

# weekly worker



**Frontism produces no lasting gains. Dave Isaacson looks at the June 22 People's Assembly**

- Bedroom tax protests
- South African Wasp
- Korean tensions mount
- Scottish referendum

No 956 Thursday April 4 2013

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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The world of women,  
like the world of men,  
is divided





# LETTERS



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

## Just names

When I read Jack Conrad's reply (Letters, March 21) to Camilla Power's 'Is feminism a dirty word?' (March 14), in which he highlighted her self-description as "anarcho-Marxist", I felt a sudden need to offer prompt support for Camilla. However, I correctly anticipated that comrade Power would require no back-up from anyone, which indeed was the case. She wrote: "... such wooden dichotomies are baggage from our movement's splintered, tragic past. Communists may have been shooting anarchists in the past, but let's not go down that road again. I know many anarchists whose intellectual inspiration is Marx" (Letters, March 28).

Political language (indeed all language) uses words that over time automatically become 'reified categories' with little (if any?) relationship to the real world; Camilla Power simply restates what was often said, even widely believed, in earlier days of communism, as represented in the words and actions of Josef Dietzgen: "... I lay very little weight on whether a man is an anarchist or a socialist, because it seems to me that too much is made of the difference. If the anarchists have mad and brainless individuals in their ranks, the socialists are blessed with cowards. For this reason I care as much for the one as the other. The majority in both camps are still in great need of education, which will of itself bring about a reconciliation."

Remember, Dietzgen speaks as one of the 'founders' of what we might call 'Marxist thought'; he was a life-long revolutionary, involved in the 1848 revolutions, who fled to America, where he propagated Marx's *Communist manifesto*. Home again, in Germany, he settled down to theoretical work, and greatly impressed Marx and Engels: his philosophical essays explored the nature of cognition, the apparent contradiction between 'thinking' and 'being', 'mind' and 'matter' - topics explored by Marx in his 1844 manuscripts.

For us today, in the 21st century, these old campaigners are just names; after years of Stalinism, they are marginally remembered, often as footnotes in Marxist classics; their differences of opinion, their rival groupings, inevitably viewed as abstract entities related only to dehumanised ghosts from the distant past, totally unrelated to real *human* beings who fought their battles.

A delegate to the international congress at the Hague 1872, Dietzgen was introduced to the assembly by Marx, with the words: "Here is our philosopher"; in 1881, he was nominated as candidate for the Reichstag. It was on April 20 1886 that Dietzgen composed the paragraph with which I opened. When the Haymarket bomb exploded and the staff of the anarchist paper, *Chicagoer Arbeiterzeitung*, were arrested and condemned to the scaffold for their opinions (none were involved in the bombing), Dietzgen promptly offered his services to the paper, assuming the post of chief editor.

In a letter to a friend, he wrote: "I call myself an 'anarchist' in this article - we shall not arrive at the new society without serious struggles ... I believe in 'anarchy' as a stage of transition. Dyed-in-the-wool anarchists pretend that anarchism is the final stage of society - to that extent they are madcaps, who think

they are the most radical people, but we are the real radicals who work for the communist order above and beyond anarchism. The final aim is socialist order, not anarchist disorder."

**Bob Potter**  
email

## Masculinism

The part of Nick Rogers' statement (Letters, March 28) which says that "The whole working class - men and women - must be remade as a female-led (not exclusively female) coalition" shows him to be a non-alpha, feminised male making political statements without any reflection.

It is time for feminised males like Nick Rogers to realise that non-feminised men do not want to be led by people on the basis of their gender. Their support for female equality and opposition to the idea of male supremacy in no way obliges them to support feminist ideology. Personally I have no desire to subordinate one sex to the other, as the non-alpha, feminised males seem to wish do.

I believe feminism to be mostly a false ideology which does not recognise the interdependence between males and females. Of course, I realise that feminism is a wide church with its own lunatic fringe. For instance, the most extreme feminist elements preach gender apartheid and argue that women must get men out of their heads and out of their beds - a truly interesting, evil proposition for anyone who wants to bring about the end of the human race.

However, what all feminists, both moderate and extreme, have in common is that they forget, or do not see, that the foundations of the comforts of the easy living which most women enjoy today in the more developed societies depend exclusively on male labour. When last did anyone see a group of females building houses for the feminists to live in? When last did anyone see a group of females making roads, laying down pavements, or rail tracks to make travel easy for the feminist? When last did anyone see a group of female workers digging for coal in the mines, getting oil and gas to provide most of the energy for the feminist, and on which modern life depends?

Furthermore, no female-friendly society would want women to do this type of labour. Without exclusively male labour providing the material foundations, modern civilisation would not be possible and the living standards of our feminists, not to mention the rest of us, would be at a miserable level. Existence would be a brute struggle for survival with no room for feminist fantasies. This is why feminism is mostly a false ideology not based on material or even psychological realities. When feminists understand that women need male labour more than males need female labour, they may begin to reconnect with reality.

However, to live really comfortably, both men and women need each other's labour. Let the feminists put this in their pipe and smoke it. No pun intended. Any worthwhile socialist discourse about female-male relations must be based on recognition of their mutual interdependence.

**Tony Clark**  
email

## Bogey Bowler

During a recent trip to Sheffield, a comrade recounted a weird episode that highlighted for me some of the absurdities - and real dangers - that are implicit in the 'safe space' scaremongering currently being whipped up by sections of the left.

My comrade and two members of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty - female and male - were leafleting a government building in the centre of the city on an employment victimisation

case. Things were proceeding as these things generally do until Maxine Bowler - prominent Socialist Workers Party activist and central committee loyalist - pitched up and disappeared into the building.

The female AWL comrade was instantly alarmed: "What's she doing here?" she asked, clearly disconcerted. "Er, she probably has a meeting here," someone said. The AWL comrade was not reassured at all, however, that comrade Bowler must surely have some legitimate business on the premises and claimed that comrade Bowler's individual presence in this large building made her feel "not safe": here was a 'rape denier' - she is a member of the 'rape denying' SWP disputes committee, after all. This was no flippant remark: I'm told that the AWL comrade was obviously upset and appeared at one point to be on the verge of tears. So I'm certainly not questioning her sincerity here; quite another thing is the supposed threat that Maxine Bowler represents to other women. Seriously, what did the AWLer think comrade Bowler's presence portended?

Perhaps the 'sleeper' male rapists amongst the hundreds working in the building would suddenly be activated when they spotted Maxine in the lift, knowing that they could now assault women in their workplace and then scuttle along to this SWP comrade for an alibi and a character reference? Was it perhaps being suggested that comrade Bowler *herself* represented some sort of physical threat to the women there? Really, what nonsense - and potentially dangerous nonsense.

At one point, incredibly, the AWLer actually proposed that *security staff* be approached to deal with comrade Bowler! Did she want this SWPer expelled from the building? Should a posse of vigilant guards have shadowed this dangerous fiend around until her business was concluded, then firmly deposit her onto the pavement? Why muck about? Why not simply phone the police and make the world a marginally 'safer space' for women by having Bowler (along with the rest of the SWP majority) banged up?

Let's stop this, comrades. The problem is not that comrade Bowler - or the revolutionary organisation to which she is loyal - deny rape, despite the shockingly badly bungled and crassly insensitive way a recent accusation was handled by the leadership and its disputes committee. The problem is that the bureaucratic centralist regime that holds sway in the SWP - with the consent and connivance of comrades like Maxine Bowler - disempowers the membership and creates an inner-party regime where gross abuses of power by an unaccountable apparatus (yes, including rape) are made potentially easier.

Incidentally, this is the point of the 'Rape is not the problem' headline in our March 14 issue that some comrades have baulked at. *The problem* with the SWP is its semi-Stalinist internal regime, not a generalised culture that pooh-poohs the notion that women are sexually assaulted: a rape accusation was a *trigger* to the crisis, not the cause. We need to call for a democratic revolution in organisations like the SWP and use every opportunity we can grab to engage with its members to agitate for it. Its exile from the workers' movement would be a disaster - for all of us, actually.

I'm sure some comrades will accuse me of 'not taking rape seriously', of trivialising the real distress of this AWLer or of using language that unconsciously reveals sexist assumptions. I flatly reject all that. In fact, it seems clear to me that politics of the sort that engender the type of brittle, irrational and childlike response of this individual AWL woman to the deadly

serious question of rape are *actually* the trivialising element in all of this.

What is certainly not serious is to react to the appearance of 'bogey woman' Bowler - or any other SWPer, people who are our *comrades* in a common movement - as if the wicked witch of the north has just touched down at the head of a squadron of flying monkeys.

**Mark Fischer**  
London

## Lenin's levity

It is telling that Peter Manson chooses a 1903 quote to demonstrate Lenin's inclusiveness for factions ('Loach makes his bid for unity', March 28). After all, Lenin himself was merely part of one faction within a much broader Russian Social Democratic Party at the time.

For a different appraisal of Lenin's attitude to party dissent, may I refer to the 11th Party Congress and how, in the context of the Cheka and Kronstadt, it was perhaps understandable that members of the Workers' Opposition did not regard it as a jest when reference was made to the use of machine guns against those criticising the New Economic Policy. Lenin had to explain he really had in mind party disciplinary measures, and not machine guns as such. I doubt Kollontai and Shlyapnikov were rolling about the aisles in fits of laughter at Lenin's levity.

The Manson defence of Lenin's tolerance of dissent was almost as funny as Paul Smith declaring it was only Stalin who defined ownership in purely juridical terms ('Stalinism, sectarianism and Marxist education', March 28). If Smith sincerely advocates the Marxist analysis, he should be aware that Lenin and Trotsky were also guilty of the same thing. All three Bolsheviks regressed to a position akin to what Marx called vulgar communism, where the condition of the labourer is not abolished: it is extended to all individuals. It is a simple community of labour, where prevails equality of wages paid by the universal capitalist.

**Alan Johnstone**  
SPGB

## Solid feet

I'm puzzled that Peter Manson's article was focused more on the SWP debacle than on Ken Loach's Left Unity project.

If this gets off to a more solid footing, it should be because Left Unity eschews 'organic' trade union links and imports the more 'populist' continental worker-class movement model from the old SFIO to the old German and Austrian social democracies. It should be because Left Unity popularises 'precarious' and 'precarariat' as the non-unionised alternative to the 99%. It should be because Left Unity learns from grassroots organisation by Syriza extending to solidarity networks and everything else from the pre-World War I SPD model.

Have radicalised British workers and disillusioned former Labour-supporting workers found their version of Oskar Lafontaine, Jean-Luc Mélenchon or even Sergei Udaltsov?

**Jacob Richter**  
email

## SWP, SWP, SWP

Protesting against the massive austerity wave choking the European working class, around 15,000 protestors rallied on March 14 in Brussels, as the European Council summit was taking place. "No to austerity! Yes to jobs for young people!" the leaders of the main European trade unions demanded, while others were campaigning to "abolish all austerity laws and treaties".

On the weekend of March 16-17

in Britain, 52 protests against the 'bedroom tax' were organised and several other actions took place. As the SWP's *Party Notes* states, anti-austerity protests must be supported but, as numerous and strong as they may become, such protests are not enough: the need for a mass working class *political party*, which is obvious for us Marxists, must be met and the word spread among protestors.

Now you have the Left Unity project, which claims to have gathered 5,000 supporters. Is it another left-reformist diversion? The first step towards a new 'Socialist Alliance'? A halfway house project?

At a meeting in Paris last weekend, a handful of Marxist comrades came together from different places -including one from Britain. The British comrade asked: "I'd like to know what the *Weekly Worker* would say about all that; these are real questions that I am trying to discuss with organisers in my town - mainly left Labour elements, but also members of far-left groups (SWP, SP, etc). But, when I read the *Weekly Worker*, as you have suggested, what are they talking about? SWP, SWP, SWP. Is the SWP the only 'real world' for them?"

I had just signed the paragraphs above when the last issue came out with a full-page article by Peter Manson titled 'Loach makes his bid for unity' (March 28). Unfortunately, even here, three quarters of the article was devoted to ... the SWP and its opponents! Surely, the left unity call and related actions such as the anti-austerity assembly and the 'bedroom tax' campaign deserve fuller treatment in the *Weekly Worker*?

**Jean-Michel Edwin**  
email

## Anti-imperialism

Next to leading the October revolution, perhaps Lenin's greatest contribution to Marxism was to place the communist movement squarely on the side of the other great revolutionary current of the 20th century: the revolt of the colonial and semi-colonial masses against their oppressors. The Comintern's position on the national question was based upon the proposition that a movement that opposes the division of society into classes must also fight against the division of the world into dominant and subject nations.

In a recent article, Mike Macnair calls into question the value of Lenin's contribution ('No inherent connection with the working class', March 21). He argues that Lenin's belief that imperialism was the final stage of capitalism led him to regard the national bourgeoisie of underdeveloped countries, barred from becoming top-tier world capitalists by huge imperialist monopolies, as 'natural allies' of the proletariat, with whom it was possible to form 'strategic alliances'. Lenin's reasoning, Macnair claims, forms the basis of the 'anti-imperialist united front' that dominated communist thinking throughout the 20th century, and continues shape the attitudes of anti-imperialist movements today.

I won't attempt to evaluate Macnair's larger argument concerning Lenin's thinking on imperialism. I must, however, take exception to his misrepresentations of the position of Lenin, Trotsky and the early Comintern on national and colonial questions - a surprising error on the part of someone so thoroughly steeped in the history of the socialist movement. Macnair considers Comintern policy to be the theoretical basis for the class collaboration of later years and decades, which led to such disasters as the Shanghai massacre of 1927 and Indonesian bloodbath of 1965, as well as the fount of more recent leftwing infatuations with third-world



figures like Khomeini, Chávez and Ahmadinejad. This is like blaming Lenin for Stalin and Pol Pot.

