce until my victimisation and dismissal in 2005. They tried to bring in not only these new practices, but pension changes and so on. All that gives you a steel, an organisational ability - otherwise you go under.

So my three decades, being elected throughout, of direct involvement in occupations, in organising strike

action, has given me the experience that McCluskey lacks - if you're going to ask others to take action, it's a good idea to show that you yourself were prepared to do it.

What about the idea put about by the union's United Left that Jerry Hicks is "unemployed, takes no part in any Unite constitutional committee anywhere and represents no-one, and has no administrative experience"? They ask: "Would you really trust this man to run a £150 million organisation?"

Well, I was considered experienced enough to be offered the regional organiser's job and I was elected to the NEC and the general purposes finance committee with the highest vote just over two years ago - 62,520 members didn't have an issue with me not working. Let me make it plain: I think it's a badge of honour right now.

In fact this is a good analogy: ask most workers who in the workplace knows the problems and who is best placed to put them right? It's not the boss, it's not the managers: it's us. We know the problems. There is actually a disconnect between being a bureaucrat or appointed official on a big salary and the real situation faced by members. The bureaucracy is a problem, not a

solution.

That doesn't mean that all its policies are bad. I think community branches are good, for example. I had no branch for eight months, along with tens of thousands of other members. The branch still doesn't have a bank account. Text messages and photo-opportunities don't persuade me that there's a sense of urgency and that we have a coordinated, winning fightback strategy. Community branches are a good idea, but we need so many more of them and they need to be set up so much quicker.

Wouldn't it be more appropriate to have cross-union community branches?

I think that's a very good idea. I'm glad you say that, because I don't know the precise details of the problems facing members in every sector Unite organises - and neither does McCluskey, by the way - but I know who does have knowledge, and that's the members in those sectors. So, rather than top-down dictat, members should have more say, members should have more control.

So, yes, that's a great idea and it should be put to members. It's actually the epitome of what I stand for. Some of our sectors are so huge that there's virtually no involvement. Members should elect officials and should have control over rank-and-file organisation.

You're a member of Grass Roots Left, which stresses such rank-and-file organisation. Is that connected with the idea of a worker's wage for union officials?

Yes. The failure to do the right thing when the chips are down didn't start with the Tolpuddle martyrs - they weren't martyrs before they did something. People throughout history have been brave and taken risks, whether it's the Tolpuddle martyrs or the suffragettes, those who fought against apartheid or to bring down the Berlin wall or those who smashed the poll tax. How do you do that without taking risks? It takes "civil disobedience" - as an action, not a catchphrase.

So to reconnect with members I think you have to have the mind of a member and live the lifestyle of a member. It's not a question of sackcloth and ashes - we want to *raise* standards. But a general secretary taking home more than £2,000 a week, every week, right throughout the year, is just not right.

The privilege and honour of running a big union, of being able to engage with members across the country and have the potential to make a difference should be sufficient. The reward should be the average wage of members, which currently is about £26,500 a year. That is an *average*, of course, so it will still be more than many receive, but that's not a problem for me.

'Grassroots' is a tag; 'rank and file' is a tag; but really what it means is, 'Are you a *member* of the union? Do you know what's in the minds of the members? Do you know the real struggle they are engaged in? Do you live the same lives as the members?' The same goes for MPs or directors of companies - they get to the stage where they don't realise that what they're doing is wrong any more. The senior officials in our union are all on very good wages - and paid out of members' pockets. Yet they're blatantly campaigning in this election for one candidate. That's

What we fight for

■ **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 should 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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wrong too. That’s when you get this disparity between the way we see the establishment and the way they see themselves. They’re not affected by the cuts like we are - Len McCluskey would have had a pay *rise* with the reduction in the highest rate of tax. Perhaps he’s given it to charity or the strike fund - I don’t know.

