

weekly worker



SWP: from no-platforming the BNP to being no-platformed over Delta rape allegations

- Imperialism
- PCS strike
- Italy stalemate
- Free Derry

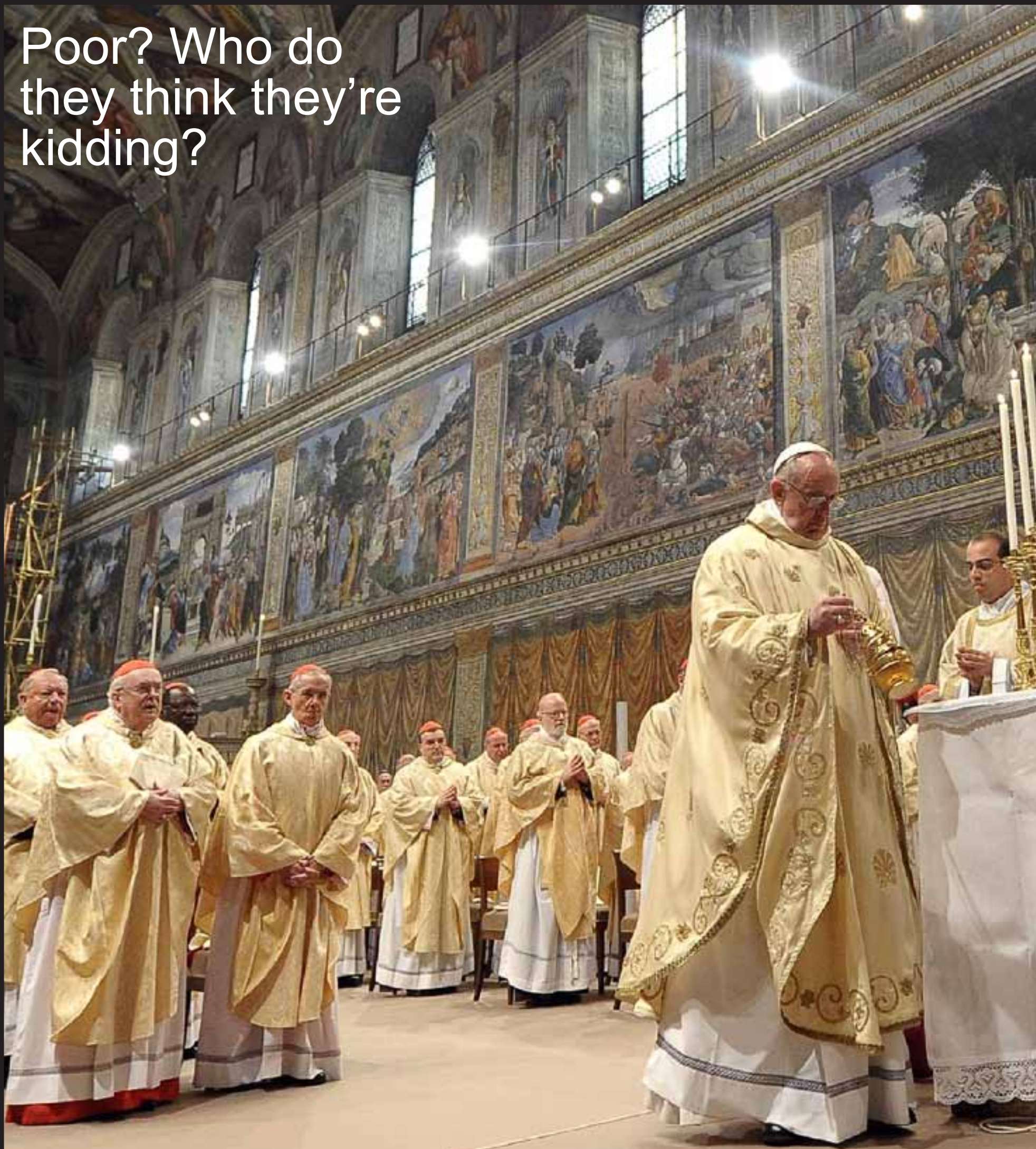
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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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Poor? Who do they think they're kidding?



LETTERS



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

Safe space

One of the benefits of reading the *Weekly Worker* is usually that it enables us to avoid Nick Cohen's opinion completely. However, fans of bourgeois Sunday supplement commentary can rely on Paul Demarty to perform the double function of bringing together the worst anti-left nonsense from the most trite of the columns, while echoing their bitchy, provocative and irrelevant style. In his quest to become the Marxist Melanie Phillips, Demarty has produced an article which is as meandering and poorly written as it is wrong ('Rape is not the problem', March 14). Has debate in the *Weekly Worker* really fallen so low?

Though it is tedious that comrade Demarty constantly sets out to adopt the bourgeois mode of news production - to provoke commentary through the most childish form of name-calling - it also reveals a dangerous aversion to any degree of constructive debate which might emerge from the Socialist Workers Party rape cover-up. Putting the expression 'safe space' into inverted commas does not make this reasonable concept ridiculous. Such spaces may not of themselves be political, but comrade Demarty might usefully ask himself how political any space is likely to be in which participants have a real fear of rape or other violence.

Comrade Demarty adopts the unappealing habit of the SWP central committee in using 'feminism' as a term of abuse, and dismisses nine counts of alleged sexual abuse as "a pretty good hit rate" - is this a facetious slip-up or a genuinely naive statement? Even within a context of opposition to token reformism, this is a vile and misogynist claim. He claims that "nowhere is completely safe for women" - yet sound political organising can only be carried out in as close as possible an emulation of the future we envisage for all men and women. If this carries within itself a risk that our alienated sexual relations might lead to coercion and violence, that is no subject for mockery: rather it is a case for feminist organising now and in the future.

For clarification on the question of rape denial, comrade Demarty might consider that in seeking to find supposedly mitigating circumstances for 'comrade Delta's' alleged rape of a teenager, the SWP disputes committee demonstrated clearly that some rapes are widely perceived as being less serious crimes than others - those where the rapist and victim are already in a sexual relationship, for example, or where the victim may have been drunk or drinking.

Within both bourgeois and leftwing debate on rape and rape culture, those involved are continually portrayed as guilty or innocent, good or bad, or, to put it starkly, 'rapists' or 'heroes'. Julian Assange is responsible for a major breakthrough in freedom of information: he may still be a rapist; George Galloway shows occasional streaks of sound political pragmatism: he is certainly nonetheless a proponent of misogyny. We are complex products of society, and therefore behave in complex ways. In no situation does this preclude rape from being either 'a' or 'the' problem. Childish headlines like this merely emphasise the growing distance between comrade Demarty and all reasonable projection of rational human relations, including freedom from sexual violence, now and after the revolution.

The correct action now for every political group is to develop a robust and transparent strategy for dealing with rape and violence allegations,

which refuses to risk victimising the victim and which puts women's and men's safety first. Until every leftwing group and institution can provide a safe organising space to all its members, the potential for large-scale organising will remain drastically diminished for at least one half of the working class.

Frances Grahl, Gwendolen Grahl, Josephine Grahl
email

Rape sanity

I'm writing to thank Paul Demarty for his superb article. It seems patently obvious that the issue surrounding 'comrade Delta' was founded in the SWP's unhealthy 'cult of authority', as opposed to any underlying 'culture' of rape encouragement - a suggestion which anyone with any internal experience of the organisation should immediately find laughably absurd. If anything, in recent years, the SWP has been far *too* sensitive to accusations of sexism, racism and the rest!

Worse still than the 'new wave' feminists finding patriarchy in scattered cultural fragments is that they also presume it as a pathological, psychological condition - something unavoidable and deeply ingrained into men's psyche. This creates a situation where it is impossible to disprove accusations of sexism or racism once made - the accused must simply 'take on board' criticisms and 'be more self-aware' in future.

The greatest irony is that hypersensitivity to such cultural and psychological 'signifiers' of underlying attitudes has been part and parcel of the central committee's recent battle against democracy: accusations of racism, bigotry and sexism have been to the SWP in the last decade what accusations of 'Trotskyism' once were to the former CPGB. A never-ending witch-hunt, chasing after phantoms and creating such a hysterical internal atmosphere of constant denunciation that coherent critiques of the leadership's increasingly unaccountable position were made impossible. The number of members fighting for democracy and slandered with such epithets as 'racist', 'homophobic' and 'bigoted' was ridiculous. So it's exactly these theories which enabled the lack of accountability, which allowed the sexual harassment and following cover-up to ensue!

So thank you for your injection of sanity into proceedings and I hope the inevitable flak won't be too unbearable.

Carl Stanley
email

Aunty Tom

I was pleased to read Paul Demarty's refreshingly sensible and balanced article about the allegation of rape against a member of the SWP.

I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that certain sections of the left appear to have been gripped by some form of mass hysteria ever since the allegations against Julian Assange broke cover. The discourse goes something like this: if you dare cast doubt on the veracity of each and every claim of sexual abuse, then you are clearly an apologist for said abuse. Female activists like myself are latter-day Uncle Toms within this narrative. I am confident your mailbox will be full of emails accusing you of all manner of thought crimes.

However, I wish you had applied the same rigid logic to the accusations of domestic violence against Steve Hedley of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union. I declare a personal interest here: Steve is the partner of my youngest daughter and I know him well.

What you omitted to say in your piece was that the allegations of domestic violence against Steve Hedley of the RMT were thoroughly

investigated by the police and he was not charged with any offence. The RMT investigation, the results of which will be published soon, was not launched because the RMT was dissatisfied with the outcome of the police investigation, as some have implied, but because Steve's accuser also made an official complaint to the union. It is duty-bound to investigate, as it would any grievance or complaint.

It is a strange kind of logic that deems it fit to criticise the SWP for not referring the rape allegation to the police, yet at the same time ignores the outcome of the police investigation into the allegations against Steve. It appears that some now hope for an outcome from an internal labour movement investigation that is more in keeping with their ready-formed opinion that he is guilty as charged and that women must always 'be believed' regardless of the evidence. This is the mentality of the lynch mob.

Pam Woods
email

Dinosaur

Needless to say, I agree with much of what Camilla Power says ('Is feminism a dirty word?' *Weekly Worker* March 14). Rape is important. Rape is a vile crime. Rape cannot in any way be tolerated.

There is no argument here, of course, with the SWP either. What its leadership must be criticised for is not that it promotes rape. No, it was that it bungled a particular rape allegation. Trial by mates, saying that a line had been drawn under it by a narrow conference vote, triggered a rebellion in its ranks, a rebellion we have *critically* supported.

Yes, as we have insisted, there is more to the SWP crisis than the Delta case. Instead of tilting against ill-defined notions of macho culture, we have consistently presented a concrete programme of democratisation, open debate and accountability. We have also shown the necessity of breaking with the dead-end 'transitional' programmes of the sects and their fake fronts.

However, there are some important areas of disagreements between myself and comrade Power. Disagreements that need debating. She describes herself as an "anarcho-Marxist". To me that is like saying you are a nationalist Marxist or a black-separatist Marxist. Anarchism and Marxism are antithetical: two different viewpoints, two different programmes, two different practices. Hence Proudhon vs Marx, Bakunin vs Marx, Chomsky vs Marx. Etc.

Comrade Power also describes herself as a feminist. Well and good, if by that she means women's liberation. However, she goes on to write about women constituting "a class", a class which she says will lead in the fight for social transformation. Illusory, in my opinion.

Here I am definitely with that 'dinosaur', Alexandra Kollontai. Yes, the Alexandra Kollontai who fought the "poison of feminism". She insisted on the primacy of class, not sex: "The women's world is divided, just as is the world of men, into two camps; the interests and aspirations of one group of women bring it close to the bourgeois class, while the other group has close connections with the proletariat, and its claims for liberation encompass a full solution to the women's question. Thus, although both camps follow the general slogan of the 'liberation of women', their aims and interests are different."

Jack Conrad
London

Ad feminem

Camilla Power's defence of feminism is intriguing. In effect, she argues that Marx and Engels were early

feminists and that Marxists today should become feminists. She proves that Marx and Engels were deeply committed to women's liberation and presents feminist ideas as a positive development of their views on sex and class. These include the notions that women have the potential to become a class through exerting collective control over their sexuality; and that Marxists should give the attack on men's control over women's sexuality as high a priority as their critique of capital's exploitation of the labour-power of workers.

I agree with her that rape and the sexual harassment of women are crucial political issues and that women's collective control over their sexuality is a necessary goal for their liberation. I disagree with her that this has the potential to make women into a class. As she suggests, the leadership of a self-defined socialist group that colludes with, covers up and practises the rape and sexual harassment of its members is not only politically divisive, but also a symptom of the moral decrepitude of late capitalism. However, it does not follow from the persistence of abusive sexist patterns in leftwing political groups that women who resist and expose these are the embryonic leadership of a class with the potential to liberate all women and - by implication - humanity as a whole.

Power forgets to mention that the notion of men as an exploiting class and women as an exploited class capable of organising mass sex strikes has its origin in radical feminism - in particular the work of Shulamith Firestone in the 1970s. It remains a plausible idea because pre-capitalist relations of master and slave, and lord and serf are reproduced within familial relations between husbands and wives and parents and children.

Power fails to mention that relations in the bourgeois family are free from the commodity form. This is evident in the fact that housework and childcare are not productive of value and do not have exchange value (unless bought from the domestic labour market outside the family). The direct dependence that children have on their parents and that adults have on each other within the family explains how relations mirror and preserve pre-capitalist forms of oppression. Nonetheless, when supported by the use of labour-saving and reproductive technologies, dependent family relations can also hint at the egalitarian relations of the socialist future.

