

# weekly **worker**



**Ukip's success reflects  
prejudice and alienation  
from the mainstream**

■ Europe and CPB  
■ Israel strikes on Syria  
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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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**Left Unity**

## **THE SPIRIT OF '45?**

A rerun of Labourism, directed by KEN LOACH and featuring KATE HUDSON and ANDREW BURGIN





# LETTERS



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

## Pretend mass

We need to build a *mass movement*. A real mass revolutionary party can only come out of a mass movement. To pretend to build a "mass party" first is putting the cart before the horse ('How can we supersede the sects?', May 2). A pretend mass party with 7,000-8,000 members will only serve as an electoral structure to run a few candidates.

Why can't we build a mass movement? Because we talk to ourselves! We do not listen to workers - left newspapers preach to workers and tell them what to do. Or we discuss in our newspapers who was expelled from other groups - just the sort thing to excite workers. The left also often waits with Buddhist fatality for the mass movement to come to it.

We need to build an international revolutionary party, but that is an organic process which will come out of the debate taking place all over the world. Meanwhile, there's nothing wrong with having several mass revolutionary parties.

**Earl Gilman**  
email

## Unity debate

Preston Left Unity had its founding meeting on May 2. As the (now) elected Preston Left Unity organiser, I was very surprised by the turnout at the launch meeting. Eight people turned up, which was good, considering around five other people emailed me prior to the meeting expressing an interest in Left Unity; they just couldn't make the meeting. The gathering was certainly an unusual one - not one person was over the age of 30, with five of the attendees in their first year of college (myself included).

Whilst Tina Becker and Michael Copestake point out in their letter (May 2) that some felt the Left Unity meeting in Sheffield was too politically "narrow", this was not the case with the Preston launch meeting! In attendance was myself, an ex-member of the Green Party and Green Left faction, a member of the Lancashire Anarchist Federation (in a personal capacity), a full-time Socialist Workers Party organiser, an ex-member of the Labour Party and a scattering of apolitical students - one of whom said they "agreed" with the government's contractionary fiscal policy.

The general discussion was very progressive. The meeting agreed that any new party formed from the Left Unity appeal should not be focused on electoralism. It was felt that elections

should merely be viewed as a platform for the furthering of local campaigns and the opportunity to politically agitate people, and that real change comes from the streets, not the council chambers and parliament.

The group recognised that Syriza's electoral and non-electoral success has largely occurred through the party symbiotically entwining itself with grassroots campaigns and unions, and that a healthy balance of both electioneering and campaigning was the formula for success. The meeting adopted the belief that any new party created from the appeal should allow for permanent factions to be formed. Such an inevitably 'broad church' party will need factions for like-minded individuals to organise in order to prevent disfranchisement. The group felt that due to Left Unity's inherently broad nature it was unlikely that allowing factions to form would lead to sectarianism. I was ecstatic, given the politically diverse beliefs present, that the group agreed that the new party should be explicitly anti-capitalist in its message and propaganda.

The group ended the general discussion on the question of whether the new party should be centralised. Whilst the anarchist comrade argued for local group autonomy, it was felt that due to Left Unity's (here's that phrase again) broad nature, it would be irresponsible to lend too much autonomy to local groups in case they acted outside the party's (to be formed) central tenets. This conclusion was reached when comrades considered the situation in Brighton and Bristol, where the local Green parties had abused their autonomy by passing cuts on the respective city councils, despite the national party repeating the well-worn mantra that it is 'anti-cuts'.

Sadly the event was not as picturesque as the above would suggest. Whilst the three of us who were fairly clued up on left politics (the anarchist, the SWP member and I) managed to abandon our differences when trying to enlighten the apolitical students, the old party lines could not be completely disregarded. During the general discussion we briefly went over whether the new party should adopt a federal structure, with different parties forming a broad coalition, similar to that of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (which polled 2.5% of the vote in the 117 county council seats it contested last week) or whether the party should have an individual membership system, like the Green Party of England and Wales, whilst allowing permanent factions to form (like the Green Left).

It was at this point that the SWP organiser made it clear that he would not leave the SWP to join the new

left-of-Labour party. He then took it upon himself to praise the virtues of the SWP and explain why he couldn't possibly leave the party in a five-minute monologue. Neither the anarchist nor I had the heart to intervene; we just shared a rueful smile and waited for him to finish his speech. When he did so, I explained, in no uncertain terms, that no decisions had yet been made about how membership will work and that one may be able to be a member of two groups, as is allowed in Respect, or the new party may copy the Tusc model, in which case the SWP as an organisation could be part of the new party.

To this the comrade replied that the infamous central committee of his organisation had deliberated with Ken Loach who, apparently, told the CC that any new party which emerges from Left Unity will have an individual membership system, as opposed to a federally orientated system. This claim is nonsensical to the extreme! Any decision taken by Left Unity will be made by the provisional coordinating committee, to be elected at the May 11 delegate meeting in London at the very least. Although I suspect that such a major decision would need to be debated in depth at a conference of sorts, the idea that Ken Loach can either implement a policy decision on his own accord or magically use some well hidden Mystic Meg powers to predict which way a future conference will vote on the issue of membership structure is ridiculous.

Clearly this evidence-lacking claim was a shameful attempt by the comrade to create a false ultimatum in which the meeting attendees would have to choose between the SWP or Left Unity and that both were mutually exclusive. Ken Loach does not dictate to the members of Left Unity. In fact one could argue that the 'discounted' £50 he is charging local groups to host a public screening of his film *The spirit of 45* suggests that he is not all that concerned with uniting the left. The fantastical claim the SWP member made was unfounded and, given it was coupled with a five-minute monologue promoting the SWP, suggests his motive for attending the meeting was one born of divisiveness, and that he himself places little utility upon uniting the left. Perhaps he and Ken Loach have more in common than previously thought?