The point that I’m making is that it’s not only bankers who are rewarded for failure. We have failed to defeat the anti-union laws. We’ve failed to hold Labour to account on so many fronts. In my view we backed the wrong candidate for leader in Ed Miliband instead of John McDonnell, who clearly had the best policies. So ‘rank and file’, ‘grassroots’, ‘ordinary members’ - there are 1.5 million in Unite alone and seven million in the TUC and they are what should drive us.

How do you answer those you say to you, ‘That’s all very well, Jerry, but the main job right now is to “consolidate the union for the left”’?

I’ll tell you what I say: in the last two elections I stood in, my detractors said, ‘Vote for Jerry Hicks and you’ll let in the right wing.’ The first time round that was the senior national official, Kevin Coyne, and the other rightwing candidate, Paul Reuter, but we beat them both handsomely when we finished runner-up. But blow me - the same detractors with the same broken records and the same tired, old arguments used the same line in the last election: ‘Vote for Jerry and get Len Bayliss’. We beat Len Bayliss and we beat Gail Cartmel.

I’m going to stress this point: I finished runner-up on two occasions as a rank-and-file, ordinary member, increasing our vote from 40,000 to over 52,000. Both times there was no ‘demon in the dark’ - that was just the message put out, sadly, by the left. Either their analysis was flawed (and analysis and judgement nowadays is crucial) or they were lying - and I’d hate to think they were lying.

I knew Len Bayliss was never going to win. But here’s the difference - Bayliss after the election was given a quarter of a million pounds of members’ money to leave the union. I wouldn’t have done that.

This time, of course, there isn’t even a rightwing candidate standing, but still the Socialist Party in England and Wales can’t recommend a vote for you.

Yes, that was my point - there are only two candidates. I’m clearly to the left of Len McCluskey, so, whoever wins this one, the left gets in. Actually, just like last time, I think we’re pulling this election *more* left, both in rhetoric and deed.

I would love to have had the support of the Socialist Party - I think they’ve made a huge mistake. They say in their ‘What we stand for’ on their website: “Full-time union officials to be regularly elected and receive no more than a worker’s wage.”” Instead of ‘What we fight for’, perhaps they should call it ‘What we prefer to put up with’.

SPEW also attempts to answer those who say that, by bringing the election forward and running it on such a short time-scale, McCluskey is trampling on union democracy. SPEW’s response is that “it’s not just a case of what is done, but who does it and for what reasons”. In other words, it’s OK if our side resorts to such manoeuvres. What do you think of that argument?

Frankly, I think it’s crude and crass. It’s been constructed to back up their own decisions, which I think is wrong. If the right wing did this, we would be going crazy about it, of course.

But I think the error in bringing the election forward is massive. It was

concocted last summer - no question, with the knowledge and support of senior Labour officials - to avoid a clash with the general election in 2015. Here I agree with McCluskey - that was the reason. Unite will plough £10 million or more into Labour’s coffers in the next couple of years - particularly in election year - and there will be no scrutiny over it at all and no *quid pro quo*.

That’s what it was about - simply to re-elect a Labour government, which once more will refuse to repeal the anti-union laws. I think holding the two elections in the same year would have pulled Unite further to the left and allowed us to make more demands on Labour, written in blood. Indeed, between now and then we could have insisted that Labour acts before we fund them by voting against the cuts, rather than ‘not so deep, not so fast’ - that’s not a solution.

So I think it’s almost a crime against the class - and I don’t use those words lightly - to manoeuvre the biggest union in the country, with potentially the most power, the single biggest donor to Labour, to change our election date. It’s letting Labour off the hook, with its agreement, no doubt.

It was last September that this first raised its head, when Len McCluskey asked the executive council to change the rule book in line with legislation - the rule book said that 65 is the retirement age - and the NEC agreed. Well, that was with one person in mind, wasn’t it? And the second rule change he put to them was to raise the number of branch nominations required to stand for general secretary from 50 to 100. That was preparing the ground to make it another ‘closed’ election. That is just so wrong, it beggars belief. So, in changing the rule book to permit the general secretary to remain in post until 67, the union has accepted the raising of the retirement age - there will be no campaign to bring it back down to 65, let alone reduce it to 60. That won’t be a demand on Labour.