Powers's defence of feminism fails to consider the nature of the movement she wishes to include Marx and Engels within. Contemporary feminism is the doctrine that women's liberation will be achieved through the collective self-activity of women. Men are excluded from participation within this activity. It is argued that men's interests are to control and dominate women. They cannot be trusted. Anti-sexist men are either wolves in sheep's clothing or surprising anomalies.

Feminism is therefore a partial solution to a global problem. It is partial in that it prioritises women's liberation over the liberation of other groups. The global problem is the ending of all forms of oppression and the liberation of humanity through the formation of proletarian collectivity, the abolition of the rule of capital and the establishment of socialism. Feminism, on the other hand, is a utopian doctrine that expresses a false form of universalism.

Feminism promotes the unity of women of different classes in a struggle for freedom from rape, sexual harassment and other examples of male violence. It plays down struggles that divide women on class lines such as demands for 24-hour, free childcare, full employment and the abolition of

alienated domestic labour. The pseudo-universality of feminism extends to the idea that if women became a ruling class they would end capitalism, war and class division. These positions follow from Power's arguments that "the first and foremost target for revolutionary attack" is the "private oppression of female by male" and that the class relation has its origin in men's control of women's sexuality.

How has contemporary feminism been able to usurp Marxism's claims for universal liberation? The answer lies in the devastating effect that Stalinism had on Marxism in general and the Marxist commitment to women's liberation in particular. Stalinists argued that women were liberated in the former USSR. They alleged women were fully integrated in the workforce and had access to free childcare. Individuals with knowledge of the condition of Soviet women rightly argued that they continued to be doubly oppressed at work and at home.

Contemporary feminism arose during the cold war as a response to the perceived failure of socialism to liberate women. The authoritarian nature of Stalinist parties disciplined those who challenged the line. This was contradictory. Women's liberation had been achieved under socialism. It would be achieved at a distant date in the future, when socialism was superseded by communism. Within this environment, physical and sexual abuse were final forms of discipline. When women complained about the roles they were expected to play as tea ladies, childminders and sex objects, they were excluded, ostracised and subject to *ad feminem* attacks.

Contemporary feminism adapted to an atmosphere of despair and fear created by Stalinism. Critical women were denounced as bourgeois feminists and therefore agents of the class enemy. Some feminists adopted a strategy for women's liberation inspired by the Stalinist doctrine of two stages of national liberation. The first stage was the struggle for women's equal rights; the second was the struggle for a non-oppressive alternative to capitalism. As the movement became more preoccupied with the former, the latter dropped out of view.

It is arguable that feminism is a spent force and that its utopian nature is self-evident. It is true that feminism has fragmented collectively. Its theoretical foundations were eclectic to start with and it has adapted to post-Stalinist intellectual currents, such as post-modernism and post-structuralism. However, as long as there are Marxist groups yet to engage in the house-cleaning needed to remove the rotting rubbish left over from Stalinism, male leaders will be tempted to abuse their institutional positions of power to oppress women. Feminism will thrive as a result.

Feminist scholars have made an important contribution to world culture. Some have documented the extent of women's oppression in a declining capitalism. Others have also recorded the history of women's involvement in struggles from below. This literature includes Power's anthropological fieldwork on tribes such as the Hadza hunter-gathers in Tanzania. Power reminds Marxists of the centrality of women as producers and reproducers. Marxists will appropriate this literature critically in their struggle to develop a thoroughgoing anti-sexist practice.

Critical reflection and study will lead eventually to a growth of a new literature on women's liberation. This will be Marxist, not feminist.

Paul B Smith
email

Alpha-males

Reading your debate on the importance (or not) of alpha-males in

evolutionary terms made me reflect that perhaps the thinking tackle of alpha individuals may be more relevant than their sexual gear.

A few years back I watched a documentary about baboons. At a key time of the year, millions of rice grains are washed up onto the shore at the base of their mountainous jungle home. This was obviously some long awaited treat, as hundreds of baboons come down from the mountains to pick up the rice from the sand. The families include large numbers of females with their babies. The task is quite painstaking, with delicate selection of the rice grain out of the sandy beach.

The camera happened to focus on a particular female who the film crew knew to be particularly intelligent. You could almost see her brain working, as she weighed up the labour-intensive, literally nit-picking exercise. At length she alone picks up two large handfuls of sand and rice grains and, with her babe clinging to her, she wades into the sea, and drops the materials into the water. At once the sand sinks and the rice floats. She and her baby are able to eat rice by the handful rather than grain by grain. It took about an hour before every monkey on that beach watched and learned from her example.

Now I consider myself a fairly alpha-male, but I know for certain I'd have starved to death before I had discovered such an ingenious method of maximising food intake in the way that female monkey did.

David Douglass
South Shields

Full frontal

The Left Front Art Collective congratulates Callum Williamson of Communist Students on the inclusion in his manifesto for the University of Westminster students union election of the following: “Stop criminalising youth: legalise all drugs! For free abortion on demand, provision of non-moralistic sexual education and counselling services for the youth. Protect the rights of individuals to enter into any consensual sexual relationships of their choice” (“Taking a stand for communism”, March 14).

If only the rest of the left could adopt the same enlightened position, and say so, rather than associate communism with ‘moralism’ - especially around sex and consensual sexual relationships.

Anton Johnson
Left Front Art Collective

Unsanctioned

Ex-dictator of Argentina Jorge Videla is calling for a new coup against the government of president Kirchner. When the Argentinean army took power in a coup on March 24 1976, general Videla was designated president. He is now in the prison of Marcos Paz, sentenced to two life terms plus 50 years.

He denies that 30,000 people were killed under his dictatorship. He considers himself a political prisoner and denounces the “dictatorial procedures of Kirschnerism and its followers”.

In 1995 captain Adolfo Scilongo confessed that he had thrown 30 people, who had been drugged, from airplanes into the ocean. According to him, the Catholic army chaplains afterwards consoled him and other murderers in similar missions that they were “separating the chaff from the wheat”.

Currently in prison is a priest, Christian Von Wernich, sentenced for his involvement in 34 kidnappings, 37 cases of torture and seven murders in his religious functions. However, he continues to perform mass inside the prison, as the church has never sanctioned him. This is in contrast to the church’s sanctions against Yorio and Jalics, priests of the Theology of Liberation, who were removed from their positions by Jorge Bergoglio - now pope - and apparently handed over

to the military to be tortured.

Earl Gilman
email

Playing politics

On March 3, Class Wargames hosted a games-playing session in the basement of the Firebox cafe in London. Over the course of this spring afternoon, the political struggles of the 1789 French Revolution were played out on the board of Martin Wallace’s *Liberté*.

In this game’s opening phase, as happened in history, it was the liberals who prevailed over the guardians of monarchy and superstition. Then, as the conflict intensified during the next round, the republicans emerged from third place to seize control of Paris and - within a few moves - take over the whole country. Best of all, learning from the mistakes of the past, Napoleon Bonaparte had been sent to the guillotine in this ludic recreation of the revolution. Our Sunday afternoon of leftie gaming in a Trotskyist cafe was coming to a most appropriate conclusion. This time around, the Jacobin republic had won.

In other attempts to simulate these tumultuous events in late 18th century France, the different players take on the role of the rival factions or personalities. You are the leader of the red republicans - and your task is to move your pieces around the board until you’ve beaten the blue liberals and white monarchists. Martin Wallace’s game slyly subverts this familiar trope of historical re-enactment. Instead of having each person restricted to playing one of the rival factions, *Liberté* allows everyone to have a go at being a little Louis XVI, Lafayette or Robespierre. France is divided into different provinces and - during your move - you can choose to commit your forces to fighting for monarchical reaction in one region, while simultaneously championing liberal moderation and republican radicalism in other areas of the board. The players of *Liberté* are leaders of occult conspiracies who are competing to manipulate the contending factions of the 1789 French revolution. In Martin Wallace’s game, the liberals almost always come out on top during the opening rounds - and the republicans in its concluding phase. The trick is to be on the winning side at the correct moment. Whichever party dominates, your conspiracy must be in charge.

While playing the game and in the pub afterwards, the political meaning of *Liberté* was a constant topic of discussion. If nothing else, recognising and talking about the characters and factions featured on its cards was a history lesson in itself. More interesting were the ideological assumptions embedded within the game’s mechanics. By enabling each of the players to be monarchists, liberals and republicans at the same time, Wallace was echoing the paranoid fantasies of Hippolyte Taine and other 19th century Catholic historians, who blamed the social upheavals of the 1789 French Revolution on malevolent conspiracies of freemasons, Jacobins and Jews.

However, we reckoned that *Liberté* owed much more to those bizarre websites which denounce the elite members of the Illuminati who are plotting to subjugate humanity to the new world order. Left and right, big business and big government, they’re all controlled by shape-shifting lizards. Similarly, as players of *Liberté*, you act as the dark forces which give the orders to the politicians, generals and agitators who are directing the revolution. So, we wondered over a pint later on, does this mean that Wallace has invented an inherently conservative game? This time, the Jacobin republic might have won, but the players’ moves that had culminated in this heartening result were realising a reactionary logic. In this cynical reading of history, duty to the king, the rights of man and the one-and-indivisible republic had become

nothing more than empty ideological slogans of rival conspiracies struggling for power.

Yet, ironically, it was precisely this reactionary model of the 1789 revolution that had enabled its players to share the experience of leading the monarchist, liberal and republican causes. When the Jacobin republic won, everyone around the table in the Firebox cafe had contributed to its victory.

Back in 2007, one of our main motivations for founding Class Wargames was boredom with stereotypical ways of thinking about radical politics. In the back of Len Bracken’s biography of Guy Debord, we’d come across the almost forgotten rules of *The game of war*. As well as providing thrilling contests with down-to-the-last-move finishes, his ludic masterpiece was also - most wonderfully - a smart lesson in situationist theory. Over the years, our participatory performances of *The game of war* have revealed the political effectiveness of this seductive combination of playing and reasoning. First-time contestants are always curious to find out whether or not Debord had succeeded in turning *The society of the spectacle* into a board game.

Of course, what puzzles many people is why he didn’t invent a simulation of May 68. Instead, the two sides in *The game of war* are commanding pieces which represent the military trinity of Napoleonic warfare: infantry, cavalry and artillery. But, once they start playing the game, its situationist logic soon becomes apparent. North and south are rival cybernetic systems. The winner is not the person who can take the most pieces, but the one who can fatally break their opponent’s network. By the time that the match is decided at our participatory performances, both sides will have understood that *The game of war* is Debord’s theory in ludic form.

In these times of austerity economics and imperialist wars, the more po-faced members of the left dismiss playing games as frivolous and infantile. However, as Debord well realised, the class enemy has no such inhibitions. Simulations are an essential tool for planning military expeditions, deciding business investments and plotting political power-grabs. Debord conceived of *The game of war* as a *détournement* of these ludic manifestations of spectacular capitalism. He created a set of rules which would train revolutionary activists in Carl von Clausewitz’s military precepts for successful strategy and tactics. Just as importantly, he’d invented an entertaining game to be played in bars and cafes of the more proletarian and bohemian neighbourhoods. As this inveterate drinker would have appreciated, our participatory performances of *The game of war* are much improved when accompanied by generous supplies of alcohol!

Class Wargames invites you to join us at one of these Sunday afternoon sessions at Firebox. We’re also open to invites to host participatory performances in your own town or city. Above all, we would urge leftists to enjoy playing political games together. What better metaphor can there be for socialists resolving their sectarian squabbles than moving pieces over a board? We can only successfully argue with each other by agreeing to observe the rules of the game without too much cheating. Competition requires cooperation. In honoured memory of Guy Debord, Class Wargames is proud to proclaim its world-historical mission: playing politics as the ludic guide to intelligent communist thinking. Proletarians of all nations, unite and fight on the game board!

Richard Barbrook
www.classwargames.net

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 24, 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’; section 4: ‘In Manufacture and society’. Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk.

Ten years on

Thursday March 21, 7pm: Public meeting - ‘Confronting war 10 years on’. Danum Hotel, High Street, Doncaster. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk.

Queers Against the Cuts

Thursday March 21, 7pm: LGBTQ anti-cuts group meeting, Vida Walsh Centre, 2B Saltoun Road, London SW2. Organised by Queers Against the Cuts: www.queersagainstthecuts.wordpress.com.

End the blacklist

Saturday March 23, 10.30am to 4pm: AGM, Faraday House, 48-51 Old Gloucester Street, London WC1. Organised by Blacklist Support group: www.hazards.org/blacklistblog.

Campaign for trade union freedom

Saturday March 23, 1.30pm: Campaign launch rally, Friends Meeting House, 173 Euston Road, London NW1. Organised by Campaign for Trade Union Freedom: www.tradeunionfreedom.co.uk.

Wales fights austerity

Saturday March 23, 10am to 3pm: Conference, Cardiff University, Park Place, Cardiff CF10. Organised by Unite the Resistance: www.uniteresist.org.

Barnet spring

Saturday March 23, 11am: Anti-cuts protest. Assemble Finchley Central station, Station Road, London N3 for march to Friern Barnet Community Library. Organised by Barnet Anti-Cuts Alliance: www.barnetalliance.org.uk.