Early Comintern formulations on the anti-imperialist struggle were admittedly ambiguous. The term ‘anti-imperialist united front’ could be construed to mean either short-term tactical combinations with the national bourgeoisie, or a longer-term strategic alliance. The Comintern nevertheless insisted on the strict programmatic and organisational independence of communist parties in countries of belated development. Its policies were completely incompatible with either prolonged communist membership in bourgeois nationalist parties - of the kind that led to the massacre of thousands of Chinese workers at the hands of the Kuomintang - or joining with such parties in governing coalitions - as did the Indonesian communists prior to their sanguinary downfall. Nor did the Comintern ever assist in puffing up the populist pretensions of third-world strongmen.

In response to the 1927 Shanghai debacle, Trotsky for the first time generalised his theory of permanent revolution to include the underdeveloped world as a whole. He also attempted to resolve lingering ambiguities concerning the anti-imperialist united front. His writings on China are an extended polemic against the notion of any kind of strategic alliance of the proletariat with the national bourgeoisie. He argues that communist collaboration must be restricted to short-term tactical agreements, usually in situations of military conflict between imperialist powers and the peoples and governments of subject nations. Under these circumstances, Trotsky thought it advantageous for communists and nationalists to agree to point their guns at their more powerful common enemy rather than at each other.

Should the nationalists renege, and join the imperialists in firing upon communists (as has happened many times), the latter could seize the opportunity to expose the local bourgeoisie as betrayers of the cause of national emancipation to which they claim to be committed, and to which communists must be genuinely committed, where national oppression exists. If the national question eclipses class struggle in the eyes of the masses, which it invariably does among oppressed nations and peoples, it is the task of communists to prove to the masses in practice - not merely to proclaim in words - that the path to the nation’s freedom runs through proletarian revolution. Military support, in other words, is a tactic for undermining the leadership of the national bourgeoisie, not, as interpreted by Stalinists and others, an invitation for long-term collaboration until the far-off day of national deliverance. It was conceived as a means of cashing in, not as an excuse for selling out.

The CBGB has difficulty with the tactic of military, as opposed to political, support. You claim that communists should oppose bourgeois nationalists and imperialists equally alike. Macnair argues that Trotsky was mistaken when he called for the defence of Abyssinia in the Italian invasion of 1935-36 because the country’s emperor, Haile Selassie, was subservient to the British. But I have often wondered how the CPGB thinks Marxists should have acted with regard to anti-colonial revolts.

Several years ago, I wrote an article in this paper criticising James Connolly for joining the Easter Rising in Dublin on nationalist, as opposed to revolutionary socialist, terms. But do the CPGB think he should not have joined at all? Are you suggesting that Lenin was wrong in siding with the rebels of 1916 against the British empire, or that Karl Radek, the then Luxemburgist against whom Lenin waged a polemic, was right

in regarding the rising as a diversion from the class struggle? Should Connolly and his Irish Citizen Army have been neutral? Should Algerian and French communists in the 1950s have even-handedly denounced the French government and the FLN? The Macnair-CPGB position is badly in need of clarification on this score.

The national question is posed today in terms quite different from those of the early Comintern era. The kinds of countries it mainly involves - eg, Iran, Iraq, Venezuela - are not typically colonies or semi-colonies (in addition to the fact that none contain communist parties of any size, which gives the whole discussion a rather abstract character). Yet these states have been historically consigned to a subordinate place within the American/European-dominated hierarchy of states. For stepping out of line, they are beset by economic sanctions, coup attempts, military threats and - in the case of Iraq - an actual invasion.

These regimes may be enemies of the working class, but they are hardly enemies equal in strength to imperialism, as the masses of these countries are keenly aware. The slogan of revolutionary defeatism on both sides is oddly inappropriate when applied to adversaries so unevenly matched. To align oneself on the field of battle with a weaker foe to defeat a stronger one, in order to defeat the weaker one later, seems a matter of tactical common sense, theories of imperialism aside.

**Jim Creegan**  
New York

## Greens left me

The reformist Greens are a party rife with opportunism who have gained electoral success through the shamelessly repeated lie that they are ‘anti-cuts’. The opportunist moves the Green Party have made, and the general direction the party is moving in, are unacceptable.

Hence on March 14 I resigned from the party after being a member since September 28 2011. Whilst in the party, I became the youngest ever chairman of a local party in Central Lancashire Green Party, at the age of 16, and became the youngest ever member on the Young Greens national committee at 17.

In 2011, the Greens made significant gains in the local elections. In Brighton, the Greens gained 10 councillors, taking the party’s overall tally to 23, making the Greens the largest party on the council and enabling them to form a minority administration. One could be excused for thinking that a supposedly ‘anti-cuts’ party taking control of a local council during times of austerity would result in illegal budgets, occupations, radical direct action and the establishment of a nationwide organisation against the cuts. Sadly, this is not what the Greens did. Instead they condemned themselves to opportunism, as have all other electoralist parties before them, by forming an administration which is passing cuts as we speak. The ‘anti-cuts’ Greens have set a budget for the 2013-14 financial year which includes £10.8 million worth of cuts, with the council website claiming that over the next four years the council will ‘save’ between £20-£25 million per year.

Despite my fundamental differences with the Greens, I recognise that they are the only left-of-Labour political party in England that appear to have a stable support base with representation in both the national and European parliaments. The left are constantly forming new parties, such as Respect, Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, Socialist Alliance, etc, in the hope that they will gain vast support in a relatively short space of time.

Whilst I am no longer an electoralist, in any sense of the word, I am also not so dogmatic as not to recognise that concessions can be won via bourgeois

parties. The Greens are the only party with parliamentary representation that have a clear policy on abolishing the monarchy; the Greens are also one of the only parties with parliamentary representation against nuclear weapons and are for the immediate withdrawal from Afghanistan. The Greens have also allowed for permanent factions to be formed, such as the wonderfully anti-capitalist, ecosocialist faction, the Green Left (which I urge all Green Party members to join).

Whilst I may vote Green, I will be clear in no uncertain terms that the Greens are bourgeois reformists. The party is currently in the vice-like grip of opportunists and, after 533 days of loyal service within the Green Party of England and Wales, I had to announce to my family and comrades that the Greens had left me.

**Robert Eagleton**  
email

## Joined up

I am an online reader of the *Weekly Worker*. As such, I usually read the pdf version on the CPGB website. However, I have recently noticed that the *Weekly Worker* no longer asks readers to become supporters of the CPGB. Similarly, on the CPGB website, the link for people wanting to join is hidden away at the bottom right-hand corner of the website. Does this mean that the CPGB is no longer looking for people to join or become active supporters?

I have also been reading *The Leninist* archive. It seems to me that, in contrast to *The Leninist*, the *Weekly Worker* no longer aims to develop a party culture and loyalty amongst its rapidly expanding readership. This, in my opinion, is a big mistake. Not all readers of the *Weekly Worker* live in London and are able to attend the London Communist Forum, where the Provisional Central Committee gives its weekly political report. Such readers have to listen to the podcasts instead.

It seems to me that producing the *Weekly Worker* each week has led to a form of routinism, whereby it has been forgotten that the paper is there to build the party, just like the scaffolding around a building under construction. Also, the *Weekly Worker*, as pointed out by the editor, is produced entirely by voluntary labour. This contrasts with Lenin who, in his famous book, *What is to be done?*, argued for paid professional revolutionaries who would work full-time for the Marxist party.

The *Weekly Worker*’s coverage of the crisis within the SWP has been marvellous. However, it is not good enough to expand the readership of the *Weekly Worker*. It is necessary to increase the number of active CPGB supporters and members. Whilst I’m not advocating the CPGB exactly copy the SWP, who never cease asking people to ‘Join the socialists’ and where membership is like a revolving door, there is much that the CPGB can learn from the SWP by putting recruitment at the centre of all activity.

I would like to make a few comments about the content of the *Weekly Worker*. As the PCC explains, the centre of the world revolution will occur across Europe, following the establishment of a Communist Party of the European Union. However, it would be good to read articles by correspondents who live in North America, especially those living in the United States, given that Obama is making \$500 billion of cuts in the state budgets. I would also like to read about what is happening in China.

Lastly, the news that Ed Miliband’s brother, David, is leaving UK politics for a high-powered job in New York is very significant. It shows that the Labour Party is gradually moving to the left. This means that coverage of developments in the Labour Party should be stepped up.

**John Smithee**  
email

# ACTION

## CPGB podcasts

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

## London Communist Forum

**Sunday April 7, 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 5: ‘The capitalist character of manufacture’. Organised by CPGB: [www.cpgb.org.uk](http://www.cpgb.org.uk).

## Radical Anthropology Group

Introduction to anthropology

**Tuesday April 9, 6.15pm:** ‘Myth, market and media: the bauxite-rich Niyamgiri in the London Stock Exchange’. Speaker: Samarendra Das. St Martin’s Community Centre, 43 Carol Street, London NW1 (Camden Town tube). £10 waged, £5 low waged, £3 unwaged. Discounts for whole term.

Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: [www.radicalanthropologygroup.org](http://www.radicalanthropologygroup.org).

## 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](http://www.swou.org).

## Stop the War

**Sunday April 7, 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](http://www.royalcourttheatre.com).

Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk](http://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](http://www.classwargames.net).

## Roma spring

**Sunday April 7, 12 noon:** Roma nation day event. Black Lion Gate, Kensington Gardens, Bayswater Road, London W2. Organised by 8 April Movement: [dale.farm@btinternet.com](mailto:dale.farm@btinternet.com).

## Palestine art

**Friday April 12 to Friday May 31:** Exhibition, Mosaic Rooms, Tower House, 226 Cromwell Road, London SW5. Mosaic Rooms: [www.mosaicrooms.org](http://www.mosaicrooms.org).

## Lessons from Gaza

**Saturday April 13, 10.30am to 4.30pm:** Conference, ‘Transforming public support into political action on Palestine’. Brunei Gallery, School of Oriental and African Studies, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: [www.palestinecampaign.org](http://www.palestinecampaign.org).

## 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](http://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](http://www.l-r-c.org.uk).

## Socialist films

**Sunday April 14, 11am:** Screening, Renoir Cinema, Brunswick Square, London WC1. Saul Landau’s *Will the real terrorist please stand up?* (Cuba/USA, 65 minutes); and Ivor Montagu’s *Defence of Madrid* (UK, 34 minutes). Organised by London Socialist Film Co-op: [www.socialistfilm.blogspot.com](http://www.socialistfilm.blogspot.com).

## Hidden stories

**Sunday April 14, 7.30pm:** Public meeting, MIC Centre, 81-103 Euston Street, London NW1. ‘Hidden stories of the Stephen Lawrence inquiry’. Speaker: Dr Richard Stone, adviser to Sir William MacPherson. Organised by Jewish Socialists Group: [www.jewishsocialist.org.uk](http://www.jewishsocialist.org.uk).

## Media and LGBT

**Tuesday April 16, 6.30pm:** Public meeting and discussion, NUJ, Headlands House, 308 Gray’s Inn Road, London WC1. ‘Has anything changed in reporting of LGBT issues?’ Organised by NUJ Pride: [www.nuj.org.uk/innerPagenuj.html?docid=2094](http://www.nuj.org.uk/innerPagenuj.html?docid=2094).

## 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](http://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](http://www.stopwar.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.



**WELFARE**

# Housing should be a basic human right

The cuts to housing benefit are cruel and irrational, says **Michael Copestake**

**C**ould you live on £53 per week? Many in this country, because of unemployment, disability or incapacity, or even low-paid, part-time employment in a world of extortionate living costs, are already barely surviving on something like this, give or take a few quid. The changes to the welfare system being pushed through by the Conservative-led coalition government only look like adding to this growing accumulation of social penury and misery.

Incidentally, the minister most directly responsible for the changes to housing benefit (HB), council tax benefit, etc thinks that he could. "If I had to, I would," a confident Iain Duncan Smith told listeners to BBC Radio 4. Indeed IDS has since boasted that he knows precisely what it is like to be on the breadline from personal experience, having been unemployed himself on two occasions. What a man of the people!

However, amusing though it may be to poke fun at the often very well-off leaders of the government, it is a mistake to follow this route in terms of the 'fairness' of austerity. What if the Conservative Party were represented by people who went to comprehensive school and small trades people who better embodied the ideology of 'striving' to implement cuts? What about when we are on the receiving end of Labour austerity? It is a class question, not a question of individual hypocrites.

The most immediate cause for the latest wave of fury against the government's austerity programme is the 'bedroom tax' that from now on is to be levied on tenants in state-owned or housing association accommodation who are deemed to be receiving more HB than they 'deserve', given that they live somewhere that has an alleged 'spare' room.

Listening to the men from the ministry, it all sounds so fair. Don't you know that in the private sector you can't claim HB for more than a single room per adult? Why should the people in state-owned housing be so much more privileged? A simple bit of regulatory alignment that will increase the amount of fairness and decrease the size of the deficit. What's not to like?

Both of these excuses, and they are the flimsiest of excuses, are risible. In no sense can one conceive that this part of the austerity programme will make even a dent in the deficit (and we reject austerity point blank anyhow), and in no sense can the measures being implemented be considered 'fair' - a malleable concept which is completely in the eye of the beholder. We say it is not fair that those in private accommodation, rented or bought, are exploited by landlords and banks. We say it is not fair to engage in 'downward levelling'. Ironically this was one of the main accusations that used to get thrown at the those who advocate communism. Under capitalism it has become a badge of merit in a world of market failure.

## What is it?

The bedroom tax will affect around 660,000 households, with two-thirds of those being hit by reductions in HB being disabled. Being found in possession of one 'spare' room will lead to a 14% reduction in HB for the tenant, with a 25% reduction for those with two or more 'spare' rooms. Government apologists claim it is unfair and iniquitous to have thousands of families stuck in overcrowded accommodation, whilst so many single people, couples or



**Take it over: Uptown Court, 103 spare rooms. Recently purchased for just £35 million by unnamed Indian billionaire**

small families are swanning around in houses that may even have a whole extra room in addition to the living and sleeping area deemed necessary, with no account taken of whether or not this 'spare' room is actually in use - unless the person goes through an arduous complaints process to try and gain an exemption: for example, the room may be needed on medical grounds.

There are around 200,000 people in overcrowded state-owned housing, so in theory, assuming straight swaps with the 'spare roomers' could be arranged (which, obviously, is impossible), that would end the overcrowding, wouldn't it? But what about the extra 400,000 people with nowhere smaller to move to? Would IDS ensure the extra accommodation was built, if he won't now?