Of course, the Socialist Party talks about a new workers’ party - mind you, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition candidate didn’t do very well in Eastleigh, did he? But my position on Labour is a lot different from McCluskey’s. He believes it can be reclaimed. Well, I think that, if McCluskey wins, then over the next two years we’ll hear not more rhetoric about “civil disobedience” and industrial action, but less.

The main beneficiary of the date change (apart from McCluskey, of course, who hopes to get an extra two years as a result) is ultimately Labour, not our members. And Labour will put the pressure on McCluskey not to have demonstrations in London in the lead-up to the general election. If you capitulate on these first requests, where does that leave you?

What exactly is your position on the Labour link then, Jerry?
 I don’t call for disaffiliation, although that might be a consequence. I don’t believe it can be reclaimed - I think it’s beyond the pale. But I acknowledge that that’s where millions of working class people look to. They’re disappointed and betrayed, but they still look to Labour.

My argument is not complicated, but a little more nuanced. I say from the onset that we should support only those MPs, councillors and candidates who support our policies. Our policy is to oppose PFI, so I would have immediately stopped funding those Labour MPs who voted for that. Len McCluskey talks about civil disobedience against the cuts - well, it seems to me inconceivable that we should be backing Labour councillors who vote through cuts.

Any Labour MPs or councillors who do the wrong thing by us - by which I mean the million and a half Unite members and seven million members of TUC unions - should not

be supported. If we are against tuition fees why should we support MPs who vote for it? I think the RMT back half a dozen Labour MPs who call for the renationalisation of rail - very sensible.

Our affiliation fees are astronomical. I know it’s Labour Party rules, but we’ve paid £6 million in the last few years. We should renegotiate that. But the real strong point I make is to support only those who support our policies. We should keep our money in a clenched fist, not hand over fist. But I don’t call for disaffiliation.

I broadly agree with you on that. I also agree that we can’t ‘reclaim’ Labour - it was never ours. However, if it’s possible to ‘reclaim’ the unions - Labour’s paymasters - for rank-and-file workers, then surely it must be possible to make the Labour Party ours. It would be a different beast from the one we have seen up to now. In other words, there’s still a job to be done in Labour.

Well, yes, there is, but there are two ways of approaching it. My feeling is that, if we had a policy in line with what I’m suggesting, more MPs and more councillors would back our policy to get our support. We pay for the offices, the legwork, the leafleting, the campaigns.

But there’s a cost for that. If the next prospective Labour candidate doesn’t commit to our policy, then why should we back them? I’d like to see more trade unionists standing, so you only get our support if you’re one of us or if you agree with us. All we got at the last general election was a safe seat for Jack Dromey, our deputy general secretary. That’s outrageous. It should have been a workplace rep, a convenor or someone from one of our national committees with a history of struggle.

So it’s the other way around, if you like - with such a policy, they would come towards *us*.

Are there any other policies you want to mention?

Yes, just a couple of things. I’m against nuclear waste and I certainly believe in green energy. Just as Germany is fast approaching the millionth job created, I think Britain should be, if you like, the Saudi Arabia of green energy. We should have a strategy emanating from the unions of putting pressure on the Labour Party to achieve a million green jobs in design, manufacturing and construction.

A Severn barrage, for example, would create tens of thousands of jobs, and cheap, safe energy. And we’d fill our factories as a result because

we’d be manufacturing here. The 800 turbines could be made at Rolls Royce in Bristol - you wouldn’t have to transport them from across the world. That takes us back to Vestas and what they produced in turbine blades.