No to privatisation

Monday March 25, 1pm: Meeting, Sussex University, Sussex House, Southern Ring Road, Falmer, Brighton. Organised by Sussex Against Privatization: www.sussexagainstoprivatization.wordpress.com.

Sex Workers Open University

Glasgow Friday April 5 to Wednesday April 10: Festival, Strathclyde University, Richmond Street, Glasgow G1. Organised by Sex Workers Open University: www.swou.org.

Stop the War

Sunday April 5, 6pm: Fundraiser, Royal Court Theatre, Sloane Square, London SW1. Evening of performances, music and comedy for the anti-war movement. Tickets from £20: 020 7565 5000 or www.royalcourttheatre.com. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk.

Class Wargames

Sunday April 7, 1pm to 6pm: Playing of classic political board games. The Firebox, 106-108 Cromer Street, London WC1. This week’s game is Jim Dunnigan’s *Chicago!*, *Chicago!* Organised by Class Wargames: www.classwargames.net.

Fighting austerity

Saturday April 13, 10.30am to 5pm: Unite the Resistance north-west regional conference, Mechanics Institute, Princess Street, Manchester M1. £5 waged, £2 unwaged. Organised by Unite the Resistance: www.uniteresist.org.

Defend gay rights

Saturday April 13, 12 noon: LGBTQ caucus meeting. ULU, Malet Street, London WC1. Organised by the Labour Representation Committee: www.l-r-c.org.uk.

Cuts, privatisation and employment rights

Wednesday April 17, 9.30am to 3.45pm: Educational event for public sector trade unionists, Hamilton House Mabledon Place, London WC1. Organised by Institute of Employment Rights: www.ier.org.uk.

Ground killer drones

Saturday April 27, 12 noon: Protest march. Assemble Lincoln station for march to rally at RAF Waddington, 2pm. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk.

People’s assembly against austerity

Saturday June 22, 9.30am to 5pm, Conference. Central Hall Westminster, Storey’s Gate, London SW1. Organised by Coalition of Resistance: www.coalitionofresistance.org.uk.

CPGB wills

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

POPE

Silence equals complicity

Far from being a new broom or 'reformer', writes **Eddie Ford**, the new pope is a reactionary to his marrow

Unless you possess a very strong stomach, mainstream media coverage of the new pope (aka Jorge Mario Bergoglio) has been truly revolting. A tidal wave of idiotic, euphoric banality. Then again, what else do you expect from the likes of the BBC, which always genuflects before anything that appears strong, powerful and ancient?

Clearly, the Argentinian-born former archbishop of Buenos Aires, Francis I, is the most holy and marvellous human being ever to have lived - or so it would seem if we swallowed the line emanating from a stupefied media. After getting the top job on March 13, coming first in the weird conclave elections, Francis declared that he would "like to see a church that is poor and is for the poor" - which was immediately presented as evidence of his profundity. As if littering your speeches and sermons with such references or with 'peace', 'forgiveness', etc is anything new - it just comes with the job description. *All* the previous 265 popes did the same.

Similarly, we were meant to be overwhelmed with awe by the fact that during his inaugural mass on March 18 he urged the 200,000 packed into St Peter's Square - and the 1.2 billion Catholics worldwide - to "defend" not just the poor, but the environment - to do everything they can to "protect creation". Deep. A little bit of tenderness, Francis remarked, could "open up a horizon of hope". Doubtlessly another sign of his theological genius and near divine humility.

In his inaugural mass, Francis told a slightly revealing anecdote. Whilst in conclave, with the votes being counted and things seeming, in his own words, a "bit dangerous", the cardinal sitting next to him - an old friend from Brazil - embraced him and said: "Don't forget the poor". The new holy father added that the reminder had made him think of none other than St Francis, a man "who wanted a poor church". According to a star-struck *Guardian*, adopting the name of Francis was a "clear signal" by Bergoglio of his desire to "reset the priorities" of the embattled Catholic church (March 16).

All this professed concern for the poor is pure hypocrisy. The official Christian attitude towards the oppressed and exploited, whether it be the Church of England or the Catholic establishment, is essentially encapsulated by the saying attributed to Jesus: "The poor will always be with us". Of course, for communists this is an utter obscenity - both to believe that class society is eternal and also to ascribe such a wretchedly reactionary position to the apocalyptic revolutionary communist Galilean, Jesus - a Jewish Spartacus who wanted to *abolish* class society, not ameliorate it or appease the oppressors.

No, the Catholic church stands indicted - and so does Francis I. Just like the ghastly Mother Theresa, he *needs* the poor to permanently exist in order to elevate himself into the religious aristocracy. He would be out of a job if the poor disappeared. 'When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why they are poor, they call me a communist' - so goes a famous adage of the Brazilian archbishop, Dom Hélder Câmara. Acceptance, not questioning. Suffering is good for the soul.

The Catholic Church and Vatican City is *groaning* with wealth beyond

the dreams of avarice. Unlike the Church of England, it does not publish any properly audited accounts, so trying to establish the exact size and magnitude of its wealth is extremely difficult - and many have tried. But what you can say with absolute certainty is that, while the CoE may have millions, the Catholic Church has many *billions*. Vatican City itself, a peculiar city-state, is wealthier than some countries. Redistribute all that wealth to the poor and needy? You must be joking.

New broom?

An absurd narrative is being built up, in which Francis is some sort new broom or 'reformer' with a radical agenda. He will sweep away the sex scandals, institutionalised corruption, etc. Also, a man who will turn his back on the ostentatious wealth and vulgar papal trappings of his predecessors. Someone who will be different. He is, after all, the first ever Jesuit to become pope.

To this end, we have been repeatedly told about his supposed modesty. How archbishop Bergoglio rode the *number 70 bus* several times a year instead of using the chauffeur-driven car. How he walked in *normal* priest's robes through dangerous neighbourhoods to celebrate mass at the tiny makeshift church of the Virgin of Caacupé. How he gave up the church palace in favour of a modest flat, where he *cooked for himself*. How he told his fellow bishops in Argentina not to waste their money on travelling to Rome for his installation ceremony, but to give the money instead to the poor. How he even had a (female) sweetheart once. Just like us.

In case you had not got the picture

yet, accounts of the inauguration ceremony emphasise his 'radicalism'. When he was presented with his papal pallium made of lambs' wool, symbolising his role as shepherd, he also received the 'fisherman's ring' bearing the image of St Peter holding two keys. We are told that the ring is second-hand and made of silver-plated gold, not the *solid gold* worn by the previous holders of the post - presumably Francis is slumming it now. Actually, he must be because only a few days previously he walked on to the stage of the vast Paul VI audience hall still wearing the white cassock, plain crucifix and black shoes that have characterised his fledgling papacy's "pared-down aesthetic" (*The Guardian* March 19). Man of the people.

Not only that: we learn that Francis apparently "thrilled" the crowd at the start of the mass by getting out of his popemobile to bless a disabled man in a display of papal magnanimity. *The Guardian*, once again indulging in popemania, described the event as a "gesture" from a man whose short papacy so far is becoming "defined by such spontaneous forays" and "concern for the disadvantaged". Surely it is a bit premature to bestow sainthood upon Francis already. Getting beyond ridiculous, all it takes it is a cheap piece of theatrics and large sections of the media go into rapture.

Bluntly, this is all propagandist crap. The 76-year-old Francis was not chosen because he was Argentinian or Latin American, let alone due to his claimed piety and modesty. Rather, they chose him precisely *because* of his age: he will do nothing and change nothing of substance - even if he can knock up a tasty paella

within minutes. We are also meant to forget the inconvenient fact that Francis was chosen by cardinals who had mostly been appointed by John Paul II and Benedict XVI, both ultra-reactionaries. He obviously follows in that tradition.

Interestingly, despite waiting very nearly five centuries to see one of their own on the papal throne, many Jesuits have been lukewarm at best about the pontiff - even deeply suspicious. Much of the distrust stems from Francis's six years as Jesuit leader in Argentina, a time marked by a highly authoritarian and conservative outlook that did not go down too well with many in an order that traditionally has had a large degree of autonomy from the Vatican hierarchy - which it has clashed with on many occasions. Nor has it gone unnoticed that Bergoglio allowed it to be known that he chose his papal name to honour St Francis of Assisi rather than the Jesuit saint, Francis Xavier.

Naturally, like his predecessors, the new incumbent is fiercely opposed to liberation theology and an outspoken opponent of abortion, divorce, contraception, women's rights and euthanasia. On the question of abortion, Francis has sternly lectured pregnant women that, according to science, the "entire genetic code is present from the moment of conception" and therefore abortion is not only a "religious issue" than concerns Catholics, but also about constructing a "scientifically based morality". Any woman who terminates her pregnancy will suffer "giant dramas" of conscience, he warns (or hopes) - so don't do it.

Francis defends the withholding of communion from divorcees. It almost goes without saying that he abhors the very notion of gay marriage, not to mention homosexuality itself. Masturbation is heavily frowned upon, as is all 'non-procreative' sex. And fun. In other words, Francis I is a reactionary to his marrow.

Dirty war

We are also meant to forget the fact that from 1973 to 1979 he was head of the Argentinian Jesuits, a period that coincided with the 'dirty war' waged by the military junta between 1976-83 - euphemistically described by the dictatorship as the "national reorganisation process". As part of this "reorganisation", at least 30,000 lefts and progressives were butchered - with countless others tortured, traumatised and sent into exile. Here is the greatest stain on the name of Francis I.

On 15 April 2005, a human rights lawyer filed a criminal complaint against Jorge Bergoglio, accusing him of "conspiring" with the junta in 1976 to kidnap two Jesuit priests, Orlando Yorio and Francisco Jalics. The pair were held and tortured for five months at the notorious Naval School of Mechanics. After their release, the priests accused Bergoglio of "abandoning" them to the military junta by effectively withdrawing his protection after they refused to stop getting involved in various social movements that operated out of the slums and ghettos (some priests, inspired by liberation theology, actually advocated the violent revolutionary overthrow of the military dictatorship).

The charge against Francis is plausible. For example, a priest named Christian von Wernich

was chaplain of the Buenos Aires province police and in 2007 he was found guilty of complicity in seven homicides, 42 kidnappings and 32 instances of torture, and sentenced to life imprisonment. Meaning that there were Catholic priests *actively* assisting the military dictatorship's violent suppression of progressive forces in Argentina - especially the Montoneros urban guerrilla group - as well as those who openly sided with the left. Bergoglio, it should be noted, refused to defrock Wernich.

Feeling the pressure, papal spokesman Federico Lombardi hit out on March 15 against the "anti-clerical, leftwing" campaign against Francis. Lombardi said the allegations against Bergoglio "must be clearly and firmly denied". Indeed, he continued, there has never been a "concrete or credible" accusation in this regard. Yes, he admitted, the post-dictatorship Argentinian justice department interrogated Bergoglio on the matter, but he was "never charged with anything". So that's okay then. As for Bergoglio himself, he has dismissed the allegations as "old slander". Far from abandoning Yorio and Jalics, he did everything he could to save them - even "interceding on their behalf" with the Argentinian dictator, Jorge Rafael Videla. What form this 'intervention' took is left unexplained.

Bergoglio's chief accuser is journalist and former Montoneros member Horacio Verbitsky, whose book *El silencio* paints a disquieting picture of Bergoglio's relationship with priests who sought his protection. Verbitsky believes the then head of the Jesuits in Argentina played a Machiavellian double game, "aiding" Yorio and Jalics while "expressing concern about their activities to military officers".

If proof was needed, the 'dirty war' underlines the close connections between the Catholic hierarchy and the military junta in Argentina - and all manner of other dictatorships elsewhere on the continent. Yet it is the disgraceful role played by Bergoglio that stands out like a sore thumb. When trials against former junta members reopened in 2006, he actually suggested in a public sermon that it was not a good idea to churn up the problems of the past - "wretched are those who are vindictive and spiteful". We are all sinners, after all. Bergoglio's silence on the terrible crimes committed by the Argentinian military dictatorship, then and now, makes him *complicit* in the horrors inflicted on the Argentine people. Unlike the Good Samaritan of the New Testament, praised by Jesus, Francis I kept quiet and walked on by.

However, his actions - or inactions - are perfectly in accordance with the past practices of the Catholic church. During the Spanish civil war, Catholic Action actively mobilised in support of Franco. Even when Jews were being deported from Rome, the Vatican kept a diplomatic silence.

The entire history of the official Catholic church is a thoroughly inglorious one of appeasement, compromise and collaboration with the forces of tyranny, oppression and exploitation - something that would have disgusted the revolutionary Jesus ●

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Cardinals: most appointed by last two popes

SWP

Meanwhile, in the real world ...

The intensifying feminist offensive against the far left is the bitter fruit of our collective political mistakes, argues **Paul Demarty**

In the *Daily Mail*'s offices, the knives are out for the Socialist Workers Party.

The third in its series of hypocritical, hysterical and incompetently researched pieces on the SWP's enduring troubles has now been published. "Did Socialist Workers Party cover up *nine* rapes?" shrieks the headline.¹ For the most part, it consists of cobbling together everything Google has to offer a *Daily Mail* hack on the subject, and littering the resulting mish-mash with pictures of SWP women comrades and caustic asides.

Intellectually, of course, this is drivel; it consists of the *Mail*, which must surely have opposed 99% of all social advances achieved by women over the course of the last century and continues to be the mouthpiece for the most vile reactionary politics on the topic, crying crocodile tears over rape, and patronising 'comrade Delta's' alleged victim ("the young woman, who we will call Miss X"), in order to attack the left. It is a feeble toe-poke into the most open goal in recent history.