Why were so many people placed in accommodation with rooms allegedly 'surplus' to requirements in the first place? No surprises: part of the answer is that there was a shortage of accommodation of a more suitable size. So people are supposedly being 'encouraged' to move into housing which not only does not exist, but whose non-existence is the basis of the whole operation in the first place! This is an entirely irrational policy - at least from the point of view of solving housing problems. But, of course, that is not the real intention. The real intention is to reduce welfare to the bare minimum as part of an overall strategy of returning to some kind of 'pristine' capitalism.

Labour, sensing easy point-scoring, has called 'bullshit' on the whole thing. Through freedom of information requests Labour has ascertained that replacement accommodation of a smaller size only exists for one in every 20 of those who will be affected by the bedroom tax. For those who remain they face either a significant further reduction in an already precarious standard of living, or moving out into smaller accommodation in the private sector. Rents, of course, tend to be higher in the private sector

than in state-owned housing, and the National Housing Association has calculated that even if only a small proportion of those presently on HB in state-owned housing move on to private-sector housing then the total cost of HB would *increase*. Add in the monstrous cost of administering this cruel wheeze, plus the costs of chasing people through the courts for rent arrears, and the idea that this will reduce the dreaded deficit by even a penny has to be laughed out of court.

Labour leader Ed Miliband has apparently instructed Labour-controlled councils to oppose the bedroom tax. Whether there is anything of substance behind this remains to be seen. In principle it should be easy enough for councils to get round it. The Labour council in Nottingham has simply reclassified several of its blocks of flats from 'two-bed' to 'one-bed' and will presumably keep tenants' HB at the same level.

Housing benefit itself is administered and paid out by local councils but then claimed back from central government funds through the department for work and pensions, so in theory all councils could refuse to go along with the bedroom tax and simply keep reclaiming the same amount as before.

## But there's more

Harder to get around is one of the other measures being introduced in the name of austerity: the changes to council tax benefit. Whilst the HB 'reforms' affect a large enough number of people, those related to CTB will hit a truly massive two million or so. Previously CTB was centrally administered and funded, subsidising a portion of the council tax of those on very low incomes. As of April 1, responsibility for the administration of CTB has been passed to local councils, along with a 10% cut in the money for funding it. The buck has been passed. There will be cuts.

Already councils are preparing for

mass non-payment. Many people will simply be unable to pay the increased council tax bill, and more will seize the opportunity to refuse any increase that will further impoverish them. Again, it is obvious that the cost to local government of chasing through the courts everyone who cannot pay would massively outweigh the costs incurred by ignoring non-payment. But a failure to pursue non-payment would simply shift the black hole in local finances, and councils will end up making extra cuts in other services.

In addition to the attacks on HB and CTB, those on benefit are facing consistent below-inflation increases in what they receive. This comes on top of a possible freeze in the level of the minimum wage and, apparently now pushed back to September/October, the pride of IDS, his universal credits scheme. We can probably expect public anger to peak some time after that, given the degree of provocation all this represents to large numbers of workers beyond the 'easy pickings' of

the present measures.

Despite everything, opinion polls still reveal consistent majorities in favour of cuts to welfare. Austerity is seen by a majority as necessary, even if people are not so sure it is working. If you accept the premises, this perception of necessity is correct: only so much of the deficit can be unwound through quantitative easing and devaluation (which hurts the whole class anyway, just less visibly).

The clear Marxist alternative we need is yet to enter the field. But one easy solution to the whole housing crisis is to occupy the millions of vacant properties, including, of course, whole swathes of Mayfair, Highgate, Hampstead, Chelsea and Kensington, which has been snapped-up by ultra-rich Russian, Egyptian, Saudi, Italian, Greek, French billionaires looking for a bolthole or investment. Housing should be a basic human right. Something to be distributed on the basis of need. Not profit ●

## Appeal from the editor

**M**y appeal to individual readers is continuing to evoke a response, although this week in the form of rather smaller sums - thanks go to JS (£20), DD (£10) and BP (£10). We are asking comrades to contribute to our legal fund following the out-of-court settlement we reached as a result of the publication of an article a year ago (see 'Unreserved apology', February 7) and that extra £40 takes us a little short of the £3,000 mark - we now have £2,950.

Once again I have to report that the final amount of the settlement is unknown. Although damages of £1,000 have been paid, we are still negotiating over legal costs - which,

as readers will appreciate, can mount up even when an agreement is quickly reached. Please send cheques and postal orders, payable to 'Weekly Worker', to 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 from the carousel on our website ●

**Peter Manson**



## ANTI-CUTS

# Frontism produces no lasting gains

What can we expect from the People's Assembly? Dave Isaacson looks at the June 22 build-up

The announcement that a People's Assembly Against Austerity was to take place at Central Hall, Westminster on June 22 came in a letter published in *The Guardian* signed by numerous prominent leftwing activists, MPs, media personalities and trade union leaders.<sup>1</sup>

The initiative came from Counterfire and its Coalition of Resistance anti-cuts front. COR is central to its organisation, which is also backed enthusiastically by the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain and such figures as Len McCluskey, general secretary of Britain's biggest union, Unite. Since the call was launched, support has grown and it seems likely that demand for tickets will exceed the venue's capacity (the main room holds up to 2,200).

It is not only in the right-on columns of the likes of Owen Jones and Mark Steel that the PA has been brought to the attention of readers of the bourgeois press. *The Daily Telegraph's* resident self-professed Blairite, Dan Hodges, plays up the significance of both the PA and Ken Loach's Left Unity initiative in an attack on Ed Miliband from the right.<sup>2</sup> He claims that a member of the shadow cabinet raised the role of the groups with him, asking: "You seen what Owen Jones and Ken Loach are up to?" While Hodges is sure that the PA will fail to live up to its stated aims - "to develop a strategy for resistance

to mobilise millions of people against the Con-Dem government" - he does envisage it causing a little grief for the Labour leader: "The left will eat itself. But it will make sure it eats Ed Miliband first," he claims.

The main point of his article is that Ed - owing to his lack of firm support in the unions - is too weak and compromised to restrain the "hard left". Yet, when the rebellion of the 44 Labour MPs who voted against the Job Seekers Bill is cited as an example of the hard left's growing strength and seriousness, you have to wonder about Hodges's sanity. Surely it is a sign of the utter weakness and insignificance of the left right now that even in opposition only a small rump of the Parliamentary Labour Party will vote against vicious Tory attacks upon some of their core supporters?

Coverage of the PA in *The Spectator* is much more predictable fare for such rightwing publications.<sup>3</sup> An aloof and sneering mockery is Freddy Gray's weapon of choice: "think Arab spring - but for Brits, who don't have quite as much to rage about". In contrast *The Guardian's* Rhian E Jones is very sympathetic, comparing the PA to both the London Corresponding Society and the Chartists, but the article's focus is all on these historic movements and nothing really concrete is said about the assembly, other than how "fitting" and relevant it is to our time.

Brendan O'Neill, in another

online *Telegraph* article, is much more keen to try to grapple with some of the stated aims. *Weekly Worker* readers may well recall that O'Neill is also editor of *Spiked*, which is run by the unsavoury clique that made up the now supposedly moribund Revolutionary Communist Party, which itself had its roots in a split from the Socialist Workers Party. But, as anyone who has come across this bunch will tell you, don't expect them to have any sympathy with any leftwing projects. Indeed, they are happy to act - in the *Telegraph* and elsewhere - as paid attack dogs savaging such initiatives. Though there was one noticeable exception to this when, in the middle of the crisis surrounding the Socialist Workers Party over the Delta case, O'Neill rushed to the SWP's defence from what he termed "a corrosive zeitgeist".<sup>4</sup>

Hidden behind a disingenuous nostalgia for a more ambitious left comes O'Neill's general attack on the left and working class resistance to austerity.<sup>5</sup> Sounding like a neoliberal, he views the welfare state as simply "monolithic" and "intrusive", rather than an important gain - albeit a bureaucratically flawed one - won through an assertion of working class power. It is absolutely correct to defend welfare against attacks from the right. While we in the CPGB also lament the left's lack of ambition,

we recognise the difference between that and being a renegade. Repeated in O'Neill's article is a trope dear to the hearts of *Spiked* contributors and their associated projects, such as the Institute of Ideas. That is, worship at the temple of "growth" and the linked attack on "miserablist Green thinking". Backing this up, and giving it an unwarranted radical veneer, is a quote from the left communist, Sylvia Pankhurst, advocating "a great production that will supply more than all the people can consume". But why would we want this? It defies logic to expend human and natural resources to wilfully generate waste. Marx's famous maxim outlining communism is surely preferable: "From each according to their ability, to each according to their needs!"<sup>6</sup>

### What strategy?

Far more interesting than all of this coverage in the mainstream media is an article written by the openly rebellious SWP member, David Renton. It first appeared on Facebook, where it sparked controversy,<sup>7</sup> and is also available on the comrade's own blog.<sup>8</sup> Renton welcomes the PA initiative and the support it has generated, but does not do so without criticism. The targets of his criticism - as suggested in the article's title, 'The People's Assembly: an auto-critique' - are not just the core organisers, but also the SWP and his own individual role in the past.

Renton reminds us that this is not the first PA - back in 2003 we had the Stop the War Coalition's People's Assembly Against War - and that the core instigators of both events are the same comrades - former SWP leaders John Rees and Lindsey German, now of Counterfire. "My main criticism is of the 'front' method; and of the assumptions behind it," says Renton, who clearly has the current SWP leadership lined up in his sights just as much as the Counterfire comrades. He outlines a number of features of the cynical approach whereby a small core of leaders within a revolutionary group, through various dishonest manoeuvres, attempt to bring the masses into action. Such features include a willingness to anathematise and dispose of uncooperative alliance partners in the movement and the very cadre who do the leg work within such revolutionary groups. Almost everything (principles included) are expendable in the pursuit of mass influence. As Renton writes, this is "ultimately bleak and unrewarding".

While those pursuing such an approach have on occasion been able to mobilise impressively large numbers (crucially when the general political situation has allowed it: eg, STWC in 2003), these gains have almost wholly been ephemeral. Looking at the position the left finds itself in today, there is no doubt that frontism has failed to bequeath us either any kind of revolutionary party or a strong anti-imperialist movement (opposition to imperialist interventions in Libya, Mali, Syria and Iran have been pitifully weak).

Can we expect the results of this year's PA to be any different? In all honesty, no. The event aims to be a massive anti-cuts rally and I expect it to be a success in those terms - the fact that elements of the rightwing press are targeting the PA is a good indicator. Recent protests against the bedroom tax have also shown that there is plenty of anger against the cuts amongst the general population. It looks likely that Central Hall will be packed out and that a not insignificant proportion of those attending will not

be the usual suspects. This is certainly not a bad thing in and of itself - indeed it is to be welcomed - but it falls a long way short of what is actually needed.

No time will be made available to debate out the perspectives and strategy we need. Those speaking from the platform will make no serious attempt to start such a debate and there will be very little time for speakers from the floor. While the organisers have suggested that providing a strategy is one of the things the PA can do, how can this be achieved without a thorough debate? The positions some of the speakers have taken are hardly uncontroversial, such as union leaders who have been deemed to have demobilised the struggles of their own members. Some activists have argued that such speakers should not have been invited. I disagree. I think that it is good that they are there, so long as we get to have a debate rather than be presented with a cosy consensus. The odds are that it will be the "top-table love-in" that comrade Renton expects.

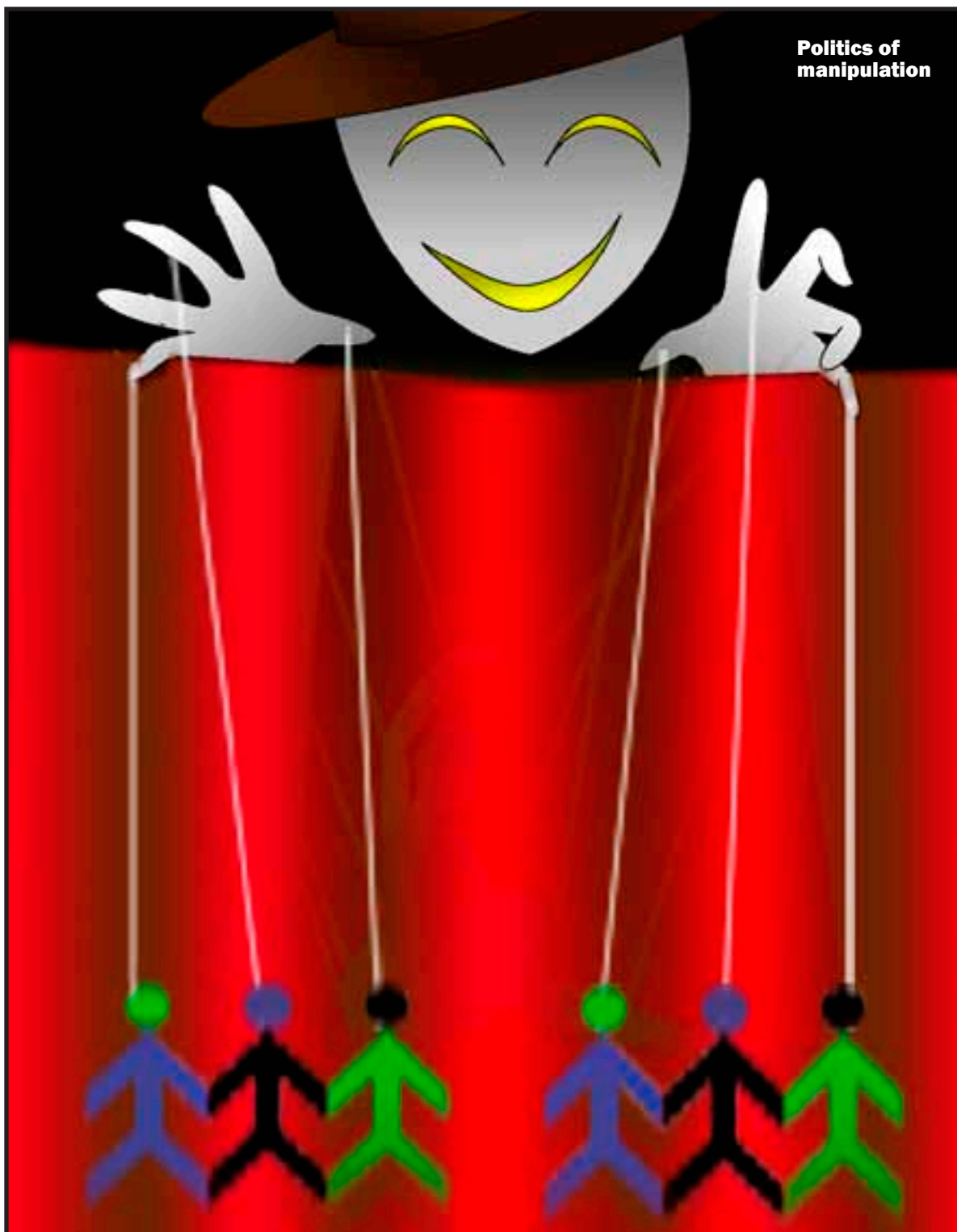
In their *Party Notes* of March 25 the SWP's leaders have welcomed the PA and are calling on "a large number" of their members to attend.<sup>9</sup> It says: "We are going to it hoping to win people to an argument - about the need for resistance in deeds, not just words, for the union leaders to call action instead of blocking or restricting it, and not to place our faith in the Labour politicians who have so signally failed to head up a fight." The SWP clearly want to be seen as being to the left of Counterfire on these questions, but the reality - as David Renton's "auto-critique" implies - is that compromises over such questions come just as naturally to SWP leaders, when it comes to their own fronts.