We’re surrounded by sea and the tide comes in and out, the wind blows and sometimes the sun shines. So you could, with joined-up thinking, create one million climate jobs, with the potential for one million union members. We could be a world leader instead of a world follower. I think Scotland is talking about being a net exporter of energy by 2020 because they’re harnessing the sea. We really do need to take advantage of what’s on our doorstep.

That doesn’t take a genius, but it does take somebody with the belief in it.

You came second in the last two elections. Have you got a chance of winning this time?

I know we have every chance of winning, but I also know that it’s the most uneven of contests - brought forward three years, fast-tracked, with a short nomination and ballot period and less postal days than in any other election. All those things are against me.

But I know this: there is a healthy cynicism towards the establishment, big salaries and ‘say one thing, do another’. But I’m not part of that. I believe that if sufficient numbers - and my objective is to increase the turnout - open that ballot paper they’ll see the contrast and we’ll get the vote. Unite has 1.5 million members, but at the moment 85 out of every hundred don’t know there’s an election on, don’t see the point or have no intention of voting. But if I can get to just one percent of those, that would mean 15,000 extra members voting. Take that to four percent and it’s an extra 60,000 votes.

So I know that if members open up those ballot papers, they’ll see the contrast. They know the scale of the crisis and what’s required - it’s not more of the same, but *more*. And that’s what I’m offering - not less, not the same, but more. More member control, more say, more democracy, more support for coordinated action ●

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Notes

- www.facebook.com/The14thNovemberMovementLeftPartyUk/posts/305865966201298.
- www.socialistparty.org.uk/keyword/Trade_union_figures/Len_McCluskey/15886/03-01-2013/unite-the-union-general-secretary-election.
- www.socialistparty.org.uk/partydoc/What_We_Stand_For.

Appeal from the editor

After a couple of weeks of receiving a few, but very large, donations to our legal fund, a good number of smaller contributions have started to come in. Three comrades (JB, PB and LW) donated £30 and two (JA and RL) £20. TB and JR gave us £10 each, while AS and AH came up with £5.

The total of £160 this week takes us over £2,000 - to £2,130, to be precise. The bad news is, we still do not know the final size of the out-of-court settlement reached following the publication of an article a year ago (see ‘Unreserved apology’, February 7). But it is expected to be a substantial sum, so it is essential that everyone who can helps us reach the final figure.

The *Weekly Worker* never knowingly publishes falsehoods, and in the event of inaccuracies our open letters pages are available - in particular to activists involved

in the working class movement - for immediate rebuttal and/or retraction. However, in this case we were obliged to pay £1,000 in damages plus costs.

Please send your contributions, marked ‘Legal appeal’, to *Weekly Worker*, BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX. Alternatively, transfer your donation directly to our account (sort code: 30-99-64; account: 00744310) or via our website using PayPal. Please ensure you inform us of the purpose of the transfer.

Comrades wanting to approach, for example, their union branch for donations can now download our appeal, together with a draft motion calling for support, from our website (see link below) ●

Peter Manson

www.cpgb.org.uk/home/weekly-worker/online-only/weekly-worker-legal-appeal-template-letter-and-motion

weekly Worker

**‘One nation’
Labour comes
poor fourth**

Snapshot of political failure

Tory fortunes look very rocky at the moment. First the UK’s ‘gold-plated’ credit rating was downgraded, which exposed George Osborne as an emperor with no clothes or coherent economic strategy. Now David Cameron has suffered the humiliation of seeing the Tory candidate in the February 28 Eastleigh by-election beaten into third place by the United Kingdom Independence Party, an organisation he once dismissed - and maybe still does privately - as “fruitcakes, loonies and closet racists mostly”.

When Nigel Farage, Ukip’s leader - if not dictator - stood in the 1994 Eastleigh by-election, he polled just 952 votes (1.7%). But this time his candidate, Diana James, secured 27.8% of the vote (11,571 votes) - barely 4% behind the official winner of the contest, Mike Thornton of the Liberal Democrats (13,342 votes). As for the Tories’ Maria Hutchings, she trailed on 10,559 votes (25.37%). Labour’s John O’Farrell came a fairly miserable fourth on 4,088 votes (9.82%).