There could, nevertheless, be consequences. The more fuel the likes of the *Mail* throw onto the fire, the more likely it is (for example) that the police will be called in to investigate this supposed nest of sexual abusers. The first statement from the SWP central committee after the scandal hit the bourgeois media claimed explicitly that there had been no cover-up. Few believed it at the time. Charlie Kimber will have a harder time still convincing judge and jury, should it come to that.

This would be a terrible outcome; just as the collapse of Lehman Brothers stripped the appearance of indomitability from its competitors as much as itself, it would not be the SWP CC on trial, but the whole organisation, and its dissidents, and those who split from it recently, and indeed the rest of us too. Yet it is a hole it has dug for itself. This ominous prospect is thus a metaphor for the difficulties the SWP (and the rest of the far left, more or less) faces in the broader workers' movement and progressive milieu in the wake of this fiasco - self-inflicted wounds, beginning to seep with pus. The far left's complete loss of traction on the women's question - and the latter's domination by decreasingly rational forms of feminism - is a particularly clear example.

Road to hell

One of the many charges levelled at the SWP opposition over the course of the factional battle was 'creeping feminism'. It was an unsubstantiated *ad hominem* attack, of course (and we will return to its stupidity later), but it is a good image. We have slowly 'crept' towards a situation where the revolutionary left not merely treats the women's question as a serious issue (however hamfistedly), but considers itself *feminist*.

Yet feminists do not look terribly much like allies just now. As I briefly noted last week,² the Unison women's conference overwhelmingly passed a motion calling for a 'no platform' policy towards rape deniers. It is a tissue of hoary feminist clichés: "rape culture is endemic in the UK", apparently - "yet some men on the left continue to reinforce negative attitudes about rape survivors, and to prop up sexism and misogyny by contributing to a blame culture that



'No platform' comes back to bite SWP

holds women responsible for the crimes of rape and sexual violence committed against them".³

The issue at hand is the Julian Assange rape allegations, and infamous comments made about them by George Galloway and the like. What is the logic here? Galloway denies that Assange raped two women; therefore he "reinforces negative attitudes about rape survivors"; therefore he indirectly reinforces this "blame culture"; therefore he (presumably) emboldens rapists; and therefore, finally, giving him a platform "contribute[s] to rape culture".

The wording, in fact, is so vague that a good deal of people could come under this purview. Which is why the motion - though no doubt well-intentioned, as most disastrous errors are - is a gift to the Unison bureaucracy. This is the same union, remember, that witch-hunted four Socialist Party in England and Wales comrades for distributing a leaflet with a 'three wise monkeys' picture on the front, which was ludicrously deemed to be racist. They are going to have all kinds of fun with *this* policy - and no mistake.

This is the context in which we have to view a statement being circulated widely around the left on the internet and social media, written by Cath Elliott (who also wrote the Unison motion) and Marsha-Jane Thompson, hosted on a blog entitled *Women in the labour movement*.⁴ On the face of it, the statement is hardly objectionable: on a straightforward 'surface reading', it argues more or less that men in the movement should not subject women to violence; that the movement should hold itself to higher standards on this score than the rest of society manages to produce;

and so on.

There is something politically dubious, which - as is often the case - lies in what is not said. In the first instance, the question arises: *why* write the statement at all? The left and workers' movement is not dominated by people who consider domestic violence to be a healthy part of a relationship, or rape to be in any way acceptable. In fact, very few people at all hold to these views in this country (elsewhere, as we shall see, things are not looking so rosy).

Rape - and domestic violence - are not conducted, by and large, by people who explicitly hold women in contempt, but are rather symptoms of an underlying social psychopathology, a deformed consciousness that does not manifest itself in a way that it can, as the writers of the statement imagine, be "confronted" or "challenged" in a direct way.

Counterproductive

So the problem comes down to this: *how* we do challenge sexual or other violence against women? And on this front the statement is useless - and, indeed, implicitly counterproductive. The most concrete demand in this short text is that "when women complain of male violence within our movement, our trade unions and political organisations should start from a position of believing women." Very well: but we can believe them all day long, without it changing how officials in the movement actually respond. (After a certain point in the SWP fracas, for example, is seems absurd to imagine that whether or not the CC thought comrade Delta to be guilty or innocent would have made any difference whatsoever to its conduct.)

The second, most concrete

proposal is that the movement should become "a safe space for women". Safe spaces, however, are in the eye of the beholder. If it means that women should not be physically assaulted in union and left meetings, then it is fair enough - but not worth even saying. This is almost invariably not what it means at all: rather it comes to mean restrictions on what can and cannot be *said* at a meeting. I do not know if either of the authors of this statement consider the presence of 'rape deniers' at left meetings a violation of the 'safe space'; but such arguments have been raised before.⁵ Other controversies have arisen about particularly 'abusive' behaviour, equally, amounting to a violation of a safe space. Who decides? The bureaucracy.

As such, the statement is implicitly counterproductive (it is too banal to be explicitly anything much at all). We do not have the power, as a movement, to cast violence against women completely and reliably out of our ranks. We can fight for democracy in our movement, redressing the power imbalances that provide a cloak for all abuses, rape included. Handing more power to the bureaucracy - which is the net effect of loosely worded 'no platform' policies and 'safe spaces' alike - is antithetical to this project.

'No platform' raises additional issues. Of course it is legitimate to employ it as a tactic - if you can kill for the revolution, you can tell somebody, with as much force as is required, to pipe down. That said, we are not out for a bloodbath, and we are equally not out to silence people whose views we do not share.

Quite apart from anything else, it patronises the audience you are

thereby 'protecting'. Are women in the trade union movement so stupid that they will not be able to make a misogynist look like the prat he (or she) is in open debate? Are they such delicate little flowers that being in a room with a big bad rape denier like George Galloway will give them a fit of the vapours? Not the ones I've met, at any rate, but that is the implication here; it is a demented approach to politics. If you want to defeat an idea, expose it to the light. Give Galloway enough rope, and he will hang himself (he has more or less made a career out of doing so).

It is not just about gaffe-prone celebrities. The trade union movement can only succeed if it can contain all the shades of opinion in that part of the working class prepared to fight the bosses at all, and make sure that fight comes off in a united fashion. It is the only weapon unions have. As a matter of course, many brothers and sisters will have reactionary views.

Take the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Recently, it railed against a right-on UN motion on women's rights partly on the basis that it condemned marital rape, which they do not accept is a meaningful concept. (As dubious as I find the term 'rape denial', it fits well enough here.) Should Muslims (or, indeed, anyone else - the world's holy books and religious doctrines are littered with equivalent notions) who have a similar theology be thereby excluded *en masse* from Unison, and transformed wholesale into potential scabs? Will that convince them of the error of their ways better than - now here's a radical notion - *arguing with them*?

Self-inflicted

The truth, unfortunately, is that this is a bitterly ironic outcome. The SWP has always been the most overwrought advocates of 'no platform' policies; its only quibble with the Unison motion (apart from the small matter that the SWP itself was suddenly counted among the 'rape deniers') was that 'no platform' is *only for fascists*. Why? Because the SWP says so.

The very *style* of politics practised by the SWP - being the 'best fighters' and builders of the movements, which in reality means repeating the movements' slogans back to them, only *louder* - encourages such irrationalism, which they now find turned against themselves.

Most of all, we can now see why the charge of 'creeping feminism' was so pathetic. In its utterly moralistic approach to politics, the SWP *encouraged* its members to become feminists. It fostered illusions in campus campaigns to ban lads' mags, in local campaigns to close down strip clubs, in all the censorious and oppressive nonsense to have come out of that movement (the carnivalesque and gleefully perverse side of feminism seems hardly to have appealed to the SWP at all, alas).

Now the curtain-twitcher's finger is being wagged at the SWP - and it has no answers at all ●

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Notes

1. *Daily Mail* March 15.
2. 'Rape is not the problem' *Weekly Worker* March 14.
3. Motion 30: www.unison.org.uk/file/B6173.pdf.
4. <http://womeninthelabourmovement.wordpress.com>.
5. For example, by student left bureaucrat Michael Chessum: <http://anticapitalists.org/2012/09/26/rape-apologism-imperialism-and-the-student-left-we-need-to-talk>.

IMPERIALISM

No inherent connection

Ten years after the height of the mobilisation against the Iraq war, **Mike Macnair** calls for an end to the politics of the ‘anti-imperialist united front’

In what sense did the Stop the War Coalition fail? After all, no-one could ever seriously have expected to actually stop the war without overthrowing the state. It is an illusion to suggest that you could do so. It might be the case that if a sufficient number of MPs were put in fear of their lives - for example, if they thought they might be hung from lampposts when they went back to their constituencies - then they might have been willing to vote not to go to war. But what sort of success, then, *could* you expect?

It was right to say ‘Not in my name’, even in common with those members of the capitalist class and the core state apparatus who did not want the war to go ahead. But, while you could not expect to stop the war as a result of that huge protest on February 15 2003, what you could expect, beyond having a couple of million people on the streets on one day, was a long-term movement: the development of a broad understanding that it is necessary to oppose our own country’s overseas adventures. Yet it is clear from Libya, Mali and Syria that this has not been achieved. What we have is a kind of *Groundhog Day* - the usual suspects, the far-left groups and their periphery, doing the same thing over and over again, only with far smaller numbers.

Part of the story is that Stop the War Coalition has been identified as a rerun of the foreign policy of the old Soviet Union in the 1960s and 70s. That is to say, the policy of the ‘socialist camp’, the ‘anti-imperialist front’ - of falling behind the opponents of US-led capitalism, whoever they may be, and transforming them into heroes: eg, claiming that Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was some kind of representative of the poor of Tehran. And the converse of that has been the repeated exclusion of Hands Off the People of Iran from STWC - even before Hopi’s formation we saw the exclusion of Iranian dissidents from anti-war platforms. Stop the War has associated itself with the opponents of the United States.

This was seen when the Socialist Workers Party attempted to create a party based on the anti-war movement: Stop the War equals Respect, equals George Galloway. And the capitalist class, the state and the media were able to fasten onto the weaknesses of Galloway’s politics to identify the anti-war movement precisely with the usual suspects - with people who retain a nostalgia for the cold war.

The question is, why? There is a simple explanation in the fact that the groups which led STWC came out of the radicalisation around the anti-Vietnam war campaign in the 1960s - or, in the case of the Communist Party of Britain/*Morning Star*, in anti-apartheid - and in effect, STWC represented the straightforward politics of nostalgia for the great times of our youth. I am a little bit younger, so I only remember the tail-end of the anti-Vietnam war movement, but that certainly formed the basis of the STWC leaders’ ideas about how to campaign now.

Of course, the reality is that the whole idea of the ‘socialist camp’, and of the ‘anti-imperialist bloc’ as an extension of that, dramatically collapsed after 1991 - after the fall of the Soviet Union and the market turn in China. Once that had gone, all sorts of people who were ‘talking Soviet’ - in the Congress Party in India, in the African National Congress, in the



Hugo Chávez: many other nationalists before him

nationalist parties in the ‘third world’ - suddenly stopped doing so and instead started talking liberal. A very dramatic phenomenon and one which the generation of leaders who grew up in the 60s have not really come to grips with yet. What it demonstrates is that the ‘socialist’ form of nationalism was a product of the USSR, and that there is no natural, inherent connection between the nationalism of oppressed countries and the movement of the working class. It was simply the case that the apparent success of ‘socialism in a single country’ had the consequence that for many nationalists in many countries it looked like a good option.

In addition to the politics of nostalgia for the cold war, what is at stake for the organised Marxist left, and the activists trained in it, is dogma. For ‘official’ communists the dogma was that of the ‘socialist camp’, its construction and defence. For Maoists it was the doctrine of ‘surrounding the cities’ on a global scale - meaning the core capitalist countries in the west - by the global ‘countryside’, the ‘third world’. For Trotskyists there is also a tradition. Trotsky in the 1930s argued that Chinese Trotskyists should throw themselves into mobilising on the side of the Kuomintang against Japan, despite a real incomprehension of what the political dynamics were in China, not least the disintegration of the Kuomintang regime. When Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1935, Trotsky made it an issue of principle that revolutionaries should back emperor Haile Selassie - which in reality meant that Trotskyists in Britain should back the client of British imperialism in an inter-imperialist conflict between

Britain and Italy. These examples of Trotskyist ‘principled anti-imperialism’, of wishing for the victory of the colonial power, are all in fact examples where Trotsky is entirely failing to grasp the actual political dynamics and the role of *inter-imperialist* conflict.

Anti-imperialist front

So within this approach there is something common to ‘official’ communism, Maoism and Trotskyism. And, of course, we have to include the SWP within the Trotskyism category, following the ‘Vietnam turn’ of the International Socialists in 1968, when it rejected the principles on which the IS was supposedly founded in 1950 and became a gung-ho enthusiast for Ho Chi Minh.

But behind all three is actually a politics founded on the first four congresses of the Communist International (and for ‘official’ communists the later congresses and the post-war Communist Information Bureau, or Cominform). Behind all of them stand the resolutions and theses of the Congress of Peoples of the East, of the 2nd Congress of the Communist International, and of the 4th Congress of the Communist International, on the national and colonial questions. These drew a sharp line between the nationalism of the oppressor countries, which is unqualifiedly opposed by communists, and the nationalism of oppressed countries, which was seen as providing potential allies for the proletariat.