What proposals will be made at the PA to take the movement forward is not yet clear, but some hints have been made along the lines of a mass demonstration, possibly to coincide with some industrial action. However, in essence, this will be no different from the role the anti-cuts movement has played all along - that of cheerleader for the actions of the big trade unions. There is no doubt that we should support the unions when they take action, but what do we do when they call actions off? We need to support the rank and file and be free to criticise the leaders when they sell their members short. But the rank and file is currently very weak and disorganised. Only with the support of the union bureaucracies have consistent large-scale actions against cuts been possible so far. It will take time and effort to build rank-and-file organisation from the base up, but it needs doing.

Crucially we need to move beyond resistance to austerity and begin to articulate a *political* alternative to the capitalist system which produces it. Convincing activists to dump frontism for partyism is a necessary part of that project ●

### Notes

1. [www.guardian.co.uk/business/2013/feb/05/people-assembly-against-austerity](http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2013/feb/05/people-assembly-against-austerity).
2. <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/danhodges/100208987/the-left-will-eat-itself-but-its-going-to-swallow-ed-miliband-as-it-does-so>.
3. <http://blogs.spectator.co.uk/coffee-house/2013/03/the-peoples-assembly-is-sound-and-fury-signifying-nothing>.
4. [www.spiked-online.com/site/article/13442](http://www.spiked-online.com/site/article/13442).
5. <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/brendanon-ei12/100209116/what-self-respecting-member-of-the-working-class-would-sign-up-for-the-patronising-zombified-peoples-assembly>.
6. [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/ch01.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/ch01.htm).
7. [www.facebook.com/davidkrenton/posts/468002366587182](http://www.facebook.com/davidkrenton/posts/468002366587182).
8. <http://livesrunning.wordpress.com/2013/03/28/the-peoples-assembly-an-auto-critique>.
9. [www.swp.org.uk/party-notes](http://www.swp.org.uk/party-notes).





## DEBATE

# The world of women, like th

Paul Demarty calls for the unity of men and women in the fight for the self-liberation of the working class



Wyndham sisters, 1899

**S**o this is the little lady who started this great war,” Abraham Lincoln is supposed to have quipped to Mary Beecher Stowe. I seem to have started a rather lesser war all of my own and frankly I see every reason to continue the fight. Hence, in this article, I shall reply to my critics and in passing make a stab at answering a highly controversial question, a question that has tortured the far left since at least the 1970s: what is to be the relationship between Marxism and feminism? Is it to be a happy and equal union, a no-holds-barred battle of irreconcilable enemies, or perhaps a group marriage with ideological representatives of all other oppressed groups?

Of course, the truth is rather more complicated than any of that - but it is perhaps clearer now than it has been for a while that the answer lies firmly within the orbit of the second option. The left is currently the victim of a clean-up operation in the movement and in society at large, and it is being conducted under the flag of feminism and women’s rights. Leftwing feminists who have signed various statements surrounding this are at best naive dupes and at worst active participants. The naive will have to pick a side. The others already have.

## Safe spaces

It is clear, to put it mildly, that not all readers of the *Weekly Worker* share this view. Responses to the arguments raised in my two recent articles<sup>1</sup> on the Socialist Workers Party and

the women’s question have ranged from supportive to mildly irked, to downright hostile.

The lion’s share of the hostility seems to have been provoked by the idea that the ‘safe space for women’ is an infantilising tool of the bureaucracy and should be rejected out of hand. This is perhaps unsurprising, as ‘safe space’ policies are apparently the one thing that unites mainstream ‘liberal’ feminism and its more politically healthy (but pretty marginal) opponent, ‘socialist feminism’.

Such is the bugbear of Frances, Gwendolen and Josephine Grahl,<sup>2</sup> who accuse me of a number of things: “the most childish form of name-calling”; producing “an article which is as meandering and poorly written as it is wrong”; “vile and misogynist claims”; and all the rest. I’m wounded, truly.

Alas, all these criticisms are barely justified in the text of the letter. Quality of writing is a matter of taste, but I notice that the comrades Grahl can only find one formulation sufficiently inelegant to quote directly (more of which later), out of 2,000-odd meandering words. The “childish” “name-calling” turns out to be a matter of punctuation. “Putting the expression ‘safe space’ into inverted commas does not make this reasonable concept ridiculous,” I am chided, immediately after that charge.

I could point out that the comrades have done the same themselves and are presumably thus guilty of childish name-calling ... against themselves.

But I am more interested to see how exactly the ‘safe space’ (whoops! there I go again) is a “reasonable concept”. “[Safe] spaces may not of themselves be political,” they concede, “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.”

Their real problem with my article, however, is that I do not believe that such a “fear of rape” in the SWP milieu is “real”, inasmuch as it implies that you are at greater risk of sexual violence within its ranks than outside. My arithmetic judgment that nine alleged rapes in a long period of time - in an organisation with an infamously high membership turnover - is a low figure, and thus “a pretty good hit rate” in a society where something like a third to a half of women suffer some form of sexual violence in their lives, is condemned as “vile and misogynist”. Readers may judge for themselves whether saying that *less* women being raped is a good thing is an involuntary expression of a deep-seated and malicious hatred of women.

(As for “other violence”, the comrades Grahl ought to try selling the *Weekly Worker* outside the Marxism festival, especially when things are generally tense, as they will be this July. It increases your chances of intimidation and assault a great deal more effectively than merely having a vagina.)

It would be easy to dismiss this baseless, absurd and offensive charge as “the most childish form of name-

calling”. Unfortunately, it is of a piece with rather more alarming trends, in which the bureaucratic ineptitude of the SWP is transmuted into a matter of violent hatred of women. This is the line of the *Daily Mail*, Nick Cohen, the Unison women’s conference, the Unite bureaucrats who accused Jerry Hicks of “condoning violence against women” simply for having the support of the SWP, and numerous other undesirables.

The method is the same across all of them - a determinate political problem (the SWP’s bureaucratic organisational norms) with a painfully obvious solution (thorough democratisation) becomes an almost existential one (the SWP, for reasons unknown, hates women) with, alas, an equally obvious solution (they should be anathematised and driven out of the movement, or else used to smear the whole labour and progressive movement).

It is thus removed from the purview of reason, and placed in the same epistemological box as, for instance, the gutter press’s habit of portraying the perpetrators of appalling crimes as incomprehensibly, demoniacally evil. It serves the same ideological purpose - achieving a grubby political aim by presenting the issue as beyond politics, a dispute which pitches the community against a bestial interloper.

I would suspect - and hope - that the comrades Grahl, and not a few others to have objected to my articles, would protest that they are all for democracy in the movement. Good: but *it is impossible to argue*

*this* on the basis of what has gone before: that is, the assessment that *contra* my “deliberately provocative and entirely crass”<sup>3</sup> headline, ‘Rape is not the problem’, rape *is* the problem in the SWP.

Because, if violent misogyny is the problem in the SWP, then it must equally be the problem with any other section of the movement in which members ever get away with sexually assaulting other members (no other evidence is offered for the SWP’s misogyny, except that it is not officially feminist). I would suspect that there is not a union or political organisation in the country without such skeletons in the closet. If this means that they are misogynist as such, then democratisation is a laughable notion. It would be as absurd as calling for the democratisation of the Catholic church.

So advocates of the ‘safe space’ are reduced either to demanding *nothing* or reciting increasingly bizarre irrationalisms. For the former, we may return to the ‘Women in the labour movement’ statement by Cath Elliott and Marsha-Jane Thompson - and signed, as it happens, by two of the three comrades Grahl (Gwendolen is the honourable exception). It is a statement which is unable to come up with anything in the way of proposals, barring the notion “when women complain of male violence within our movement, our trade unions and political organisations should start from a position of believing women”.<sup>4</sup>

As formulated, there is a legitimate discussion here on whether internal



# The world of men, is divided

investigations should use the criminal (beyond all reasonable doubt) or civil (balance of probabilities) standard of proof (most non-state bodies use the latter for complaints procedures; the former was infamously deployed by the SWP disputes committee in the Delta case).<sup>5</sup> Beyond that, there is only the assertion that the labour movement should be a “safe space” for women. I argued that the “believing women” argument is inadequate to prevent cover-ups by bureaucratic cliques, because it does not attack the bureaucracy (why should they not *end* by not “believing women”?).

As for the ‘safe space’ argument, it is simply not clear on this basis what it *means*. If it is just a matter of all getting together and reaffirming that rape and domestic violence are deplorable, then it is utterly pointless, because, as I previously wrote, “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”.

“Huh? Say what?” writes left-feminist Louise Whittle in response.<sup>6</sup> “I signed [the statement] because I agreed with it.” I believe she is playing dumb, but this paragraph is a little needlessly jargon-heavy, so I will spell it out. Rapists in the movement do not brag about their crimes. Wife-beaters do not go around boasting about their southpaw stance. They are all perfectly capable of mouthing the required pieties about stamping out misogynistic violence, just as the good ‘family men’ who conduct the vast majority of child molestation are perfectly capable of shrieking along with the *Daily Mail* about malevolent sexual predators - and perhaps even believing it. So what is the point of the pieties?

(Comrade Whittle also asks: “Where’s the empirical and rational basis for this?” It is pretty difficult to prove a negative, but my statement could be disproven very easily, by finding examples of leftwing position papers arguing that rape is progressive, or a private affair between a man and his victim, or some such. As a keen leftwing coprologist, I await her findings with genuine interest. Until they come, I will continue to believe that perpetrators of misogynistic violence in the movement do not make it known to the brothers and sisters at large.)

Left at this, the ‘safe space’ is a pretty empty space. Given that gatherings of leftwingers are not generally scenes of mass rape or violent affray against women, the concept must be given some other content for it to be necessary - let alone “reasonable”. And so we arrive at the ‘no platform for rape deniers’ business. Taken with another latter-day feminist trope - the crusade against ‘rape culture’ - the inevitable result of the ‘safe space’ policy is the exclusion of voices which are, with wildly varying degrees of plausibility, deemed to be ‘enabling’ rape. Thus it is the tool of the bureaucracy.

Exactly who these voices are is a matter of personal prejudice. George Galloway is a popular choice, for his crass comments on the Assange affair. Yet there is no rational reason why he should be excluded that would not justify the following patently ludicrous claim, which emanates inevitably from the nest of vipers that is the Scottish far left, post-Scottish Socialist Party split: “When you make or laugh at a

rape joke, you are enabling rapists to continue by sending the message that what they do to people won’t be taken seriously.”<sup>7</sup>

Of course, comrade Whittle opposes the Unison ‘no platform’ call - but “I do understand the sentiments and reasoning behind this motion. Politically wrongheaded, but totally understandable. In the current climate of devaluing, demeaning and denigrating rape, it’s been shocking and damaging to the left.” No, comrade - George Galloway saying something silly is not “shocking”, nor particularly “damaging”.

What is damaging is the suffocating bureaucracy that hampers progress and political clarification on the left. The SWP disputes committee and the Unison women’s conference are both representatives of this petty caste (and the former, let us remember, was composed of a majority of women and has claimed throughout that it takes rape very seriously indeed). A thousand statements from the likes of Galloway is less damaging than *one* motion that gives the bureaucracy more weapons against us. Splitting the difference is simply not good enough.

## Definitions

I have ended up, here, discussing one or two very precise theses - ‘safe spaces’ and ‘rape culture/denial’ - which can hardly be said satisfactorily to substitute for feminism as a whole. This ties into other complaints made of me.

Nick Rogers, a supporter of the CPGB, for a start, complains that “the trouble with the *Weekly Worker*’s attempt in its last two issues to draw a line in the sand between Marxism and feminism is that the debate has produced more heat than light ... I am none the wiser as to what Paul Demarty and Jack Conrad mean by the ‘feminism’ they so vehemently oppose”. He fills in the gap himself: “I have always thought of feminism as simply the belief that the liberation of women from oppression is a priority, that this oppression seeps into all the pores of our society and finds expression in multitudinous ways, and that those at the sharp end of that oppression should play a leading role in combating it.”<sup>8</sup>

There are two problems with this definition. The first is that it is at a very high level of generality, which fails to tell us anything *useful* about what feminism *does*. A definition of Christianity might be offered - the belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ. No more precise formulation would avoid excluding one group or another of Christians. Not all believe Jesus was the son of God. Not all accept the biblical accounts. There are Trinitarians, Unitarians and all the rest.