In other words, by any objective measurement, Ukip came a *very* good second and the Tories came a very bad third - with Labour coming to a shuddering halt. Yes, we all know that by-elections are no automatic guidance to general election prospects and that there are very particular - perhaps unusual - circumstances surrounding Eastleigh: like the fact that is a ‘one-party state’ where *all* the councillors are Lib Dems. But it would be foolish and philistine to dismiss the electoral verdict on that day as a *purely* one-off phenomenon.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, by the way, received a whopping 62 votes (0.15%) - beaten into 13th place, including by candidates from the Beer, Baccy and Crummet Party, Christian Party, Monster Raving Loony Party, Peace Party and Elvis Loves Pets Party. Not so long ago, as regularly *Weekly Worker* readers will recall, the Tusc leadership absurdly argued that only organisations which had “social weight” should be allowed to field candidates under its electoral umbrella (which apparently excluded the CPGB, but not, for example, the Socialist Party in England and Wales).

Lib Dem leader Nick Clegg described Mike Thornton’s performance in Eastleigh as a “stunning” victory - the Lib Dems holding onto the seat vacated by a disgraced Chris Huhne. Yet in some respects you could argue that Eastleigh was a disaster avoided, not a triumph - stunning or otherwise. In reality the Lib Dem vote *fell* by a substantial 14.48% (to 32% of the total vote).

Indeed, the strong suspicion is that Ukip would have *won* the election if campaigning had carried on for a few more weeks - it obviously had the wind in its sails, not something you can say about the Lib Dems or the other mainstream parties. There are not many seats where the Lib Dems could survive such a drop and still come out on top. Actually, Cleggian hyperbole aside, the 14-point drop in their Eastleigh vote share since 2010 is entirely consistent with numerous opinion polls, which suggest a

nationwide collapse from 24% to something around 10% or so.

Having said that, it is the case that the Tory press mounted a concerted and not so subtle effort to halt the Lib Dems in Eastleigh. Hence the running of near endless scandalous stories about Huhne and especially Lord Rennard, whose unseemly behaviour they had known about for a long time, of course - but now was the perfectly opportune time to get the presses rolling.

The Lib Dem victory was ultimately down to the fact that they had experienced *cadre* on the ground - thus contradicting the left cliché that bourgeois parties have no contact or relationship with the local communities outside of elections and just cynically parachute in ‘outsiders’ or high-profile candidates. Whilst this is certainly true of an outfit like Tusc, an on-off electoral alliance that treats the electorate with contempt, that is most distinctly not the case with the Lib Dems - at least in constituencies like leafy Eastleigh. Councillor Thornton’s unashamedly localist focus on traffic lights, the local bypass, etc struck a resonance with sections of the electorate - prevailing over the shrill, Tory-centric, sometimes semi-hysterical national press.

The Tories’ share of the vote fell by a similar amount to the Lib Dems (13.96%). However, the sober reality is that the Conservative Party needs to win seats such as Eastleigh if it is to have any chance of forming a government on its own in 2015 - the last time the Tories won an outright majority, they held Eastleigh with a majority of 18,000 votes.

However, as things stand now - despite the economy on the brink of a possible triple-dip recession and absolutely no recovery on the horizon - the Tories are in with a real chance of forming a majority government at the next election. Moreover, they are well placed to do a deal, either with the Lib Dems or with Ukip (but not with both). ‘One nation’ Labour certainly has nothing to smile about, as previously noted - though if you are a supreme optimist then maybe you could find

a sliver of consolation in the fact that Labour was the only mainstream party to actually *increase* its share of the vote on February 28, albeit by a less than awesome fifth of 1%. Eastleigh, when all is said and done, represents a failure of Miliband’s rebranding, especially as it was designed to appeal to southern voters.