It was proposed that there be an ‘anti-imperialist united front’ - of the

working class, the petty bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie - against imperialism. In fact, this policy was already unable to be implemented even in the 1920s - otherwise than to make the communists bag-carriers for the national bourgeoisie, where they exposed their necks, only to have their heads cut off. This happened in Turkey in the 1920s, which is not much talked about because it was during the time of Lenin and Trotsky - the classical leadership of the Comintern - not the post-Lenin regime. But under the post-Lenin leadership, the same happened in China in 1927: Trotskyists *do* talk about this, but in reality they do not have an alternative policy. There are many other examples since World War II: the Iraqi Communist Party in the early 1960s, the Indonesian Communist Party in 1965 and, more recently, the Iranian left and its anti-imperialist front with ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who subsequently jailed and executed thousands of them.

If we ask why the policy fails, the underlying reason is perfectly straightforward, and in fact, entirely predictable from Marx’s and Engels’ own writings in the 19th century. That is to say, the class contradiction between the working class and national bourgeoisie of the oppressed countries is stronger than the national contradiction between the bourgeoisie of the oppressed country and the bourgeoisie of the imperialist country. Notice that I am *not* saying that there is no such thing as imperialism, or that there is no such thing as national oppression: just that the *class* contradiction tends to be more

fundamental, and that consequently the anti-imperialist united front fails.

When has it not failed? It is true that there are cases when it has appeared to have achieved something, but these tend to be when the communist parties were armed to the teeth and backed by the Soviet Union, in connection with the events of World War II and with Soviet geopolitics generally. Cuba wound up as a ‘communist country’, not because it would have done so without the presence of the Soviet Union, but because the Castroites decided to align themselves with the Popular Socialist Party: that is, the Communist Party of Cuba. And for reasons to do with the struggle with the ‘anti-party group’ in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the beginnings of the Sino-Soviet split, Khrushchev manoeuvred to the left in mobilising Soviet support for bringing Cuba into the ‘socialist camp’.

So when we discuss the motivation behind the Comintern policy we have to start with this point: what is at issue at the end of the day is the class-political independence of the working class. The constant element of Marx and Engels, from 1846 - for an early example, the address to Feargus O’Connor in connection with the Chartist election campaigns - is the need for the class-political independence of the working class, the political action of the working class, and the political organisation of the working class. The idea of collaboration with the bourgeois liberals emerged in their line for Germany in 1848 precisely because the working class was so underdeveloped there. By 1850, that conception was abandoned

with the working class

and consistently rejected from then on: the alliance of Bismarck and Lassalle was to be rejected; Louis Blanc's engagement in a 'democratic government' in 1848 was to be rejected. The message in the inaugural address of the First International was the class-political independence of the working class.

Now we come to the question of imperialism. We start with Eduard Bernstein, who engaged in debate with Ernest Belfort Bax in 1896-97 over the question: should socialists support imperialism? Should they support European expansion, because it supposedly had a civilising and progressive effect on the rest of the world?

Bax argued the contrary: that as far as possible capitalism should be kept in narrow confines, because this would cause overproduction to take place much more quickly and cause capitalism to collapse sooner. Bax's argument was nonsense, but Bernstein in the course of the polemic with him, and then with Parvus which grew out of the Bernstein-Bax debate, found that he could not maintain simultaneously the line of the civilising mission of capitalism in the colonial world, and the idea of the class-political independence of the working class. As a result he broke openly with the idea of the latter.

The anti-imperialist united front was not intended to be a break with the class-political independence of the working class, but in practice it is such a break, because placing a priority on the legitimate concerns of the national bourgeoisie inevitably has the effect of subordinating the movement of the class to the aspirations of the national bourgeoisie. And, like Bernstein, the proponents of this idea after the 1920s are inevitably driven to abandon the conception of the class-political independence of the working class, in favour of the 'broad anti-monopoly alliance', the people's front and similar operations, until we end up with the Eurocommunists saying that all this stuff about class in our programmes is really a bit obsolete, that class has ceased to exist. So how the anti-imperialist united front works is in practice to abandon the class-political independence of the working class. How is it justified?

The answer to this is Lenin's pamphlet, *Imperialism: the highest stage of capitalism*. Lenin in the beginning of the pamphlet urges caution about it: he says it is a popular outline, and written to pass the censorship. Nonetheless, *Imperialism*, having reproduced the general scheme of Second International writers prior to 1914, then diverges from them in significant ways.

International capital

The general scheme, just in outline, is that capitalism grows up in the framework of the nation-state. But then it becomes overdeveloped in this framework, and the reason this happens is underconsumption. Because of the great debates about the causes of crisis which took place in the late 1960s and 70s, it is now deeply unorthodox to talk about a secular tendency toward underconsumption as the root of crisis. But the whole of the Second International discussion of imperialism is framed within the idea of such an underconsumptionist view of crisis and a tendency to capitalist stagnation.

The obverse of underconsumption is overproduction, and to deal with

this there arise monopolies and cartels to restrict production. The fact that monopolies and cartels restrict production is a reason for supposing that these indicate a decay of capitalism. Following on from this, if there are monopolies and cartels in a national framework, then tariff barriers are needed to protect them from foreign competition. And then, the area included inside these tariff barriers must be increased, the state must expand its territory, and this drives the division of the world by the capitalist great powers.

There are certain sub-themes here which Lenin eliminates. In much of the literature prior to 1914 the relationship between particular capitals and the state is discussed, but Lenin reduces that to two lines in his pamphlet. In the discussion before 1914, there is much debate about the emergence of a world market and the physical internationalisation of production - the extent to which there are flows of raw materials, part-built objects and other output between countries. Lenin completely eliminates discussion of that issue. This decision was not unconnected to the polemic he was engaged in, at the time of writing *Imperialism*, with the Poles and others about the national question, and the Easter Rising in Ireland.

What replaces these elements of theory in the formulations that he uses is overdevelopment of a few countries - monopolies and monopolisation become absolutely central to his argument. There is now a large degree of polarisation in his account: instead of the division between top-dog countries, middle-rank countries, and colonies and other bottom-rank countries, there is a total bifurcation between a few overdeveloped imperialist countries and a large mass of exploited countries. But equally in domestic politics the pamphlet argues for a division between, on the one hand, the monopolists who control the state and, on the other hand, all the rest. So the alliance between the national bourgeoisie and the working class is already present in *Imperialism: the highest stage of capitalism*. All this is set within the theoretical framework of the general collapse and terminal crisis of capitalism - the 'highest stage'.

It follows from this set of views that for Comintern it becomes necessary to formulate a strategy similar to the one adopted in Russia - the worker-peasant alliance - but on an international scale, in which the Congress Party in India and other nationalist formations like the Kuomintang in China stand in for the Russian Socialist Revolutionaries as strategic allies of the working class. Lenin has accentuated the features of pre-1914 accounts of imperialism that lead to that conclusion, but in fact the pre-1914 story of the growth of capitalism was rubbish in any case.

For example, the capitalists in the republic of Venice exported capital to sugar plantations in Cyprus, which was a colony of Venice, in the late Middle Ages. The bankers of the republic of Genoa financed sugar plantations on Atlantic islands of one sort and another under Portuguese sovereignty. At the moment the Dutch republic emerged as an independent bourgeois state, the Dutch East India Company embarked on a path of conquest in Asia and elsewhere, and by the conclusion of the 80-year war of Dutch independence in 1648, the Dutch empire already included South Africa, Sri Lanka, part of Indonesia,

part of Brazil and exclaves of one sort or another dotted round the world.

The parliamentary New Model Army is victorious in the English Civil War, the king is executed, and the New Model Army immediately begins a campaign of conquest - which starts in Scotland and Ireland, but extends by the 1650s to operations in the Caribbean, leading to the conquest of Jamaica. By the time we get to 1689-1713, the British state is engaged in a global conquest for power. Some have said that the Napoleonic wars should be regarded as World War I, but it is just as true to say that the wars between 1689 and 1713 could be seen as the first world war, the Seven Years War as the second, and the Napoleonic wars as the third, and so on. The social dynamic that created the world wars we know was already in operation long before 1914.

We ask then, when was there a time when there was a free-trading, liberal capitalism - a capitalism that did not have tariff barriers, that did not have monopolisation, that did not have the export of capital and finance capitalist operations? Where does this idea come from? The answer to this explains why CPGB comrades have translated and published Kautsky's text from 1898 in the form of *Karl Kautsky on colonialism*. The text is frankly dreadful. But it is precisely because he is the person who did history in the Second International that Kautsky's writing on the *history* of imperialism was taken as authoritative, and therefore also taken on by Lenin, who was really just recapitulating what was standard orthodoxy at the time.

Lenin was really just taking the standard line of the Second International, and so he assumes that there once was a non-imperialist capitalism. It is Kautsky who actually *argues* that there is such a thing, that industrial capital does not have an interest in protectionism, in empire, and that the early modern empires are pre-capitalist. But reality shows us that many, although not all, *were* capitalist. The Spanish in Latin America, to the extent that they went beyond mere looting, attempted to create feudal regimes. But the Portuguese in south Asia, and the Dutch and British, created *capitalist* empires.

It is also worth reprinting Kautsky because there are two sides of the coin. On the one hand, there are people who want an anti-imperialist united front - and therefore suppress dissent toward the Iranian regime, big up anyone who is opposed to American-led imperialism and think in a nationalistic way about these questions. They see the nationalist movement as the necessary uprising of the petty bourgeoisie and the collapse of capitalism, and 'know' this because imperialism is the highest stage of capitalism, and because once upon a time there was a nationalist, democratic capitalism, whereas now there are monopolies and cartels and therefore capitalism has reached its limits.

But it is equally true of the other side of this debate: the Eustonites, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty and Platypus (I have to be cautious about the Platypus comrades, because it is very difficult to tell what they believe). The idea of a non-imperialist capitalism functions for these people as an extraordinary illusion, so that when the United States engages in warlike operations in the Middle East what it is actually doing is bringing capitalist modernity. Compare Bill Warren's 1970s book *Imperialism*,

pioneer of capitalism.

And there is a contradiction. For millions of people, 19th century England was the home of liberty; it was the most libertarian, most constitutional, most liberal country. That is incredibly visible in Kautsky's writing - he really believes that England is this great liberal country.

But then, on the other hand, here is Marx on the Indian mutiny, where 'there is such a thing as retribution':

However infamous the conduct of the Sepoys, it is only the reflex, in a concentrated form, of England's own conduct in India, not only during the epoch of the foundation of her eastern empire, but even during the last 10 years of a long-settled rule. To characterise that rule, it suffices to say that torture formed an organic instrument of its financial policy. There is something in human history like retribution ...¹

The illusion exists, but what is the reality? The United States claims that it is going into Iraq to create a parliamentary state, and what does it actually do? It goes into alliance with Shia parties based in the mosque and linked to the Iranian Islamic Republic. The United States sees the Arab spring and how does it react? It goes into an alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and its equivalents elsewhere. The great centre of liberty turns out, when it intervenes in other parts of the world, to operate torture and tyranny itself, to side with torturers and tyrants, and inevitably to promote the most socially conservative forces.

Emancipation

Back to the fundamental politics: for communists and Marxists, the route to the emancipation of humanity comes through the emancipation of the working class, the proletariat, as a class. Why is that the case? The answer is again, to be found in Marx: the division of labour and property rights are two sides of the same coin, which we can see in the SWP right now. What is Alex Callinicos defending? I do not think he is defending the right of 'comrade Delta' to hypothetically commit rape or anything like that. What he is defending is his own property rights as an entrenched leader.

The emancipation of labour through a return to family production is impossible simply because technical development has made it so. It is also objectively reactionary

because of the role of women and youth - family production comes with patriarchy in its classical sense. The route forward out of capitalism therefore goes through the wage relation, through no-one earning anything more than a wage, and the universal right to access to political decision-making - clinging to the right to manage, the right to a political career, is no different in principle at all to clinging to your own small workshop, your own little farm.

The emancipation of the working class is the emancipation of all humanity, because it can only be achieved by laying collective hands on the whole interlocking process of production, and it is only possible to do that by winning the battle for political democracy. If there is no political democracy, the rights of president Lassalle, as the elected president-with-absolute-powers of the General Association of German Workers, or, for that matter, of Hugo Chávez, or of George Galloway as the particularly notorious leader of Respect, are just property rights. The emancipation of the working class involves laying hands on the whole interlocking process of production, and that implies winning political democracy on an international scale.

Eustonism, 'democratic imperialism', simultaneously asserts democracy and denies democracy. It asserts democracy in apologetics, but it denies democracy as soon as it assumes the right to tell the Iranians or the Libyans or whoever what to do. Left versions assert the prospect of the emancipation of the working class, and simultaneously deny it.

The same is obviously true of the anti-imperialist united front policy: it simultaneously asserts the possibility of communism and - by setting up the local tyrant as somehow preferable to the global tyrant - denies it. And it is this simultaneous assertion and denial of a possibility of an alternative to capitalism which has the consequence that the 'anti-imperialism' of STWC and the SWP reduces itself to declining numbers of the usual suspects.

It is a politics that had some meaning when the Soviet Union was still in existence during the cold war. After the fall of the Soviet Union, it can only represent a retreat into ever decreasing circles ●

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Notes

1. 'The Indian revolt' (1857): www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/09/16.htm.