Yet there is nothing about the idea that a particular Jewish man in Roman-occupied Palestine was not of this Earth which should lead, inevitably, to the behaviour of the Catholic church as a global institution; to the particular problems of the relationship between piety and liturgy, exegesis and ritual around which Christian ideology turns and transforms itself.

So I am suspicious of defining feminism in this manner, because it is less a doctrine than an ideology. It is true that there are self-identified feminists that are a little embarrassed by the endless heresy-hunting, campaigns against lads’ mags and sundry ‘rape culture’, who attempt a materialist analysis of sexual oppression and so on. It is equally true that these forces are not and, so far as I know, have never been hegemonic within what has been called feminism

at a particular time.

The kicker is in Nick’s final phrase: “those at the sharp end of that oppression should play a leading role in combating it”. There *is* an assumption in feminism that there is an underlying objective basis for solidarity among women *as such*: that is, a solidarity which stems from the fact of sexual oppression against the oppressors. On the basis of the actual history of feminism as a movement, more fissile than Trotskyism and Maoism put together, this claim is transparently false, but it is still a serious motive force.

The basis for this claim is the assumption of a partially or completely unified *experience* of oppression on the part of women, which can provide the ground for this. The basic claim of Marxism, on the other hand, is that it is in the *material interests* of the working class as a class to act collectively, and to fight for the radical democracy which enables truly collective action, which stands or falls independently of the particular experience of oppression.

The consequence is that the workers’ movement *must* stand up for the collective interests of the class as a whole, and fight all sectionalism (sexism and oppression of women very much included), *or it will fail*. We know all too well the philistinism of mainstream far-left forces - ‘official’ communism and the likes of Militant - when it came to the women’s question at the time that second-wave feminism emerged. This philistinism led to disaster. In healthier times, on the other hand, the workers’ movement and class solidarity were pivotal in fighting for women’s suffrage, for the end of slavery in America, and other grotesque inequalities which were not *directly* connected to the individual experience of class society.

The contention of a unified experience of sexual exploitation and oppression, however, *tends* to reduce itself to those crimes which are equally oppressive to all - mainly rape and violence against women in general. There is thus a trend towards a myopic focus on this problem,<sup>9</sup> which *occludes* the material basis for women’s oppression, of which rape and so forth are *symptoms*. The state is a natural ally for such politics, since it has the requisite means of coercion to fight the symptoms. (That is not to say that no progressive positions are ever taken - on abortion, for instance.)

So here is the “line in the sand”. It is necessary for Marxists to fight for the class solidarity of women and men, to oppose all oppression of women and all expressions of sexist ideology, be they religious or secular, explicit or implicit. Failure to do so is a dereliction of duty. Feminists, on the other hand, fight for the unity of women as women. The *Weekly Worker* is unequivocally on the former side of the line. The two positions are not compatible. There are no doubt many self-described ‘Marxist feminists’ who are also on our side of the line. That is all well and good, but in that case their feminism is adding nothing to their Marxism, and they may as well drop it, for clarity’s sake.

Radical Anthropology Group’s Camilla Power<sup>10</sup> does not like such dichotomies, which she calls “dinosaur Marxism”: “Jack Conrad says we need to make an either-or choice between Marxism and anarchism. Ditto with sexual politics versus class politics - we’re supposed to choose one or the other. To me, such wooden dichotomies are baggage from our movement’s splintered, tragic past.”

She continues: “If Marx is right to insist on workers’ *self-emancipation*,

then it is only working class women who can lead the struggle against both thousands of years of patriarchy and hundreds of years of capitalism.” This is a dubious quotation with a dubious inference. It is the self-emancipation of *the working class*, which “is that of all human beings *without distinction of sex or race*”;<sup>11</sup> and this formulation is based on the aforementioned analytical distinction between class material interests and phenomenal experiences of oppression alluded to above.

We are left with no *necessary* reason for women to “lead the struggle”; the struggle will be led by those who win *the class as a whole* to a correct and adequate revolutionary policy, be they male, female, animal, vegetable or mineral (to be as clear as possible: shunting the fight for women’s liberation back to some indeterminate point in the future is not a correct or adequate policy). To pursue the line advocated by comrades Nick and Camilla is actually *to take the royal road to further splintering*. If women *must* take the lead on women’s issues, then blacks must take the lead on racial oppression, and black women must take the lead on black women’s issues ... until we arrive at the amusing bickering between different micro-‘privileges’ that so enhances the Twitter experience these days.

## Name-calling

There is one thing that comes up again and again in this barrage, which is less directly political, but deserves comment. It is the portrayal of me, personally, and the paper I write for, as overly aggressive in tone. Nick Rogers says I generate “more heat than light”. The comrades Grahl suggest I exhibit “a dangerous aversion to any degree of constructive debate”. Comrade Whittle objects that I “[reduce] the criticism to insults and stereotypes” and avoid “a real discussion”.

Yet look at their contributions. I am “provocative and entirely crass” (Rogers, who is otherwise generally civil); “vile and misogynist”, a bad writer, “the Marxist Melanie Phillips”, and so forth (the particularly energetic Grahl); “incoherent”, “misogynist” (again), “utterly reactionary” (Whittle). Crikey!

Alas, I have got off lightly; a marked feature of contributions from left feminists to relevant internet comment threads is the blind rage.

An organisation like the SWP, which dramatically mishandled rape allegations, is depicted almost as if there was a Sade-esque slave-pit under its HQ. People on the wrong side (I stress: the *wrong* side) of the recent SWP crisis are depicted as more or less rapists themselves.

Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel, *Uncle Tom’s cabin*, suffered a peculiar fate - from being an abolitionist rallying cry, it became a symbol of all the patronising stereotypes under which blacks were to suffer for the next century. I note that Pam Woods worries that she risks being cast as “a latter-day Uncle Tom” for not buying into this great collective shriek, and she is not the only comrade, or indeed woman comrade, who has expressed to me her unease at the Manichean manner in which these debates are conducted. This approach has four distinctive features: it is repugnant, laughable, paranoid and hypocritical.

Given that this all started with a provocative headline, let me end with another provocation: this is all sound and fury, signifying nothing. The trolls scream only because they have nothing to say ●

## Notes

1. ‘Rape is not the problem’, March 14; ‘Mean-while, in the real world ...’, March 21.
2. Letters, March 21.
3. Nick Rogers, Letters, March 28. On that point, guilty as charged.
4. <https://womeninthelabourmovement.wordpress.com/2013/03/12/our-movement-must-be-a-safe-space-for-women>.
5. SWP dissident and barrister Dave Renton has some interesting points on this: <http://livesrunning.wordpress.com/2013/03/28/the-man-or-the-woman-who-are-we-supposed-to-believe>.
6. <http://harpymarx.wordpress.com/2013/03/24/jabberwocky-weekly-worker-style>.
7. <http://athousandflowers.net/2013/03/31/this-is-a-tax-demo-why-dont-you-go-back-to-your-rape-demo>.
8. Letters, March 28.
9. Indeed, I have noticed as long as I have been writing on these matters an odd Freudian slip on the part of rape-obsessed feminism. Comrade Whittle complains of the “devaluing, demeaning and denigrating [of] rape”; fittingly enough, the Socialist Worker Student Society has previously declared that “it is never acceptable to make statements that undermine rape”. Phrased as such, it rather looks like rape is getting a raw deal, what with all this demeaning and devaluing and undermining that goes on! Well, I suppose it is: from the perspective of a certain feminism, where rape is a uniquely jealous god, the master key to the understanding of society as a whole. Whittle and SWSS alike have bought into this nonsense - whether or not they know it.
10. Letters, March 28.
11. *Programme of the Parti Ouvrier* (emphasis added): [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/05/parti-ouvrier.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/05/parti-ouvrier.htm).

## Fighting fund

## Every little

**D**espite a valiant last-minute effort from a number of supporters, we fell slightly short of our £1,500 fighting fund target for March. But we did manage to raise a pretty useful £236 in just three days, taking our total to £1,340.

The biggest donor was YM, who wrote a cheque for the unusual sum of £96, while KL and PN took my advice last week and used PayPal to donate £50 and £20 respectively (they were among 11,977 who read us online last week, by the way). Comrade RB added £15 to his subscription cheque, and the standing orders from PM (£30), SP (£20) and CC (£5) made up the rest.

I can’t stress enough that a failure to raise the full amount every month leaves us with a big problem. That figure of £1,500

is, near enough, what we actually *need*. Which means we now have to ensure we make good the deficit in April. But we have got off to a reasonable start, thanks to the flurry of standing orders that come in at the beginning of the month. Sixteen comrades have produced £222 in all, in amounts ranging from £6 to £30 - all quite modest, so it just shows how every little helps!

But we need to keep going at this pace. Don’t forget, the target for April is no longer £1,500. Including the March shortfall, we now need £1,660. I know you can do it! ●

**Robbie Rix**

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



## SOUTH AFRICA

# Attempt to go round already existing mass organisations

Wasp might be able to sting the SACP/Cosatu bureaucracy. But, asks Peter Manson, can it become a mass party capable of leading a socialist revolution?

On March 21 the Workers and Socialist Party (Wasp) was launched in Tshwane, South Africa at a meeting attended by 500-600 workers. It was set up on the initiative of the Democratic Socialist Movement, which is the South African affiliate of Peter Taaffe's Committee for a Workers' International.

Wasp is intended to be the "broad mass party" which the Socialist Party in England and Wales believes is a necessity everywhere. Everywhere traditional working class parties, whether Labourite or social democratic, have now gone over completely to the bourgeoisie and, according to the SPEW/CWI theory, are completely useless even as sites for struggle. The task now is to found fighting alternatives, which, at this stage, can only be 'broad' - ie, parties where all class-conscious workers can come together. The CWI will provide such parties with the "Marxist, revolutionary spine"<sup>1</sup> and eventually - how we are not told - a Marxist party will emerge.

According to the CWI website, The launch of Wasp "surpassed all expectations". It reports: "Over 500 Tshwane workers, mineworkers' delegates, trade union and community activists packed Lucas Van Den Bergh Community Hall in Pretoria ... The hall could not accommodate the turnout and attendees overspilled onto the neighbouring field."

Continuing in optimistic vein, the CWI notes: "It is without a doubt that Wasp is striking a chord with working class people. Today's launch will have worried many in the establishment - the ANC and their partners in government, the Cosatu leadership and big business. A new power is rising. The working class are getting organised and they are preparing a mighty challenge to the status quo. The ideas of socialism are being re-embraced."<sup>2</sup>

The CWI report names three DSM speakers at the launch, plus Joe Higgins, the Irish Socialist Party TD. Also on the platform were Elias Juba, chair of the national mineworkers committee, set up with the encouragement of the DSM, and Ephraim Mphahlela, president of the breakaway National Transport Movement union. The CWI/DSM enthusiasm for new working class organisations is not restricted to alternative parties: it also calls on workers to break with the existing trade unions, mostly affiliated to the Congress of South African Trade Unions, dominated by the South African Communist Party and linked to the ruling African National Congress.

The CWI also states that "workers' delegates" from "supporting organisations" spoke at the launch and names those from seven different mining companies. Many such workers have become increasingly disgusted with the leadership of the official unions, tied as they are to the ANC-SACP-Cosatu tripartite alliance, and have responded positively to the DSM's activism.

During last year's strike wave, which saw the establishment hit back through the police slaughter of 34 miners at Marikana, the DSM was inadvertently given a helping hand by the SACP, which dubbed the CWI comrades "counterrevolutionary", falsely

blaming them for rank-and-file violence directed against National Union of Mineworkers shop stewards. This only served to boost the DSM's standing amongst mineworkers and there was a brief period when the group seemed to feature in the mass media virtually every day. DSM speakers were invited to address rallies organised by unofficial strikers and attended by hundreds - not bad for an organisation of a few dozen comrades.

So should the launch be seen as a success for at least the first stage of the mass party 'theory'? Well, not exactly. Pretoria was chosen for a reason. It was the site of a bitter (and ultimately successful) strike by municipal workers, where DSM comrades have been active in support. Most of those attending the launch were striking local workers with time on their hands, not the "delegates" named by the CWI.

In fact, the first attempt at a launch had occurred in December in Limpopo, one of the sites of the mass miners' strikes. The DSM and "representatives of strike committees" had arranged a rally at a huge stadium. But this was a flop. As a result of "the withdrawal of the permission by police hours after it was granted to hold the rally at a stadium in Limpopo, the draconian bail conditions of leaders of the Bokoni Platinum strike committee and the shunning of the event by the media", there were "just 20 delegates present", according to the DSM's own statement.<sup>3</sup> Following what were "more than likely to be deliberate acts of sabotage", the intended launch "had to be pared down to a founding meeting".

Personally I do not find this very convincing. Permission to hold the rally in the stadium was withdrawn, *some* workers could not get there because of "draconian bail conditions", and the media just did not cooperate. But surely that does not explain the dismal attendance. Not unless the DSM had been counting on the Bokoni workers to swell the numbers, as the municipal workers at Pretoria did on March 21.

But the DSM tried to put a brave face on things. The Limpopo "founding" was, nevertheless, an event with "the potential to change the political landscape of South Africa" and, in any case, "We will formally launch Wasp on March 21 - Sharpeville Day, 2013." Strangely the December 18 2012 statement on the Limpopo debacle issued by the DSM executive committee can no longer be found on the group's own website, nor that of the CWI.

## Sting

So what sort of party will Wasp be? Well, for a start, its immediate demands are far more radical than what you would expect from the "broad mass party" the CWI envisages for Britain. Or at least they are looking further down the road to SPEW-style national socialism. Wasp's five-point manifesto reads:

1. Kick out the fat cats. Nationalise the mines, the farms, the banks and big business. Nationalised industry to be under the democratic control of workers and working class communities. Democratic planning of production for social need, not

profit.

2. End unemployment. Create socially useful jobs for all those seeking work. Fight for a living wage of R12,500 [£900] per month.