Depressing news for Labour then. Under normal circumstances, so to speak, they would expect to occupy - and benefit electorally from - the acres of vacant space to the left of an increasingly unpopular rightwing government committed to a vicious regime of cuts, even in many ‘typical’ southern seats. It should be able to do better than a pretty pitiful 10%, putting it bluntly.

Nonetheless, the rumbles of discontent from the Tory backbenches are getting deeper and more repeated. Before Eastleigh, the prominent rightwinger, David Davis - who, of course, stood against Cameron for the Tory leadership - gravely informed *The Guardian* that the prime minister would be in “crisis” if Ukip managed to claim second place (February 22). In fact, he went on, even a Tory “close second” with Ukip on “our tail” would also be “uncomfortable”. Well, what Davis feared has come true - now comes the bitter inquest and recriminations.

Inevitably, there have been Pavlovian cries for larger tax reductions and greater spending cuts. Right on cue, the Free Enterprise group of Tory MPs have urged George Osborne to “wake up” to the “harm” caused by high taxes. Stifling tomorrow’s entrepreneurs and ‘wealth creators’. There is widespread talk from the right of challenging Cameron’s leadership if the March budget speech turns out to be disappointing from their perspective - an almost certainty - and if they also do badly in the May local elections.

So many voices are being raised saying the Tories urgently need to move to the right in order to reclaim the ground allegedly stolen from them by Ukip - start banging on about tighter immigration laws, repatriating powers from the Brussels bureaucrats, and so

on. Cameron’s recent call for a simple in-out referendum on European Union membership, though hailed by many at the time as a brilliant political manoeuvre, does not seem to have warded off the dangerous Ukip beast - at least not yet.

Expressing this anxiety, Michael Fabricant - the Tory vice-chairman who last year called for an electoral pact with Ukip - issued a series of tweets about how the Tories’ voice is “muffled and ‘not crisp’: it does not ‘clearly project’ Conservative Party ‘core policies or principles’”. For Fabricant, Ukip “clearly connected with Conservative policies” at Eastleigh. Or, as Nigel Farage put it more straightforwardly, the “real problem” the Conservatives have got is not with Ukip, but rather that their own supporters “look at a Conservative Party that used to talk about wealth creation, low tax and enterprise and it now talks about gay marriage and wind farms” and other such highly undesirable issues. Instead, back to reactionary basics.

Unhappily for the Tories though, this sort of prognosis is at best crudely simplistic and at worst plain delusional. If only life was so simple. Take a quick look at the Tories’ Eastleigh candidate, Maria Hutchings. She came across as more Ukip than Ukip’s own Diane James. Yet it counted for nothing in the end.

Such ideological crossover fatally undermines reductive political calculations predicated on a left-right see-saw. Moving to the right (or the left, for that matter), as Cameron has pointed out, will not automatically reap any benefits in the ballot box. Think again. Who exactly would be moving closer to whom and who will be trying to steal votes from whom?

Even more basically still, as Farage noted quite correctly, such an idea is based on “false arithmetic” - posited on the premise that Ukip is *only* picking up disaffected Tory voters. Obviously not the case. According to Farage’s

calculations, which sound plausible, merely a third of the Ukip vote came from unhappy Tories. Cameron, on the other hand, has concluded - far from illogically - that he is doing the right thing by sticking to the ‘sensible’ centre-right ground. Keep on hugging those hoodies and loving gays.

Ukip’s emerging ‘anti-politics’ politics are more akin to Beppe Grillo’s Five Star Movement in Italy - and all the more potentially dangerous for that, given his virulently reactionary, anti-trade union/immigrant views. This, of course, utterly confounds the Socialist Workers Party’s contention that the FSM is somehow leftwing. If that is so, then so is Ukip - perhaps *Socialist Worker* should urge the working class to ‘critically’ vote for Nigel Farage in 2015.

Eddie Ford

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Nigel Farage: very good second

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