Appeal from the editor

Hopefully all *Weekly Worker* subscribers will have received a personal appeal with this week's paper. We are asking all readers to contribute to our legal fund following the out-of-court settlement we reached following the publication of an article over a year ago (see 'Unreserved apology', February 7).

The total raised so far is £2,440, but we will need much more. Although we have agreed to pay £1,000 in damages, an agreement on costs has yet to be reached. But we know they will be substantial. Please make cheques and postal orders payable to 'Weekly Worker' and send them 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.

For those comrades wishing to approach, for example, their union branch for a contribution, a template letter and draft motion calling for support can be downloaded via the link below ●

Peter Manson

<http://cpgb.org.uk/home/weekly-worker/online-only/weekly-worker-legal-appeal-template-letter-and-motion>

PCS

PCS goes it alone

Civil servants are striking for a decent pay rise and to defend pay and conditions. But, asks **Dave Vincent**, will the current strategy win?

I am writing this two days before 250,000 or so Public and Commercial Service union members will be supporting a national strike on budget day, Wednesday March 20, over pay and 'reviews' of our terms and conditions of service.

While, of course, we hope that the walkout is an outstanding success, my branch executive committee and myself have had real misgivings over the handling of this dispute from the start. I wrote to the national executive committee with a list of our concerns and hoping for convincing arguments back, but received no reply (although I have heard the NEC was given my email). Our concerns have not been addressed in any subsequent circulars, nor were they dealt with at NEC regional briefings for PCS reps.

As the Socialist Party in England and Wales has a dominant presence on the NEC, we even invited a leading SPEW speaker to our branch AGM, who had been advised of our concerns in advance. But none of them were dealt with in what I suspected was a stock speech aimed at the already convinced or non-questioning. Could I have done more to help the NEC understand and address our concerns before the ballot, held in late February and early March?

Perhaps we are seen as unduly pessimistic (defeatist?) in a union where the members are overwhelmingly up for action. Well, a 60:40 vote for a strike on a 28% turnout is hardly a thumping mandate, is it? As usual, there was more support for action short of strike - more of which later.

The NEC had called off an earlier fight over pay on the grounds that the public and members themselves would not understand why we were fighting for a pay rise when so many people were losing their jobs. There is still a continuing massacre of jobs, so why is it now acceptable to fight over pay - and civil service pay only, at that, rather than in coordination with others? No answer.

PCS is correctly saying how badly members have been affected by a two-year pay freeze, increased pension contributions and water, gas, electricity, rail, fuel and food price rises - all above inflation. So have workers across the public sector. Odd then, to not fight over pay during the two-year pay freeze, but to do so now - alone - as we are about to get a 1% pay rise from April. PCS is demanding a 5% or £1,200 rise, whichever is the greater.

Joint action?

Were other public sector unions offering unity over pay, then? No, the NEC says it wants such unity, but is going it alone, without waiting for a decision over possible action by other unions. After the ballot closed and PCS named the day for March 20 (to be followed by a further half-day on April 5), we now hear the National Union of Teachers and National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers are also calling for a strike over pay - regional action from June 27, then a national strike before the autumn term.

Of course, it was very frustrating for the PCS NEC to see the unity over pensions, which took two years to achieve and culminated in two million out on November 30 2011, shattered



Striking: but how effective is the strategy?

virtually overnight, as Unison, the GMB and Unite rushed to settle terms for their own members rather than going for escalation and calling out four million, together with a pledge that no-one would settle until we had all settled. But the awkward question remains - if two million workers could not move this government over pay 18 months ago, how can 250,000 civil servants do so now?

It is not as if the Labour Party is supporting PCS. After all, Labour voted for the public sector pay freeze, then the 1% cap. Why is any union still handing money over to these class traitors, who are not promising to reverse any of the cuts? Why is Len McCluskey, Unite general secretary, calling a snap election for his own post two years early? Solely to avoid creating a diversion and damaging Labour's chances in the 2015 general election - after all his windbagery promising a fightback at the TUC anti-austerity march of December 2012.

Why on earth is SPEW calling for support for McCluskey instead of Jerry Hicks? It was a superb interview with him in the *Weekly Worker*, by the way ('Not more of the same', March 7). I note Jerry is making promises about only taking an ordinary worker's wage if elected - a promise also made, but apparently long forgotten, by Mark Serwotka when he was going for PCS general secretary. Jerry is also calling for the election of all full-time officers and I think that too should apply

to PCS, given the sheer number of SPEW members or sympathisers we have appointed to these posts. SPEW formally supports both policies - although no doubt it can cite plenty of reasons why they are not realistic in a union it happens to control.

What has happened to the much vaunted, so-called 'joint working agreements' PCS signed and declared at successive conferences - first with Unison, then with Unite? I recall a smiling Mark shaking hands with, I think, Dave Prentis and certainly Len McCluskey after each addressed PCS conference. Neither union is fostering closer working relationships with PCS activists at local level - not here in Manchester, at any rate.

The Independent Left within PCS had argued for action by PCS alone rather than waiting for other unions - a position rejected at conference by Mark, who said PCS could not win on its own and that members had given a clear message that they wanted joint action with other unions. Yet following the pensions sell-out it seems he has changed his mind. PCS cites successful departmental ballots - extra jobs were won in one, and the threat of compulsory redundancies removed in another. Both very welcome, but small beer compared to winning a civil service-wide pay rise in total defiance of the government's austerity cuts.

There is no conference mandate for a fight over pay now (there was one for a fight that never happened in 2012). There was no consultation

with members before the NEC suddenly announced we were to be balloted for such a fight. Yet for it to be successful two questions need to be answered - what sort of industrial action will realistically be necessary to defeat a government (rather than a profit-rich private company, say) and are we confident members are willing

to take that action?

Strategy

What is the strategy proposed by the NEC? Hold on to your seats, comrades - the action is to consist of three days in total taken over a period of three months. We all come out on March 20, then again from 1pm on

Fighting fund

Eyes open

This is to thank you for your brilliant coverage of the SWP crisis," writes comrade TG in the note accompanying her £50 cheque. She says that she has recently started to visit our website "every Thursday afternoon" and "as a long-time supporter [of the SWP] it has really opened my eyes."

I've previously reported the *Weekly Worker's* increased web readership recently and linked it to that SWP coverage. But this is the first time that someone has put it in so many words. Last week we had 15,215 online readers and the biggest slice of them was indeed recorded last Thursday (that's the day the new issue comes out, of course!).

I also got a £20 cheque from comrade RT and another for £10 from PL, which was added to

his resubscription. But the most money came, as usual, from our standing order donors - thanks this week to SK, MM, MKS, JD, SP and DW for your collective contribution of £355.

All in all, £435 has landed in our account this week, taking our March fighting fund to £937. But we need £1,500 a month to meet our running costs and there are only 10 days left. Does anyone fancy writing us a cheque, clicking on the PayPal link on our website, or making an online transfer? How about adding your name to our growing list of standing order supporters? ●

Robbie Rix

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

April 5 (I am annoyed the NEC has already set the next action without even waiting to gauge the actual support for March 20).

So that leaves another one and a half days - departmental PCS groups are to decide when best to take such action themselves. Mark states the aim is for the least action and cost to members, for the most disruption. It could be a series of two-hour walkouts. It could be coordinated across departments, so that action will occur on successive days. Oh, and there is an overtime ban from March 21 until June. So this time members losing pay through strikes will not be able to make good their losses - members already on the breadline, remember.

How will action by 250,000 PCS members succeed when we have 100,000 non-members, many of whom will come in to work regardless (and to do the overtime PCS members are not supposed to be taking up)? Will a two-hour walkout in one department one day, followed by another somewhere else the next, even be noticed by the media? And our action is set to finish, just as the NUT/NASUWT commence theirs.

Will it succeed? PCS has a ready answer - if the current strategy does not work, repeat it again for the next three months. So that means six days' strike action over six months, nine over nine, or 12 over 12 until victory, does it?

Even if the government wanted to settle over pay with PCS (it does not), how could it? Would it then claim that civil servants (so popular compared to the nurses, doctors, firefighters ...) are

a 'special case'? Its whole austerity package of cuts and pay restraint would be called into question. The media would not let the government go quietly. Even the Labour Party would condemn such a settlement!

The strike is also over the proposal that each department should separately review workers' terms and conditions of service - amount of annual leave, paid sick leave, privilege leave, flexible working patterns and hours. Each department claims it needs to ensure that what it permits is in line with that of a 'modern employer' (cuts, in other words).

We could conceivably beat each department by taking enough action to force them to reconsider their individual attacks, but the level and strength of membership and the relative importance of their work differs from department to department - we would surely end up with civil servants, already on different pay rates, finding themselves with different terms and conditions as well.

The continual attacks on us - pay freezes, reduced redundancy pay, reduced pension benefits for increased contributions, reduced terms and conditions - are being made for one purpose: to make us more attractive to private companies, who have been told the public sector is open for (to) business. The lowering of labour costs obviously is a big part of it.

Now, I have to say that, despite my and my BEC's pessimism, our members do seem up for action on the 20th. However, they are not considering whether this strategy

will win: they are just fed up. So I expect March 20 to be a relative success in terms of members out on the day, although picket numbers may be down - a continuing trend I have noticed: members are increasingly treating strike action as an extra (unpaid) day off. I foresee real problems delivering the rest of the 'some out here, some out there' action afterwards.

PCS has missed an opportunity too. In calling strike rallies in major cities, we overlooked the possibility of making March 20 a focus for all those who want to resist austerity by calling on all anti-cuts groups to take part. What a chance to foster unity between the young and older, the unemployed, students, other public sector unions, NHS workers, teachers and those now fighting the bedroom tax! Instead the rallying call will be "Support civil servants' pay claim and defence of their terms and conditions". PCS is going it alone, I'm afraid.

What do I think should have been done? We should have waited a few more weeks until PCS national conference in May and then decide in light of what other unions are doing. Instead conference may now see a divisive and heated debate on the strategy of coming out alone and too soon rather than attempting an inspirational way forward, as some other unions finally start to fight back. Our members will only take so much action.

I have built support for this strike and will, as usual, be on the picket line. But I would rather be inspired by the possibility of victory, not left at a loss by the NEC's top-down, poorly justified strategy.



Campaigning for communism

Standing as a Communist Students candidate running for president in the University of Westminster student union (UWSU) elections, I came fourth with 230 votes (around 10%). I ran with the support of Westminster Students Left (a broad grouping of mainly unaffiliated socialists and leftwingers), who were standing six candidates for National Union of Students delegate positions.

I was running on an overtly communist platform against six 'apolitical' candidates. The aim of this was not to win a union post on watered-down politics, but to win people to the politics of communism.

The student union has recently taken to holding debates for its YouTube channel and the election hustings were filmed with this in mind. But the presidential debate was frustratingly apolitical. It is fair to say that it was impossible to really engage with the other candidates, given the extent to which I was speaking about totally different issues from the others (in criticising my manifesto, another candidate noted that I had said nothing about UWSU sports teams).

There were, however, issues over which it seemed political contestation would be possible. For example, I attacked the bizarre policy of neutrality the student union has taken in regards to all 'off-campus' issues - in other words, we refrain from taking a stance on anything other than 'student concerns'. While the other candidates seemed to support this, I pointed to the impact students had often made when they had been at the forefront of key struggles.

During canvassing we generated a fair amount of interest. Many of those I spoke to were keen to understand the details of my platform and often expressed sympathy with Marxist politics. But a number of people mentioned the different initiatives suggested by some of the other candidates to give Westminster students a 'competitive edge'. Whilst it is completely understandable that students are concerned about future employment prospects, schemes to give one section an advantage at the expense of other students (and others looking for work) are self-evidently no solution to mass unemployment.

The tendency towards establishing greater links between universities and business, including through such proposals, is a damaging one, in that it refashions higher education as the training and research arm of capital. This represents a threat to genuine academic freedom and so a defeat

for students, with education increasingly dedicated to setting up hoops that students must jump through - playing students off against one another to decide who will have an advantage when they enter the labour market. The real answer lies beyond capitalism, a system that in its current form periodically requires millions to be unemployed.

I was asked more than once why I would stand under the banner of communism: 'Surely you're not for anything like the USSR?' So why did I cling to the term? Communist Students argue that we must reclaim the word from Stalinism and in doing so rescue it for the struggle for emancipation. It is not that we have a quasi-religious attachment to 'communist', but it is useful in that it immediately asserts our commitment to the overthrow of the capitalist state and the social order it protects, at a time when revolutionary politics have been consigned to the wilderness. On the other hand, 'socialism' - suggested to me as a more acceptable label for our movement - has for many a reformist meaning. Moreover, 'socialism' for Marxists refers to a transitional stage of democratic workers' power before a classless, stateless society can be established, not our final goal.

The main talking points during the campaign for president concerned the petty squabbles between feuding careerist cliques, who used every opportunity to discredit, to cheat and to level accusations of cheating against their rivals. In the final week the favourite was disqualified for 'voter harassment', leading to a protest at the results event. To me it seemed all this was the behaviour of wannabe bureaucrats and their mates - but perhaps they were just really passionate about their exciting initiatives to get students involved in campus life.

In terms of the success of this particular campaign, all depends on whether it will be possible to build on campus between now and the end of the year. It is encouraging to see that there is a receptive audience for revolutionary ideas, even given the state of the organised left and the absence of a clear route out of capitalism at present. The question, however, is how to mobilise this sentiment behind a communist project.