3. Stop cut-offs and evictions - for massive investment in housing, electricity, water, sanitation, roads, public transport and social services.
4. For publicly funded, free education from nursery to university.
5. For publicly funded free health-care accessible to all.<sup>4</sup>

The would-be party sums up its "principles" in the following points:

- We reject outright the corruption of pro-capitalist politicians and political parties.
- All Wasp candidates for publicly elected positions - whether councillors, MPLs or MPs - are elected subject to the right of immediate recall.
- For workers' representatives on workers' wages. All officials elected on the basis of the Wasp manifesto will only take the wage of an average skilled worker. The remainder will be donated back to Wasp.<sup>5</sup>

Wasp will be campaigning for "rolling mass action across mining communities to build up towards a one-day general strike". It will "extend solidarity in action with all workers and working class communities in struggle whenever the need arises". It intends to convene a conference to "flesh out its manifesto"<sup>6</sup> and elect a leadership "before the end of the year"<sup>7</sup> and it has set itself an ambitious target of collecting "one million signatures in support of building Wasp by August 16 2013".<sup>8</sup> It intends to contest the 2014 general election.

The DSM has said that existing left groups are free to join Wasp, while retaining their own distinct platforms. For example, the tiny Workers International Vanguard Party reports: "We have been assured that we can participate under our own name and with our own programme." It concludes: "There will be a congress within a few months; if it adopts an opportunist position on elections, we will go our separate ways, but for now we hope to march together with the Wasp comrades in the class battles that are breaking out daily."<sup>9</sup>

In an interview with the press after the launch, DSM general secretary Weizmann Hamilton said: "The working class is on its own. It has no alternative but to reclaim its class independence and political independence."<sup>10</sup> That independence is always contrasted to the fact that the existing mass organisations are tied hand and foot to the ruling class. The CWI approvingly quotes a speaker

at the launch as saying: "During the strike we saw the NUM, Cosatu, the ANC and SACP - none of them came to defend us. Instead they attacked us. It was the DSM alone that came to us when we were on the mountain, and stayed there with us to fight."<sup>11</sup>

But the Wasp/DSM policy of calling on workers to abandon the existing organisations of the class is clearly mistaken. The SACP, claiming just under 200,000 members, is the *already existing* mass workers' party, albeit one that is completely under the bureaucratic control of leaders committed to the ANC-led tripartite popular front. Cosatu, which still enjoys the allegiance of millions of workers, is capable of leading militant trade union struggles, although they are always tempered by the perceived need to support the 'party of liberation', the bourgeois ANC.

In South Africa the unions are held back by 'official communists'; in Britain by Labourites. It has always been the nature of the union bureaucracy to act as intermediaries between militant workers and the ruling class. But that does not lead us to call on workers to walk out and establish 'pure' replacements. Those replacements cannot but be affected by the tendency towards domination by the same bureaucratic caste.

There can be no short cut in the battle for working class bodies worthy of the name. We have to start where workers are currently organised and encourage them to fight to win back control of their unions. The setting up of rival unions will, self-evidently, result in fresh divisions and a *weakening* of our forces.

The same applies to the SACP. This, the largest 'official communist' party in the western world, attempts to keep workers loyal to the ANC through its 'Marxist' jargon about the "national democratic revolution" and talk of "building socialism now". It will be impossible to win the mass of workers to the ideas of genuine, internationalist socialism without engaging with, taking on and defeating the SACP's popular frontism. That, in my opinion, can only be done from the inside *and* the outside. In other words, a combined strategy.

## Marxist spine

What of the state of the DSM itself? How does it shape up to the task of providing Wasp with its "Marxist, revolutionary spine"?

Speaking at Socialism 2012, Alec Thraves, the SPEW comrade most involved with the CWI's South African affiliate, stated that he believed the DSM's membership had increased to around 100 following the organisation's relative prominence during the miners' strike wave.<sup>12</sup>

During my recent visit to Cape Town, I met with comrade Michael Helu, the group's representative in the city. While he believed that possibly up to 500 had expressed an interest in joining the DSM across the country, that was different from calling them members. In fact, the recruitment surge seemed to have passed Cape Town by: it still had only around six comrades, he said.

The DSM held its own conference over the weekend of February 9-11, attended by "about 60 members and visitors", including comrades Taaffe

and Thraves. The conference "adopted a target of reaching 300 paid-up members by September", according to the DSM website.<sup>13</sup> It goes without saying that the "delegates unanimously affirmed the DSM's and mineworkers' committees' initiative to build the new Workers and Socialist Party as a broad socialist party in response to the lack of a working class political voice, which was apparent in the aftermath of the Marikana massacre".

The commentary continues: "The conference was in many ways a rebirth of the CWI in South Africa. Based on the new and old members gathered over the weekend, we are confident that the DSM will be able to catch up with history - by continuing to grow its small forces into a true revolutionary party that can constitute the backbone of the beginnings of the Workers and Socialist Party."

Meanwhile, the CWI has launched an appeal to raise £30,000 for the DSM, which will help to finance the group's "full-timers". In fact the CWI already pays the wages of the DSM's single full-timer - its effective leader, Liv Shange - to the tune of R3,000 (£214) a month. The appeal will also help ensure that the long-awaited next edition of the DSM paper, *Izwi Labasebenzi*, is produced (last published May-July 2012).

I do not wish to pour cold water over the attempt to build a new working class party in South Africa. In fact I welcome the fact that thousands of workers are questioning the established bodies and looking for an alternative. But there is no getting away from the serious shortcomings represented by this particular attempt. I am not just talking about the lack of any roots among the class of the DSM, the group upon which Wasp will have to depend (although, given the mass pro-socialist sentiment that exists, one million signatures is not an impossibility). Nor the gross inadequacies of the CWI version of 'socialism'. I am talking most of all about the criminally divisive attitude to existing working class bodies.

The fight for a genuine party of the class must be fought in parallel with the fight to win back the unions and wrest the SACP from the control of the popular-front bureaucrats. Don't turn your backs on Cosatu and the SACP. Demand that they break with the capitalist ANC and uphold the independent interests of the working class ●

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## Notes

1. The words of general secretary Peter Taaffe, speaking at SPEW's Socialism 2012 weekend school. See 'Unity of the left can wait' *Weekly Worker* November 8 2012.
2. www.socialistworld.net/doc/6223.
3. www.politicsweb.co.za/politicsweb/view/politicsweb/en/page71654?oid=347787&sn=Detail&pid=71616.
4. http://workerssocialistparty.co.za/?page\_id=2.
5. *Ibid*.
6. www.socialistworld.net/doc/6223
7. According to spokesman Mamatlwe Sebei, quoted in *City Press* March 22.
8. http://workerssocialistparty.co.za/?page\_id=2.
9. www.workersinternational.org.za/The%20Spark%2030.03.pdf.
10. *Times Live* March 22.
11. www.socialistworld.net/mob/doc/6237.
12. See 'On a publicity high' *Weekly Worker* November 8 2012.
13. www.socialistsouthafrica.co.za/index.php?option=com\_content&view=article&id=102:democratic-socialist-movement-national-conference.





## KOREA

# Obama raises the stakes

US provocation in the Korean peninsular has the potential to destabilise the entire region, argues

**Eddie Ford**

Over the last week there has been a considerable escalation of tensions between North and South Korea. To some degree, of course, this is 'business as usual' rhetoric, eg, Pyongyang on March 31 declared that it was in a "state of war" with Seoul (actually that has been the case since the 1953 armistice). But there is more going on than heightened rhetoric - though so far, thankfully, not a single missile has been fired.

Now, I am no admirer of the North Korean regime. It is a brutal and very odd Stalinist dictatorship, which quite literally deifies its leaders - whether the current tyrant, the Great Successor, Kim Jong-un, or his grandfather and Great Leader, Kim Il-sung, the "eternal president" who died in 1994 and presumably still guides the nation, albeit in his new, other-worldly form. To think that such a repressive system could be a workers' state of *any* kind, deformed or otherwise, is a grotesque abnegation of genuine socialist politics. As for the official state ideology of *juche* - based on the three core notions of "political independence", economic "self-sustenance" and "self-reliance" in defence - it is a delusional, nationalist fantasy that has absolutely nothing in common with Marxism. I think it is safe to say that the Pyongyang regime would have revolted Marx and Engels.

But, having said that, there seems little doubt that the current crisis is predominantly the result of United States provocation. Just because Pyongyang says something it does not automatically mean that it is crazy. The facts surely speak for themselves. Since the beginning of March, the US has been engaged in joint military exercises with South Korea scheduled to last two months. This has involved nuclear-capable B-52 bombers buzzing around the Korean peninsula - not to mention long-range B-2 stealth bombers and F-22 stealth fighters, out to prove (if proof was needed) that US imperialism is capable of conducting "long-range, precision strikes quickly and at will", dropping dummy munitions on a South Korean-claimed island very close to North Korean territory. If that were not enough, the USS John McCain, an Aegis-class destroyer capable of intercepting missiles, has been positioned off the Korean peninsula and a second destroyer - the USS Decatur - has been sent to the region. It is an open secret that these exercises simulate an invasion and occupation of North Korea.

Talk about being *in your face*. Just because you're paranoid, which Pyongyang certainly is, about almost everything, it doesn't mean that they're not out to get you - or to at least seriously rattle your cage. Nor should it be forgotten that the whole of Korea was *flattened* by US imperialism during the 1950-53 war, which left millions, the majority of them civilians, dead. That would make anyone twitchy.

## Threats

Anyway, the US got exactly the response it wanted from North Korea - blood-curling and bombastic threats that under any other circumstances would be near comical. Dead on cue, therefore, Kim Jong-un warned about a "pre-emptive nuclear strike" on the US itself, the "headquarters of the aggressor". Time has come, the Supreme Commander promised, to "settle accounts" with US



**Kim Jong-un: rising to provocation**

imperialism. Of course, North Korea has absolutely no capability of hitting the US mainland with anything - except maybe through cyberspace. Kim also declared, perhaps a bit more realistically, that deadly rockets were ready to be fired at a moment's notice against various American bases in the Pacific (though military experts are sceptical about Pyongyang's ability to deliver such a strike).

In a further volley of purple rhetoric, the official North Korean news agency, KCNA, stated that Pyongyang and Washington could only settle their differences by "physical means". The agency also released pictures of Kim and his senior generals huddled around a map showing strike possibilities on both US coasts. On March 29 a 90-minute rally was held in Pyongyang's main square, tens of thousands vowing undying support for Kim and his call to arms. Men and women, most of them in the standard-issue drab olive uniform, raised their fists chanting: "Death to the US imperialists". Placards in the plaza bore harsh words too about South Korea: "Let's rip the puppet traitors to death!"

North Korea's most widely-read newspaper, *Rodong Sinmun* (*Newspaper of the workers*) reported that the 1953 armistice was "nullified" as from April 1 - a peace treaty has never been formally signed between the two countries. However, a United Nations spokesman insisted that the armistice is "still valid" because the agreement had been adopted by the UN general assembly and hence neither North nor South Korea could dissolve it "unilaterally".

Upping the ante, in a move that surprised some Pyongyangologists, the north has blocked the entry of South Korean workers into the Kaesong joint industrial zone located about 16 kilometres north of the demilitarised zone. The complex is a vital money-maker for the north - so much for *juche* - and is traditionally seen as a key barometer of inter-Korean relations. Pyongyang generates an estimated \$100 million of annual revenue from the joint business project that has produced a total of over \$2 billion of goods since its opening in 2005. More than 120 South Korean companies hire about 53,000 North Korean workers at the complex - lots of *very* cheap labour to exploit - so there are some things that the rulers of both Koreas can happily agree on, even if that is

not a particularly comforting thought.

Ratcheting up the tension even more, South Korean president Park Geun-hye made a great show of telling her military to retaliate massively to any attack or incursion from the north. Speaking to defence officials on April 1, she took the recent series of threats from Pyongyang "very seriously" - though what that means is hard to discern - and offered the slightly cryptic opinion that there should be a "strong response in initial combat without any political considerations". Perhaps rather ironically, Park had been elected president in December after promising to improve relations with the north, which suffered quite considerably under her predecessor, Lee Myung-bak.

Outside of the White House, and maybe No10 Downing Street - which so far has said next to nothing about the crisis - it is quite difficult to find anyone who does not think that the US military manoeuvres in the Korean peninsula were a *deliberate* gesture guaranteed to antagonise the north and generally stir up a hornet's nest. A report in Reuters, hardly known for its far-left views, begins by saying that Washington's decision to fly B-52 and stealth bomber missions over Korea "risks pushing the north into staging an attack on the south, just as its threats may have been on the cusp of dying down" (March 29). The same article also notes that the new leaders in Seoul, Beijing and, most importantly, an "untested" Kim Jong-un, who has to prove he is capable of facing down threats from the US, have "raised the stakes" in a month-long stand-off that "risks flaring into a conflict".

## Reactor wars

Defiantly, North Korea said it would "reactivate" all facilities at its main Yongbyon nuclear complex to ease its electricity shortage and strengthen its nuclear capability. The reactor was shut down in 2007 as part of a disarmament-for-aid deal that has since stalled. Yongbyon offers the regime two ways of making nuclear bombs - a uranium enrichment facility, and a nuclear reactor, from which the spent fuel can be turned into plutonium.

This came one day after Pyongyang announced a "new strategic line" focusing on its nuclear programme and the economy. KCNA cited Kim Jong-un telling a meeting of the Korean

Workers' Party central committee at the weekend that nuclear weapons could "never be abandoned" as they were the "nation's life" - its heart and soul. Indeed, the agency report added, "only when the nuclear shield for self-defence is held fast, will it be possible to shatter the US imperialists' ambition for annexing the Korean Peninsula by force". The UN, at the prompting of US-led imperialism, imposed sanctions upon Pyongyang after it conducted a series of nuclear tests in February.

On April 2 a White House spokesman, Jay Carney, said the decision to reopen the Yongbyon reactor was "another indication" of North Korea "violating its international obligations" - the US "will not accept" Pyongyang as a nuclear state. If and when the Yongbyon complex eventually becomes productive again, a process that would obviously take many months, then that would be an "extremely alarming" development, counselled Carney. Striking a slightly less confrontational note, Caitlin Hayden, a national security council spokeswoman, reminded journalists that North Korea has a "long history of bellicose rhetoric" and Kim's recent threats "follows that familiar pattern". But just in case, she added, the US has also strengthened its missile defence capabilities on its west coast - knowing damned well, of course, that an attack will only ever happen in bad Hollywood moves or unimaginative video games.