The task of the Marxist left must be to build the necessary unity of its forces and conduct a patient struggle within society to win people to its ideas.

Callum Williamson

No victimisation

The campaign against the dismissal of trade union activist Lee Rock is gathering pace. Comrade Lee was sacked by the department for work and pensions after 27 years as a union activist in the PCS, officially on the grounds of "attendance management" - which is officialdom-speak for sickness absence.

In September 2012, he hit his so-called "consideration point" of 11 days' sickness - and the DWP 'considered' that this would be an ideal time to get rid of one of the most effective and outspoken militants in the DWP (where the PCS represents over 70,000 members). In fact he had had just two and a half days off sick over the previous six months and none at all over the previous three.

It has been clear from the outset - and is becoming ever clearer - that this dismissal is not just an overly bureaucratic response to an individual's sickness absence, but part and parcel of the political attack on the trade unions, especially in the public sector.

At the recent regional conference of Unite the Resistance in Sheffield, PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka highlighted Lee's case, condemning the "trumped up" charges. He has assured Lee of the support of the national union and will demand his reinstatement "at the highest level". The DWP group secretary will be forwarding to the national disputes committee the submission for a ballot to take strike action - initially in the Sheffield contact centre, where Lee worked.

Comrade Rock has been continuing in his post as assistant branch secretary and still represents local PCS members - but management is making it as hard for him as possible. For the first meeting of the branch after his dismissal, management insisted that Lee be escorted onto the premises by a security guard - and picked up afterwards, much to the embarrassment of

the guard. He has since been banned from his former workplace, which means that even for official hearings Lee, the workers he represents, the managers and the minute-taker have to traipse miles across Sheffield city centre to meet in a different DWP building. The whole branch executive committee, too, has been forced to gather at a different location for its monthly meetings.

Meanwhile, members of Lee's local PCS branch have been collecting hundreds of signatures demanding his reinstatement and calling for strike action. Eighteen branches have submitted similar emergency motions to the DWP group conference in May - there would have been even more, had most branch AGMs not already taken place a week or two before his dismissal on February 23. This wide support ensures that the demand for strike action will be heard by hundreds of delegates in Brighton. Management might have thought for a few days that they had seen the last of Lee - but clearly he continues to be a thorn in their side.

Other union branches, individuals or trades councils who wish to send a message of solidarity to Lee or the branch can email it to the branch secretary at tombishell@yahoo.co.uk.

Tina Becker



Lee Rock: support rallying

ITALY

Anti-working class stalemate

The contending parties cannot agree on how to make workers pay for the crisis. Toby Abse reports

The Italian political crisis continues. Three weeks after the general election of February 24-25, Mario Monti is still in office as a caretaker premier and there is no certainty either about who will form the next government or about the likelihood of the current stalemate continuing and precipitating a second general election in late June.¹

Pierluigi Bersani, the leader of the centre-left Partito Democratico, is attempting what may prove to be impossible: to form a centre-left government with a majority in the Chamber of Deputies, but no majority in the Senate, where he would be reliant on support from Beppe Grillo's Movimento Cinque Stelle (Five Star Movement - M5S) on a case-by-case basis. He has repeatedly proposed to Grillo that M5S give support to a PD-led government (which would also include the rather more leftwing Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà - SEL) on a programmatic basis, drawing up a list of eight points which would appear to correspond to some of the major demands of M5S, including dealing with the 'conflict of interest' (in other words, making it impossible for anybody to have a near monopoly of commercial television and be prime minister or the holder of some other major political office at the same time) and bringing in a new, much more serious anti-corruption law.² Grillo has repeatedly rejected any such offer and often indulged in his habitual personal abuse of Bersani, calling him, amongst other things, a "dead man talking".

Bersani's strategy has not met with universal approval in the ranks of the ex-'official communist'-dominated PD, although he survived the first attempt to depose him in the aftermath of the election 'half victory', made at the first meeting of the PD's *direzione* (leadership body) a few days after the results came out. Various figures from the old guard of the party - the generation that presided over the liquidation of the old Partito Comunista Italiano in 1991 and then led all the 'post-communist' successor organisations of that liquidationist majority down to 2008, most notably Massimo D'Alema and Walter Veltroni³ - have made no secret of their opposition to Bersani's opening to M5S.

D'Alema is the political figure most heavily identified with the idea of an *inciucio* (a widely used slang term not found in mainstream Italian dictionaries, but best translated as 'stitch-up') with Berlusconi in a rerun of the ill-fated Bicamerale (Bicameral Commission for Constitutional Reform) of 1996-98. The *inciucio* gave Berlusconi a means of escaping any serious measures against 'conflict of interest', when the more straightforward Romano Prodi - at that stage the centre-left prime minister - might well have implemented them, by bogging the centre-left down in a prolonged and ultimately pointless discussion of various possible constitutional reforms.

Grand coalition?

D'Alema has made no secret of his desire for a grand coalition between the PD and Berlusconi's Popolo della Libertà. D'Alema likes to think of himself as in some way like Palmiro Togliatti, when he involved himself in the national unity government of 1944-47, or perhaps Berlinguer at the time of the ill-fated 'historic compromise' between the PCI and the Democrazia Cristiana in 1976-79. However, it is hard to gauge to what



Silvio Berlusconi: delaying trials

extent D'Alema really believes these myths, which place him within the tradition of the old PCI, rather than just seeking personal aggrandisement for himself.⁴ In the last few days it was widely believed that D'Alema's motivation in suggesting that the presidency of the Senate might be given to the PdL was part of an intrigue designed to get himself elected president of the republic in succession to Giorgio Napolitano (who is coming to the end of his seven-year term) with the support of Berlusconi and the PdL - doubtless in return for some sort of *de facto* safe conduct for Berlusconi in relation to his numerous legal problems.

Walter Veltroni's strategy appears to be slightly different: he seems to favour another technocratic government led by Monti or some similar figure rather than a more political grand coalition, but in practice the distinction is a bit hazy, since a technocratic government would require a 'strange majority' involving both the PD and PdL, just as Monti's administration did between November 2011 and December 2012. Both D'Alema and Veltroni are still smarting from being 'scrapped', or having to 'scrap' themselves, as Bersani came under pressure from his younger rival, 'the scrapper', Matteo Renzi, mayor of Florence and leader of the PD's right wing, to get rid of the PD's old guard when candidate lists for parliament were being drawn up.

However, much as the two old stagers hate Renzi and each other, they are all united in opposing Bersani's opening to M5S, even if Renzi with his totally vacuous obsession with youth has to be a bit more careful in attacking the Grillini (as Beppe's followers are known), who have by far the youngest parliamentary group in the current legislature. Renzi is believed to want to delay the elections for some months, as a June election would make it virtually impossible for him to topple Bersani as party leader in the interim. On the other hand, an autumn election might give credibility to a second round of primaries within the PD, in which Renzi could attack Bersani as a political failure as well as a representative of the older generation.

Bersani's most solid supporters in the PD are a grouping known to journalists as the 'Young Turks' which does include Stefano Fassina, the leader of the PD's left wing, although one must stress that to characterise anybody within the PD as leftwing is to employ a relative term - even if one might suggest that some of these are closer to traditional social democracy and less keen on the

American Democrats as a model.

Mario Monti, despite his continuing tenure as premier, was the biggest loser in the general election and his influence seems to be declining by the week. He has publicly quarrelled with president Napolitano, who rebuked him for his abortive attempt to become president of the Senate as a stepping stone towards becoming the next president of the republic. Napolitano told him it was his duty to remain as premier for 'the sake of the country', which was really code for 'the sake of the markets'.

In the course of this scheme, which was abandoned before any formal candidacy was announced because of Napolitano's hostile reaction, Monti seems to have had a meeting with Berlusconi himself, rather than some more presentable representative of the PdL - something which went down very badly with the PD - whilst failing to regain the favour of the PdL, who resent him for replacing Berlusconi in November 2011. Even within his own centrist block in parliament, Monti seems to be losing ground to the veteran Christian Democrat, Pierferdinando Casini, who seems more willing to do deals with the PD and less accommodating to Berlusconi.

At the European level, although the European People's Party was prepared to listen to a long harangue from Monti about Berlusconi's unreliability in relation to austerity, there is no longer any realistic chance that Berlusconi will be expelled from the EPP (unless he becomes totally toxic for purely judicial as opposed to political reasons). Indeed Angela Merkel has ended up as the most vocal exponent of a grand coalition between the PD and PdL, seeing Grillo as a greater threat to the German government's vision of Europe than the man who personally insulted her on more than one occasion.

Eye troubles

Berlusconi is desperately anxious to be involved in both any new government and the choice of a new president. It is clear that, whilst he may have fought the election on an anti-austerity, anti-German and somewhat Europhobic platform, the only issue that concerns him now is justice - or, to be more exact, avoiding it. A number of his trials have reached a critical stage. The Ruby case, in which he is accused of using the services of an under-age prostitute, has stalled after a hearing in which the magistrate's summing up had started. Berlusconi is clearly expecting a guilty verdict, so his primary concern is to prevent the court from sitting on

one pretext or another.

It is hard to believe that his eye troubles, which started as the election campaign was nearing its close and led to the cancellation of his closing rally in Naples, are entirely unconnected with this case. Whether the conjunctivitis, which has allegedly taken some more exotic and unusually complicated form, is an illness with a large psychosomatic component or an outright fraud is difficult to assess, since Berlusconi is now wont to go round wearing the darkest of dark glasses when he is not covering his eyes with his hands or very ostentatiously wiping them, as he did in a picture of the Senate session which went round the world and even got reproduced in the *Evening Standard*. It is true that he spent a week in hospital allegedly being treated for this terrible complaint, which did not seem to stop him from holding marathon meetings with about a dozen close political associates in his large private room more or less every day of his confinement, but it should be pointed out that it was a private hospital in Milan with which he and the PdL's Roberto Formigoni, the now disgraced former president of the Lombard region, had very close and longstanding connections.

The magistrates in one of Berlusconi's court cases - this one concerned with financial rather than sexual irregularities - were not satisfied with the doctor's note provided and sent their own doctor to the hospital,⁵ who expressed the opinion that, whilst the patient was probably not fit enough to endure cross-examination or to make a long statement, his health would in fact have permitted him to attend the court hearing in question, at which neither of these two things were required.

Berlusconi has made a number of inflammatory attacks on the magistrates and is calling a national demonstration against them for Saturday March 23. Moreover, he has said that if the next president of the Republic is from the left (as he defines it) he will call upon his followers to take to the streets. He ever more frequently compares himself to Bettino Craxi, the former Socialist premier who claimed to be a victim of persecution when he was convicted of bribery and corruption. According to Berlusconi, the magistrates have a similar fate in store for him - although he has not yet said that he will flee the country in the event of a conviction, as his erstwhile patron did.

Given the real possibility that a knockout blow might finally be delivered to Berlusconi, Grillo's refusal to make a temporary deal with the PD to pass some legislation that would bring the tycoon's political career to an end is an indication of the gap between rhetoric and reality within M5S. This gap has led to some tension even within the M5S parliamentary group, as recent events in the Senate have shown. The election of a new president of the Senate (roughly the equivalent of the speaker, but having somewhat greater prestige in terms of the Italian state hierarchy) was bound to lead to political deals or quarrels, since unlike the Chamber of Deputies, in which the centre-left coalition has an outright majority and therefore could guarantee the election of its chosen candidate, no political grouping possesses a Senate majority.

M5S started off by putting forward its own candidates for the presidency of both houses, but in the Senate it was eventually faced with having to vote

for either the PD or PdL candidate. Grillo instructed his followers that they should abstain, as there was absolutely nothing to choose between the two coalitions. There was a long and very noisy meeting of the M5S Senate delegation, which, despite all the talk of transparency, and even promises of live streaming, was in fact held behind closed doors, with journalists listening to the shouting from outside.

The PD's candidate was Pietro Grasso, previously a leading anti-Mafia magistrate,⁶ whilst the PdL's was Renato Schifani, a Sicilian former justice minister who had devised the *Lodo Schifani*, one of Berlusconi's made-to-measure laws allowing him to avoid appearing at his trials, and had been the object of judicial inquiries in relation to alleged involvement with the Mafia. It is claimed that a vote was taken at the M5S meeting, in which a large minority supported Grasso but the majority voted for abstention. In the event, about a dozen broke ranks in the secret ballot, so that Grasso beat Schifani with M5S assistance. The bulk of the dissidents seem to have been Sicilians or southern Italians - all too familiar with organised crime and aware of how their voters might respond if, by default, they handed the post to an alleged Mafioso.