New and expanded sanctions against North Korea have been unanimously agreed by the UN security council after three weeks of negotiations between the US and China. From now on, at least in theory, the North Korean elite will not be allowed to import a whole list of luxury items - like yachts, racing cars, designer watches, certain types of jewellery, and so on. What a blow. In reality, as we all know, it will be the North Korean masses who will suffer most in the end - their already wretched lives made worse in a form of collective punishment.

Nevertheless, China's ambassador to the UN, Li Baodong, said Beijing wanted to see "full implementation" of the new security council resolution. Ban Ki-moon, the secretary-general of the UN - and a former South Korean foreign minister - was pleased as punch too, issuing a statement to the effect that North Korea has been

sent an "unequivocal message" that the 'international community' will "not tolerate its pursuit of nuclear weapons". In other words, the monopoly of nuclear weaponry enjoyed by the *existing* nuclear powers must be retained at all costs.

Quite correctly, the comrades from All Together - the Socialist Workers Party's sister group in South Korea - write that North Korea's nuclear test has "nothing to do with anti-imperialism or socialism", pointing out that its nuclear programme is pursued at the "expense of its people's livelihoods" and "will only increase tension in the region".<sup>1</sup> As socialists who "oppose any form of nuclear programme", they therefore do not support North Korea's nuclear test. However, they also argue, equally as true, that the US "demonisation" of Pyongyang's nuclear weapons and rockets (its "monsters") is part of its strategy to "maintain hegemony" in East Asia - the permanent North Korean "bogeyman" being a very handy way of keeping its allies on a "tight leash". In that way, thinks comrade Kim Young-ik, "inter-imperialist rivalry in the region is likely to further destabilise the situation".<sup>2</sup>

The US is playing a risky and hypocritical double-game. Barack Obama has staged the latest provocations in order to defuse criticism from the right, at least for now, about his alleged softness towards North Korea and other 'rogue states'. He can walk and chew gum. In a perfect world, the US would love to see the back of this particular 'rogue state', of course, not least because it would surely be replaced by a united Korean *client state* - substantially increasing its influence in the region and beyond.

But, on the other hand, the US - like everybody else in the 'international community' - is scared about the possible consequences of the North Korean regime coming to a sudden end. A total collapse, just to name one possibility, would lead to a human tsunami of refugees from the north - and rebuilding the Korean economy, and society as a whole, could cost a *fortune* (far more costly, for sure, than supplying North Korea with food aid). Or the Korean population could just be left to rot, but how would that look on the international stage? Not really an option either for the US. Similarly, China has wearily propped up the Pyongyang regime for decades for fear of the alternative. Yet clearly Beijing would have no compunctions about dumping it if necessary and possible - forget notions of 'anti-imperialist' solidarity; that is purely for the ageing text books.

In that sense, the renewed tension in the Korean peninsula is in large part a reflection of the tension - or contradiction - within imperialism itself. The US is torn between wanting to maintain the status quo and getting rid of the Pyongyang regime once and for all. After all, this is supposed to be the goddamned new American century. Under such fraught conditions, with everyone playing a high-risk game, it is far from impossible that one or more of the players could make a grievous miscalculation that takes the brewing crisis in a nuclear-armed region to a different and more dangerous level ●

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## Notes

1. *Socialist Worker* online February 23: [www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=30654](http://www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=30654).
2. *Socialist Worker* April 6.



# SCOTLAND



Left nationalists: serving SNP

## Those wanting a break-up will be disappointed, whatever outcome

What position should communists take on next year's referendum? Sarah McDonald urges a boycott

**T**he date is set. The preparations are well underway. There is a general nervous tension (among Scottish media types and politicians, at least). September 18 2014 is the day when, unlike in the Billy Idol song, it is a divorce, not a wedding, that is on the cards.

Just to make clear to readers outside Scotland, whose notice this may have escaped, we are referring to the independence referendum. It is safe to say that, while this might be getting big play in the media north of the border, there has been relatively little coverage of the story elsewhere. Remarkable perhaps, given the implications for the UK state, should the Scottish people opt for divorce.

As things stand, this is an unlikely scenario, since support for an independent Scotland has remained constant at around the 30% mark for decades. In fact, all things being equal, it is likely that this figure could drop somewhat, once the UK state and the British nationalist media start to crank up their efforts to maintain the union. That is not to surmise that it is in the bag for the 'no' camp (more positively officially spun as the Better Together campaign). Yet all things might not be as they are now in 18 months time - plus there is the matter of 16-18-year-old voting intentions, not yet factored into the polling stats.

The 'yes' camp (which perhaps ought to be called 'Better Off Alone') is banking on the continued unpopularity of the coalition government - the notion that independence would see off the Tories once and for all. This sentiment strikes a chord with a large section of the Scottish population, which views the Conservative attacks of the Margaret Thatcher government in particular as anti-Scots rather than anti-working class in general - no UK Tory government is perceived to have had a democratic mandate in Scotland, where the Conservatives have polled increasingly small returns since the 1960s. Shadow Scottish secretary Margaret Curran's very sophisticated response to the 'let's break up the UK and get rid of the Tories' argument is to tell people to vote Labour - clearly, she

is the strategic mind behind Scottish Labour's PR machine.

Following the Scottish National Party's clear majority at the last Holyrood election, the Westminster government was forced into a position where it could not be seen to deny the SNP a referendum. In some ways, for David Cameron, the sooner the better. As things stand, his government is not likely to gain much in popularity, and there is still relatively little support for separation (electoral support for the SNP should not be confused with a desire for independence - many people vote SNP as a protest against Labour as well as the Tories). On top of which, British national spirit can still be invoked on the back of last summer's Olympic Games success.

The question really to be asked is: what would losing the referendum mean for the SNP? If the result is clear-cut (eg, 70:30 in favour of maintaining the union), then the call for independence will have to be put on the back burner for the foreseeable future. Yet independence is the party's ostensible *raison d'être*, so it could be facing a bit of an identity crisis. Since taking the reins at Holyrood, its popularity has increased. It has, by and large, implemented small, tinkering changes that have been crowd-pleasers and has been able to point to Holyrood's limited powers and the dominance of the Westminster government as the reason it has not been able to do more. Cynically, some might argue, the current arrangement suits SNP leader Alex Salmond right down to the ground - a rather cushy little number. Keep the SNP brand name, keep independence on the medium-term agenda, agitate for greater powers for the Scottish parliament and repaint the party's politics a soft, social democratic hue (a yellowish pink perhaps?).

Let us just imagine, for the sake of argument, the unlikely scenario of a clear vote for independence. What are the implications? Maybe not as much sunshine and puppies for Salmond. He is then in the situation where he would have to implement austerity cuts hard and fast. He would have to renegotiate the status of Scotland as an unknown

economic quantity within the European Union - there are some unpleasant precedents, like Ireland and Iceland (once examples used by the SNP to demonstrate the great potential of small countries). Even if Scotland were to avoid economic catastrophe, the shine would surely come off the SNP - it could no longer avoid the finger of blame, as it presided over harsh cuts in public services and social spending.

What would the political implications be for the rest of the UK in this event? Though the Tories are obviously opposed ideologically to the break-up of the UK state, removing Scotland from the picture would most certainly benefit them electorally, as cutting off Scotland would also take 59 Scottish MPs out of the equation (right now 41 are Labour, 11 Liberal Democrat, six SNP and just one Conservative). Such an outcome would definitely come as a big blow to Labour, severely damaging its chances of ever being able to form a majority government in Westminster. In short it would result in seismic changes to UK politics.

At least, with the SNP, there is a sense of realism about what independence for Scotland would actually mean. All but the most naive of its supporters understand that it would mean harsh cuts and significant economic uncertainty. It would also mean the retention of the monarchy as head of state. Scotland would remain in Nato - as agreed at the SNP's last conference with much in the way of ruffled feathers.

### Fantasy left

This realism stands in sharp contrast to what sections of the left envisages as the possibilities for socialist advance that will be embodied in an independent Scotland (renowned for its long coastlines, temperate climate and mineral and cultural wealth - to paraphrase a certain comrade Alan McCombes).

At the forefront of the pro-independence left is the Radical Independence Campaign - an initiative of Chris Bamberg and the International Socialist Group (an

SWP breakaway now affiliated to Counterfire). Given the 800 who turned out for the November 2012 launch rally, this is not yet another fake front. No, it is a veritable popular front involving left nationalists, left opportunists, left SNPers, etc, etc. This motley crew want to turn the 'yes' vote into a vote against austerity, against Trident and for a "society that cares about welfare, employment, peace and the environment" (sic).

Slightly less starry-eyed about the consequences of a 'yes' majority vote is the programmatically rudderless Committee for a Workers' International. These comrades choose to ignore the harsh reality of what independence would mean for working class people in Scotland by giving it a leftist tinge. One gets the impression from speaking to CWI comrades that they do not actually favour independence themselves, but it is important to, you know, 'meet the class where they're at' and therefore support independence in order to win the working class to socialism. And not just any old independence, of course - according to the fantasy, it must be socialist independence! But these so-called Trotskyist comrades would be the first to admit that socialism cannot exist in one country ... so all one can gather from what they have to say on the subject is that they are consistently opportunist and otherwise thoroughly inconsistent.

The Socialist Workers Party - which was just a little bit late to the party - is equally opportunistic in its current position: "For independence, against nationalism". The SWP feels the need to adopt a pro-independence line in order to 'hold the conversation' with trade unionists and win workers to a 'left' version of independence. This is a step backwards from its already appalling previous position - which had of necessity been a fudge in order to ingratiate the SWP with the Scottish Socialist Party leadership during the days before the SSP was wrecked by Tommy Sheridan's defamation case against the *News of the World*.

The SWP position has been that

essentially it doesn't matter that much. In any case, we should shed no tears over the break-up of the UK state: it would, after all, be a blow to British imperialism. That may be true, comrades, but the resulting national divisions would also be a blow to the working class - and you should shed more than a tear over that. Of course, what remains of the SSP itself is now a hardened nationalist outfit (the nationalism that was once adopted supposedly just to gain an audience is now embedded in the organisation's DNA). It will be a pathetic cheerleader for a 'yes' vote. Not that many people will be listening - anyone with any genuine belief in the SSP's politics really ought to leave and join the SNP. The practical politics of the two organisations are now pretty similar (although possibly the SNP is *less* committed to nationalism).

As we have repeatedly said, it is important that we take the national question seriously. The working class must be armed with the best possible answers on all matters if it is to become the future ruling class. We must fight for democracy and champion the right of nations and nationalities to self-determination. This does not mean that we ought to go around shouting for secession at every opportunity, in every scenario - contrary to left-nationalist opinion. In fact, we need to fight for the *greatest voluntary unity* of peoples as the strongest weapon of the working class against the state. In the case of the British Isles we fight for a united Ireland alongside a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales as the best means of overcoming national antagonisms and moving towards greater unity.

This, of course, will not be an option on the ballot paper on September 18 2014. The choice will be between a 'no' vote - effectively lining up with the British state; and a 'yes' - the equivalent of siding with the SNP nationalists. The genuine left in Scotland would be well advised to build for an active boycott if it wants to take a clear and independent class position ●



## REVIEW

# Left feeling unfulfilled

Kate Gould **Exposing phallacy: flashing in contemporary culture** Zero Books, 2012, pp74, £9.99

The initial thoughts that leap into one's mind when coming across Gould's book are, firstly, what drives anyone to write a book about flashing (except maybe psychoanalysts)? And, secondly, what a great title!

The motivation behind the author's interest in the subject is personal and is revealed in an amusing little anecdote, with which the book opens. Apparently during the Blitz, when the streets were blacked out, at least one flasher had been making use of these ideal conditions to expose himself in the spirit of 41, opening his coat and shining a torch on the relevant object. A trap was laid - the author's grandmother was the bait to tempt him, her grandfather the copper hiding in bushes ready to pounce. The flasher was a no-show - but the incident did spark the romance between the two.

Gould opens her remarks on the subject by stating that, far from wanting to put flashers in manacles, her aim was to find out what exactly they do and why they do it, through online forums and chat rooms. She makes the point that we are all exhibitionists, whether that be through "ostrich-feathered hats", "pink moonboots", decorating our work suits with jewellery, showing a bit of cleavage, etc. Then add movement. "We create spectacles of our bodies, using them to convey an image of how we want to be perceived." The difference with flashers, she asserts, is that they use their genitals to communicate this message (pp10-11).

Gould, throughout the first two chapters, makes a point of contrasting the psychology and gratification of the male flasher with that of the female flasher. For the male flasher, in her view, it is all about the penis, the need for attention. Gratification comes through the response, though it is largely irrelevant what that response is. For the male flasher it is an aggressive act imposing confrontation and fear. For the female, Gould takes the view that it is about validation through being desired - regardless of whether or not she would find the male to whom she exposes herself attractive. She imagines that her "shaved vagina" and "porn-esque performances" (p12) cause men to "brag to her about how hard they came thinking of them" (p14).

It becomes clear by chapter 2, headed 'Slick slits and throbbing clits' (honestly, this was the second time that I was disappointed by the expectations provoked when reading this book), that Kate Gould does not think much of shaved vaginas, pornography or strippers. The chapter starts off with descriptions of how women flash 'accidentally on purpose' - bending over too far, legs 'carelessly' splayed, etc - or through the use of Facebook photos and 'like' options: you get the picture (and if you literally do, remember to 'like' and leave a comment). Her argument at this point seemed to negate her previous position about the emulating of soft porn by female flashers when she states that they bypass "the dabbling in soft porn, so rampant in our culture, and move straight on to hard-core".

She takes the opportunity to have a feminist pop at the "increasingly early sexualisation of young girls", also abhorred by daytime TV feminists, mothers' union types and

tabloid journalists alike (the irony of this in connection to the latter should not have to be pointed out). She refers to the "get-up said to be empowering by girls, sexualised at an increasingly young age, who have little real idea of their actions and are unlikely to be able to handle the situations their clothing and posturing may place them in" (p17).

Firstly, the claim that young people (girls, primarily) are sexualised at an increasingly early age is untrue. This is a question of what is considered to be sexualisation within a given society at a particular time. A girl marrying at 14 might be considered unacceptable to most western cultures today, but you do not have to go back that far into the 20th century to find it was perfectly normal in certain US states. A nine-year-old in a padded bra might seem inappropriate, but, with girls reaching puberty earlier, she might actually need the support. A teenager in lip gloss and a Playboy top might fill some parents with moral outrage, while in some cultures a girl of the same age showing her hair would provoke the same reaction. The second point about this short, throwaway statement - that girls "are unlikely to be able to handle the situations their clothing and posturing may place them in" - is that, while it does not actually say the girl is asking for it, the implication is that her attire could lead her to be raped. An implication that leads to very dodgy conclusions.

Gould then goes on to have a rant about 'Barbie doll culture' and the ubiquitous nature of pornography. Has she watched any porn since the 1990s? It comes in all shapes, sizes, colours, attire, tastes and niches. It is a trite and tired old argument that pornography objectifies women and is only interested in buxom blondes with shiny genitalia that pervert young boys' view of women and sex. Do vibrators distort women's expectations in the bedroom? Let's face it, while it is true that culture does portray an array of gender and sexual stereotypes, most of us are nuanced enough to cope with reality.

In Gould's version of the sex industry, like that of most of the feminist prudes, she sees the women involved as "degraded and dehumanised" (p19). This is a very simplified view of the situation. It ignores the fact that women in commercial porn are generally paid more than their male counterparts, and that more and more pornography is amateur and placed on the web by couples eager to share it. Not to mention the fact that there is an

increasing tendency towards female-produced porn.

She also has a go at pole dancing as a fitness craze, along with strippers who are "paying off debts" (aren't we all?), "supporting their families" (the degradation!), "paying for a drug habit" (clichéd), etc (p21). In other words, it is not empowering. These statements are not backed up with facts or data, yet they make sweeping generalisations and assumptions about people - or rather women, as ever: very little is made of male or trans people in the sex industry. For some it may be empowering; for others it may be to fund a drug habit: there are a multitude of reasons why people work in the sex industry. Gould's argument in this chapter is that we (women) are culturally conditioned to be good at faking it, whether it is clothes, tits or orgasms, but what we are not allowed to do "by law and culture is show our vaginas" (p22).

This is what female flashers (yes, I was wondering when we'd get back to the point too) are inviting men to do. They are "confronting men with their femaleness". However, "The woman may tell herself it's empowering, sharing the beauty of her form with another, but this is not empowerment: it is objectification" (p26), as she still lives within the confines of male approval and male threat. With that brief and highly debatable point left undeveloped sociologically or psychologically, we go back to the 'Porn is terrible, shaving one's vagina is pandering to male expectations set by the porn industry' line of ranting. All other forms of male and female tweezing, trimming and shaving are presumably pandering to the more acceptable expectations set by Gillette.

The chapter on male flashing is different - perhaps because it deals more with the actual subject and less with moral judgments. Gould makes reference to online forums and chat rooms with sizable memberships, where male flashers relate their stories. The author shares with the men her own experiences of having been flashed at and is offered opinions by the men on, for instance, the degree of chivalry, or otherwise, practised. She learns what male flashers actually do - from using 'glory holes' to taking pictures on their partners' friends' phones to be discovered later. She is also told about ways to get round awkward situations (and the law) - 'I wasn't rubbing against that fellow commuter: the carriage was packed.' There are accounts of incest and paedophilia in this chapter that no-one in the chat rooms seems to recognise as such, the author points out.

What is clear from Gould's accounts of what the men say is that it is the very act of flashing (and the recounting of the experience) that gets them off - not (as she believes of female flashers) the response of the person to whom they are exposing themselves. She goes on to make the link between flashing and other sexual misdemeanours (15% go on to commit further offences) and the confrontation it forces the women being flashed into (which is true). In fact, she ends the chapter with: "... he can masturbate over them till he's dry, but all the flasher really feels towards the women is hatred."

While the act may force women into a confrontation, while it can be very scary in certain situations and does in some cases lead to further acts of

sexual aggression, how can we know, in all cases, the exact and arguably complex emotions felt by the flasher towards his victim? It is the necessary conclusion of her argument - nothing more. In the same way, critics of the Socialist Workers Party claim that the mishandling of rape allegations mean that the organisation is misogynist to its very core.

While I have many criticisms of the book, it also features some very good assertions made by the author. She comments on the culture of victimhood, where women are taught to be fearful, rather than angry. If they have been flashed, then they may resort to carrying rape alarms that trigger a response in the attacker or passers-by, rather than relying on one's own ability to react in a challenging and assertive way.

She also makes very interesting arguments about the way that the medical profession deals with flashers. Most undergo psychiatric treatment as a condition of release from a prison sentence - so they are not necessarily the most willing participants. Often the 'treatment' involves punishment or humiliation. She cites one example of a 12-year-old boy "who fantasised about and flashed older women and was encouraged to find a more age-appropriate heterosexual object choice" (p79). This was affected through the showing of pictures and administering of electric shocks till he showed the sexual preference desired by the doctors - frightening stuff. Other examples of 'treatment' include inducing nausea using valeric acid, or making the 'patient' undress in front of an audience, while describing his flashing experiences.

Gould's concluding chapter of her short book, 'The demise of the good, old-fashioned roll in the hay', is a mixed bag. It starts by having a go at raunch culture, deals with the desire to have better and better sex (an admirable goal, worth striving for), deviates into stories about 11-years-olds being pressurised into having anal sex and meanders into the general sexualisation of our culture - what effect is this having on our children? Finally she comes back to the point: the idea that in a culture so obsessed with sex, so sexualised in an insidious matter, the flasher is blatant. The male flasher is delusional in the way he regards his penis. The female flasher is delusional insofar as she believes that she is desired by the men she flashes - "apparently unaware that her body has become expendable to the point that, no matter how naked she may be, she is barely visible" (p129).

*Exposing phallacy* is a great title, but a disappointing book. A lot of the arguments made are tired, trite and lacking in evidence. More of the same stuff brought to us by the anti-raunch culture feminists of the 1990s, such as Pamela Paul and Ariel Levy. It would have been a more interesting read to have explored in more depth the stories of flashers and those flashed. To have looked at how the phenomenon varies according to different sexual orientations, not just gender, and perhaps to have explored cultural differences in the way people flash - if such exist. The chapter on treatment offered some insight into how psychiatry deals with flashers, but how should society?

The hackneyed, anti-porn, anti-raunch, anti-sexualisation arguments left this writer unfulfilled ●

Janice Sheldon

## 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.

Printed and published by: November Publications Ltd (07950 416922). Registered as a newspaper by Royal Mail. ISSN 1351-0150. © April 2013





# weekly Worker

## Nostalgic for 1945 government

# Realise potential, avoid pitfalls

The Left Unity appeal has gathered a promising level of support, but runs the risk of repeating past mistakes, argues **Harley Filben**

Unity is in the air - again. After more than a decade of rapidly diminishing returns - from the initially promising Socialist Labour Party and Socialist Alliance, to the hopelessly compromised likes of Respect and the Scottish Socialist Party, to the undead Anti-Capitalist Initiative and Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition - the cry is being raised once more.

The voices this time, initially, were those of an unlikely duo: Kate Hudson and Andrew Burgin, whose political trajectory has taken them into the ranks or orbit of too many different organisations to count. Some unity-mongers, who split at the drop of a hat (most recently, both found their positions in Respect untenable due to George Galloway's crude defence of Julian Assange - his vocal opposition to abortion rights, stem cell research and the rest being perfectly kosher for these sensitive souls, apparently).

The song was made sweeter by Ken Loach, the most prominent socialist film-maker this country has produced, whose national treasure status - built on clip-show favourite *Cathy, come home*, *Kes* and other acknowledged classics of social realism - has proven impermeable even to laudatory films about the Irish Republican Army. He and comrade Burgin share political ancestry in Gerry Healy's Workers Revolutionary Party (comrade Loach also had a spell in Respect, although it predates the involvement of Hudson and Burgin).

Loach's endorsement, it seems, was enough to force the eminently sensible idea of the left uniting in a single organisation far enough into the mainstream not to be easily ignored - and it hasn't been. At least 5,000 people have signed Loach's brief appeal and thus endorsed the idea of "a new political party of the left",<sup>1</sup> which is encouraging in and of itself. The website claims that 60 local supporting groups have been set up, although there is little evidence of their existence beyond a name and contact email for each. The names vary from Tusc members Nick Wrack and Will McMahon, to Green Party left Jim Jepps, to academic and poet Keston Sutherland, with groups in place from Fife to Exeter.

It must be conceded, on the other hand, that there is a great deal working against the new initiative. The appeal notes correctly that "the Labour Party is not presenting a strong opposition to austerity and instead appears to have wholeheartedly adopted neoliberal policy", but it still arises at a time when Labour is in opposition, and thus the dynamics of the British political cycle are working against it. As we have repeatedly argued, the reactionary nature of the Labour Party is all too easily offset by the sense that people have nowhere else meaningful to go - not to say the brute force of the bourgeois consensus behind austerity bearing down on them.

Meanwhile, the appearance of these local groups is a positive thing, but it remains to be seen how many of them exist beyond the snazzy Google



**Ken Loach: illusory**

map that plots them on the Left Unity website. A measured and reasonable article in the Alliance for Workers' Liberty's paper *Solidarity* puts the point quite nicely:

"If an activist group with a known record of political activity makes a call for unity, then people judge it partly according to their opinion of that record. If a splinter of a split of a splinter (just two people initially, as with Burgin and Hudson, or a few dozen, as with Counterfire) makes an appeal, and puts it in the vaguest terms ... then everyone can read into it what they want. Everyone who wants to build a socialist organisation, but is unsure about how to do it, and so holds back from joining any of the existing groups, can believe they have found a short cut. Just a click on a website, or a 'like' on Facebook, and they're already part of the big movement they want!"<sup>2</sup>

The initiators in this case have the advantage of coming at it relatively clean - those in the know are aware of Burgin's and Hudson's backgrounds, but many others will know only Loach's reputation as a conscientious filmmaker. They have the disadvantage of being 'generals without armies'. The

Socialist Workers Party, at least until its recent travails and probably still today, has the requisite organisational muscle to give even its most deluded pipe dreams some semblance of reality. Unless serious forces get on board, this latest unity call will face the problem of a simple lack of foot soldiers, for which Facebook likes and petition signatories are no substitute.

As for the *political* basis of this new formation, it should hardly surprise anyone to find that it is dreadful. The appeal notes that "The welfare state is being dismantled by the coalition government, bringing great suffering to the most vulnerable in society and eroding the living conditions of millions of ordinary people." True enough.

We need instead to return to the 'spirit of 45', as the title of Ken Loach's Nye Bevan nostalgia-fest documentary has it, when "the post-war generation transform[ed] the lives of ordinary people by bringing improved health, housing, education and social security to the people of Britain. We need to defend these achievements and continue the tradition of protecting the most vulnerable in society."

A little more meat is hidden away on

the website's 'About' page, demanding "a new political formation which rejects austerity and war, advocates a greater democratisation of our society and institutions, and poses a new way of organising everyday life".<sup>3</sup> Exactly what this means is left to the imagination - which is just as well, because no imagination went into these platitudes at all.

More details come from an article in *The Guardian* by Loach, Hudson and Gilbert Achcar, the Mandelstam historian whose most recent claim to fame was lurching bizarrely into a pro-imperialist line during the Libyan war.<sup>4</sup> Here, the colours are nailed firmly to the post-war Labourite mast. As ever in such nostalgic eulogies, certain other enduring achievements of Attlee's government - the bomb, the cementation of Britain's 'special relationship' with the United States - are politely overlooked.

The fundamental weakness here is a very old one. While our three authors are perfectly aware that Labour's shift to the right in the last three decades is hardly unique to it, they fail to draw the obvious conclusion that this was not a matter of various party leaderships deciding, for one reason or another, to become left Thatcherites, but a function of global political shifts after the collapse of Stalinism. Likewise, the national health service and so forth was not the 'achievement' of principled politicians, but a strategy of containment in response to increased working class confidence after World War II.

When that strategy was abandoned, so was the 'socialism' of social democracy. Its material support had disappeared. Thus the Keynesian platitudes offered up by Hudson, Loach *et al* are *fantasy politics*. No objective basis exists for them.

The instinct for unity is a healthy and necessary one. It is fundamental to the existence and success of the workers' movement. Inasmuch as this initiative gets off the ground, the *potential* exists

for that unity to be made meaningful, by fleshing out its organisation and correcting the doomed politics that animate it. In order for that to happen, three conditions must be met.

Firstly, the resulting organisation must take the Labour Party seriously. We all know that its leadership is rightwing and detestable. But it is also organically connected to the trade unions and other mass organisations of the working class. These institutional links matter, even now that party and unions alike are hollowed out. Until that link is broken - and even after - Labour, and the instinctive support it continues to find in the working class, will remain a serious obstacle for forces to its left, which require strategic thinking to overcome.

Secondly, the existing far left must, equally, be taken seriously. The squabbling sects of which it is comprised may not have the institutional heft of Labour, but contain in their ranks the necessary raw material for building any new organisation from scratch. Left unity requires a battle against the bureaucratic sect regimes that currently perpetuate our divisions - not trying to ignore them.

Thirdly, and most importantly, the left needs to break with its habit of pushing alien politics in the hope of being popular. The vast majority of those of us able, equipped and (potentially) willing to build a united party of the left are committed on some level to Marxism, which - unlike stale 1945 nostalgia - has the potential to change the world for real.

It should be obvious that Kate Hudson and Ken Loach will not fight for this approach themselves. Communists should intervene in this latest left unity initiative, and help it realise its potential - and avoid its pitfalls ●

### Notes

1. <http://leftunity.org/appeal>.
2. 'Left unity must be linked to real action', March 27.
3. <http://leftunity.org/about>.
4. March 25.

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