Grillo's initial response was to threaten them with expulsion, even if he seems to have drawn back from this intransigent position - whether temporarily or permanently remains to be seen ●

Notes

1. Sunday June 30 and Monday July 1 are the days that have been suggested. The current parliament would need to elect a new president to replace Napolitano before any dissolution (or conceivably to re-elect Napolitano for a second term, as Berlusconi has suggested recently at least as a possibility).
2. The anti-corruption law brought in during the period of Monti's technocratic government and dependent on Berlusconi's Popolo della Libertà for support resolved nothing and some have argued that certain changes actually made things worse, allowing more of those involved in corruption to evade the statute of limitations at an earlier stage.
3. D'Alema and Veltroni are in some ways a duo like Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, in that both are equally complicit in the liquidationist project, but consumed by intense personal rivalry. Veltroni did at one stage promote himself as the Italian Tony Blair and one might see D'Alema as the more traditionalist figure, although like the post-1994 Brown he was not really to the left of his rival in any fundamental sense.
4. The Bicamerale of 1996-98 seemed a prelude to his own replacement of Prodi as prime minister. Although Prodi's government appeared to fall because of an ideological clash with Bertinotti, who refused to continue giving the centre-left external support, Prodi and his close associates have always been inclined to the view that D'Alema stabbed him in the back.
5. This is nothing like as extraordinary as it seems. If an ordinary person in Italy is absent from work for more than a very short period, the employer has the right to impose a medical visit upon them by somebody who is not their own physician. As has so often been the case, Berlusconi felt himself above the ranks of common mortals, making a mockery of the signs in every courtroom that say, 'The law is equal for all'.
6. It is worth noting that originally the PD proposed putting forward two of its long-serving parliamentarians, Anna Finocchiaro for the presidency of the Chamber and Dario Franceschini (who succeeded Veltroni and preceded Bersani as PD leader) for the presidency of the Senate. A conscious decision was then taken to put forward Laura Boldrini for the Chamber and Pietro Grasso for the Senate; neither of these candidates had been in parliament before and both could in some sense be seen as part of civil society - Boldrini, who was elected on the SEL list, had worked for the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, whilst Grasso was a former magistrate who had no previous strong association with any political party. This tactic was not just designed as a method of demonstrating to the voters that the PD was capable of renewing itself in response to the criticisms of party politics by M5S, but also as a means of putting M5S itself to the test, making it more difficult for it to justify abstaining or voting against such candidates.

REVIEW



Derry 1973

Freedom for a year

Adrian Kerr **Free Derry: protest and resistance** Guildhall Press, 2013, pp224, £11.95

From the declaration of 'Free Derry' on August 9 1971, when the solidly working class and republican community seized control of their own area of the city of Londonderry, to the time of the Provisional Irish Republican Army ceasefire in 1994, the price paid and the degree of resistance mounted within it was hugely inordinate, by comparison with occupied Ulster as a whole.

One hundred and twenty-two people lost their lives in and around the Free Derry area, including 73 civilians and republican volunteers, and 49 members of the security forces or civilians working for them. Over 3% of the total deaths for the whole of the conflict occurred in an area containing less than 1% of the population of the north of Ireland. The largest number of killings were committed by the 'security forces' - 46 died at the hands of either the British army or the Royal Ulster Constabulary, 33 of whom were civilian non-combatants.

This is a remarkable book. Not least because it is the *only* book to have been written about the Free Derry 'commune', as we could correctly call it. That creation was shapeless, spontaneous, episodic and heroic. The people of this risen community decided enough was enough and they would no longer be prey to loyalist murder gangs, sectarian armed police, and later the full weight of the British army. They claimed it back, shutting it off from the authority of the British state, taking the whole area under their own direct control and administration.

This rattled the British ruling class no end. The initial 'Hold back and it will peter out' response of the authorities was to cause furious contempt among sections of the British forces. Not least major-general Robert Ford, commander of land forces for regiments stationed

in Derry in 1971-72. The tactical decision not to go in and re-impose British control over this republican stronghold for the sake of appearance was taken almost personally by Ford as a sign of weakness and tantamount to surrender. It was Ford who was to bypass the forces on the ground, employing a detachment of Paras brought in from outside with the clear intention of showing the people of Derry who was boss. At the end of the bloodbath that was Bloody Sunday (January 30 1972) 14 utterly innocent people lay dead, many with multiple bullet wounds, some summarily executed as they lay bleeding and helpless on the ground.

The book leads us through the narrative of mounting resistance: the non-violent civil rights campaign to win 'one person, one vote' - incredibly not all adult Catholics were enfranchised, while Protestant businessmen could quite legitimately exercise more than one vote through the property franchise. The weighing of the ballot to favour one political community regardless of population size was a throwback to the 'rotten boroughs' prior to the 1832 Reform Act, and complemented the gerrymandering of borders which already ensured a loyalist electoral majority, even when clearly outnumbered by republicans. The monolithic nature of Stormont, with its cast-iron loyalist control, ensured that the Catholic republican community would be confined to specific ghettos and housing would not be allocated on the basis of need, but on the basis of religion and politics. The injustice of the situation cried out for a remedy, but the simple demand for constitutional equality in line with the rest of 'Britain' brought down upon the petitioners the most vulgar and unrestrained violence and repression, and basically beat the pacifism and non-violence out of the movement.

As the narrative unfolds, each death is recorded in the book on a differently shaded page - and the shaded pages increase in number as the story moves on. I thought I had understood fully the process of events, but I know now I was missing shades of grey among what appeared to me simply black and white. Blow by blow and death by death, as the struggle matures and degree of resistance hardens, we follow here the history as few except those intimately involved would have understood and experienced it. The emergence of the Provisional IRA, with its new breed of young working class fighters, to meet the challenge and for a time face down 20,000 British troops, is something which in general 'the left' in Britain never, ever fully understood - perhaps with the benefit of distance and reflection, that movement might become clearer now. But the book tells the whole story here, warts and all.

As I read, my own understanding of the struggle was severely dented on a number of occasions, not least by the record of armed struggle engaged in by the Officials, who I had always believed were virtually confined to barracks throughout the bitter resistance. Not so by any means. This history goes to show that depending on the Provisional press and its version of history alone, as I had done, had not actually provided me with the whole picture.

Following the Bloody Sunday massacre, one might have thought - and the military strategists who planned the atrocity must have intended - that the spirit of the community would be broken. Not so - just the opposite. Almost every able-bodied man and boy in the community lined up to join both wings of the IRA, and the community imposed its control back on the streets again. In the months following, the IRA extracted a heavy cost on the army and RUC, while the British

state fumed at the autonomy of Free Derry, establishing a think tank of strategists to draw up options on how to cope with the display of defiance and autonomy. Interestingly the relevant documents are now available - some of the options considered give you a clue as to how desperate the situation was believed to be. One of them involved cutting off Free Derry completely - a siege no less: no water, electricity, post or basic deliveries.

In the end they opted for Operation Motorman. The intention was to go with the panzers (Centurion battlefield tanks), armoured cars and 1,500 fully armed troops. As the tanks smash through road blocks and over rubble and barricades, there is something of similar world events in this scenario - Hungary comes to mind. They prepare for house-by-house resistance, they calculate high casualties, they expect innocent civilians across the board to die: they think it is all a price worth paying. But the IRA does not, and wisely refuses to fight this battle in its own backyard, within its own unarmed and vulnerable community. Free Derry, as an autonomous, self-operating and defended community was broken open on July 31 1972. It had lasted just a few days short of a year.

But the spirit (as well as the famous end-house mural) still remains. Now it is the clicking of cameras, not the discharging of rifles, that is heard, as folk from across the world come to visit the area, marvel at its history, study its legend and visit its wonderfully moving Museum of Free Derry, from which this book is derived.

Every person who calls themselves a socialist of any description must surely read *Free Derry: protest and resistance* and arm themselves with the knowledge of one of the most heroic pages of struggle of any working class community in the last century ●

David Douglass

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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weekly Worker

SWP refuses to face up to reality

If you don't talk about it ...

“What a weekend,” begins the latest *Party Notes*, the Socialist Workers Party’s internal weekly bulletin. “Campaigners across Britain held 52 protests against the bedroom tax, thousands marched in north London in defence of Whittington hospital, hundreds came to the Sheffield Unite the Resistance conference, anti-fascists confronted the Nazis in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Rotherham, firefighters and their supporters marched in south London - and much more!”

Yes, that’s the exciting “real world” for you. At a time like this, why would anyone want to talk about the crisis that has wracked the SWP? The bungled handling of a rape accusation against a leading comrade. The expulsion of those who complained about it on Facebook. The rigging of the March 10 special conference through the use of the full-time apparatus to ensure that oppositionists were excluded as delegates wherever possible.

Who in the SWP is interested in the resulting resignation of hundreds of their comrades? Most of those who have now left the organisation have simply packed it in as individuals, but, at the last count, 121 comrades have signed the open resignation letter put out by the newly formed International Socialist Network.² Has the central committee nothing to say about their departure? No, not a word. Neither *Party Notes* nor, of course, *Socialist Worker* even mentions it. If you don’t talk about it, it didn’t happen.

This, if nothing else, demonstrates the absolute bankruptcy of the CC. As if the remaining few hundred activists do not know how serious the situation is. As if they are not wondering what the future holds for the organisation - indeed whether it will even survive in its present form. What a way to treat comrades who in many cases have sacrificed decades of their lives for “the party”. In the eyes of the CC they are just like children who have to be protected from the cruel truth and pepped up with exaggerated stories of mass resistance (with the SWP at the centre of it, of course).

None of this is a cause for celebration. Certainly not the departure of so many class fighters - many of whom will now drift away from revolutionary politics rather than join the ISN. Burnt by the experience, fewer still will think of throwing in their lot with one of the other sects.

In a sense it was hardly surprising, but it has to be said that the ISN comrades around Richard Seymour and China Miéville have been guilty of two linked mistakes. First, they agreed to accept the discipline of the In Defence of Our Party temporary faction, and immediately cease all public criticism of the leadership’s antics. It was all very well declaring after the event: “We are not prepared to accept or abide by the decisions of the special conference”³ - ie, it was illegitimate - but they should have said so, loudly and repeatedly, in advance. They should not have agreed, at the behest of IDOP, to effectively close down the *International Socialism*



Head in the sand over Delta

blog in the weeks before March 10. *IS* had continually exposed the CC’s gerrymandering and provided a focal point for all those who at last were beginning to recognise the CC’s bureaucratic centralism for what it is.

The second mistake was to organise a walkout. They should have done the opposite: in other words, continued to organise inside the SWP, whether or not the CC recognised their right to do so. The leadership’s ban on free association and free speech is unacceptable for any revolutionary and as a matter of principle democratic partisans of the working class must constantly seek to overturn such restrictions on our basic rights.

While IDOP has obediently shut up shop after the conference in compliance with the bureaucratic constitution, the *IS* comrades should have declared an open rebellion. In the case of Seymour, Miéville and no doubt others, they were facing expulsion, no matter what they did. They should have rallied their supporters to defy the bureaucrats - ‘Let them drive us out if they can’ should have been the attitude. It is the duty of revolutionaries to rebel not only against the outrages of the

class enemy, but against those of their unconscious agents within our movement too.

Remarkable

The silence of the leadership is all the more remarkable in view of the coverage accorded to the SWP crisis by the mass media - the BBC, *The Times*, *The Independent* and *The Guardian* all reported on the special conference. And just two days before *Party Notes* came out, the *Daily Mail* was at it again.

Implying that it alone had broken the story, it continued its assault on not just the SWP, but by extension the entire organised left, by alleging that - unlike bourgeois institutions, not least popular newspapers - our organisations are awash with sexism. Leftwing men will, it seems, sexually assault young women comrades as soon as look at them - the *Mail* took up the claim previously made on the internet by a former member that the SWP disputes committee had investigated no fewer than *nine* rape cases internally.

Of the special conference, the ignorant *Mail* journalists stated: “They say that, had all the estimated 1,000 or so party members been allowed to

participate, under the time-honoured principle of ‘one person, one vote’, the leadership would have been forced to resign *en masse*.”⁴ Of course, all the mainstream parties allow their entire membership to vote at conference, don’t they? (The Tories do not even bother with votes!) None of their conferences are restricted to *delegates*, are they?

But the CC’s vow of silence prevents it from responding to what just about every one of its members must have read for themselves. You see, a “line has been drawn” under the ‘comrade Delta’ affair and no-one in the “real world” is talking about it. Much more important is the fact that 200 people attended a Unite the Resistance meeting in Sheffield and a couple of thousand people protested against a threatened hospital closure in London. What goes on in an organisation that aspires to lead those protestors, along with millions of fellow workers, is actually none of their business. The nuts and bolts of revolutionary organisation is the sole preserve of the SWP central committee.

In reality its gross mishandling of the Delta case must be confronted. The CC should have stated to the alleged victim that it was not competent

to investigate the matter. Yes, her complaint had to be taken seriously. Delta should have been told to give up his membership until such a time as he was able to clear his name - the cost to the SWP of defending him even from demotion for so long is now obvious to everyone.

Perhaps learning from this in a negative way, the Socialist Party in England and Wales has adopted a totally different approach in the case of Steve Hedley, assistant general secretary of the RMT union, who last week announced his resignation from SPEW, following an allegation of an assault on his former partner. Comrade Hedley denies it, but he has written to SPEW to say: “I know this puts the Socialist Party in a difficult position and am therefore resigning my membership.”⁵

Whatever the truth of the allegation, the correct course has been followed. I am sure the resignation letter did not exactly come as a surprise to SPEW - in fact comrades Peter Taaffe and Hannah Sell might well have been familiar with its entire content before the email landed in their inbox. Comrade Hedley ought to be welcomed back into membership if and when he can demonstrate his innocence.

The two cases are real enough, and we will continue to expose the bureaucratic inadequacies of the left groups. But we will not join in the hypocritical witch-hunting of the likes of the *Mail*. We will defend the SWP from their attacks, even if it is not willing to do so itself ●

Peter Manson

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Notes

1. *Party Notes* March 18.
2. <http://internationalsocialismuk.blogspot.co.uk/2013/03/fao-central-committee-of-socialist.html>.
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5. www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/16319/14-03-2013/steve-hedley-resignation-from-socialist-party.

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