Despite this minor setback, I maintain the view that the meeting went well. Sadly some comrades have seen the most recent attempt to unite the left as an opportunity to recruit for their own sect. Both the *Weekly Worker* and the CPGB have made tremendous and consistent efforts to unite the left. Now the chance has presented itself, it would be foolish to ignore it. Whilst Left Unity is not perfect, I agree with Nick Wrack's article that factional differences need to be put aside in the interest of uniting the left ('How can we supersede the sects?', May 2). The CPGB has shown its commitment to forming a new Marxist party by engaging with the International Socialist Network and I sincerely hope the party fully engages with Left Unity to counteract the opportunist elements attempting to derail the project. Capitalism is ripe to be overthrown, yet the largest revolutionary party is degenerating, union membership amongst the workers is on a downward trajectory, class-consciousness is at an all-time low, the Tories are forcing untold thousands into poverty, and we are seeing no organised fightback from the left.

John Holloway is absolutely right when he talks about capitalism being a windowless room with a myriad of cracks in the walls. Each crack is an act which defies the law of capitalism, such as volunteering at your local charity shop when under capitalism you ought to sell your labour-power. Sometimes

these cracks release 'screams', which take the form of riots (like the London riots in 2011), or they can manifest themselves in other radical direct action, such as occupations (take the 2010 battle of Millbank, for example). The downfall of capitalism will only be realised when these screams can be synchronised and connected. Such a synchronisation, on both a national and international scale, will only come about with the presence of partyism.

The potential for resistance is there, the screams are presenting themselves, and as communists we have the obligation to seize the opportunity Left Unity presents to organise as one entity and overthrow capitalism. I will finish by using a phrase with which the SWP have labelled one of their stillborn operations, to call for the grotesquely overdue end of capitalism. As communists we need to unite, and Left Unity offers us this opportunity. The time has come to ... unite the resistance.

**Robert Eagleton**  
Organiser, Preston Left Unity

## Reminder

The UK Independence Party has certainly achieved a major electoral success and is shaking the establishment. If only it was the Communist Party riding such an electoral insurgency of around 25% of the popular vote. Ukip are unlikely to go away any time soon.

I think Ukip's success had very little to do with Europe or the European Union. This is about large sections of Middle England feeling unrepresented and offended by the effete social liberalism of Cameron, Osborne, Clegg and Miliband. It is about older generations of fairly well-to-do middle class people living in the shires, villages and suburbs, feeling and seeing their beloved environments being slowly transformed and changed by mass migration. Some will be members of the lower strata of the broadly defined capitalist class - ie, the 10% who can live off interest, dividends and savings. However, most will, objectively, be members of the traditional working class who, in line with traditional values, have worked hard all their lives in order to achieve a degree of comfort and security and something to hand down to their children, giving them a better start and a better future.

They feel newer people are 'different'. Their skins may be of different colours, they may speak different languages, eat different foods, behave in different ways and, among their own communities, have perhaps higher levels of integration, cohesion and solidarity. Very different from the ferocious, self-centred individualism and competitiveness that lies behind the veneer of sleepy Middle England.

Middle England feels threatened, marginalised and increasingly excluded. This is not necessarily racist. It is not racist to feel people of other backgrounds and cultures, ways of speaking and doing things are different, and to prefer the comfort of one's own kind. It is as much, if not more, a question of class.

Racism is when people feel not only that others are 'different', but they are somehow inferior as well. We need to be very careful about the 'racist' epithet. Most Ukip supporters would not regard themselves as racist and are probably not, if one uses the tighter definition I suggest. Calling them racist will (and indeed has) pushed Middle England into the hands of a quite hard-right, reactionary political party.

I would suggest that the recent orchestrated mass celebrations and carefully generated 'feel good' factor around the royal wedding, the diamond jubilee and the Olympic games have done a great deal to pump up feelings of sentiment, patriotism and support

for 'traditional English values' and affection for an image of 'traditional' England and Great Britannia. And this deliberate awakening and stirring has translated directly into votes for Ukip.

All this is a deliberate and carefully worked through strategy by the ruling class. The middle class consensus, built up by Blairism and continued by Cameron, Osborne, Clegg and Miliband, does not represent an adequate political and social basis for the final removal of the post-war welfare state required by British capitalism.

The likely prospect of a Labour-Liberal coalition after 2015, and the Liberal Democrats playing a permanent governmental role in perpetuating the social liberalism and consensus of the soggy centre, fills our ruling class with dread and is forcing their hand. A major realignment of the hard right is being worked through, seeking to split away from the soggy centre of Cameron/Clegg/Miliband. The aim is to create a new formation on the right, probably including very large sections of the existing Conservative Party, and certainly Ukip, which will present a clear nationalist alternative to Cameron/Clegg/Miliband and which will be capable of winning general elections, which the present Conservative Party is not.

Demographic changes are working in favour of this project. The population of Britain as a whole is ageing in the sense that an increasing majority are older. The majority of Ukip supporters are over 50. And the parts of the British population who are ageing the most are traditional white working and middle class people. The Thatcher death and funeral was a useful reminder and refresher for the ruling class of the last time it developed such a bold and radical transformative strategy.

**Andrew Northall**  
Kettering

## Thanks, Maggie

Many thanks for your recent coverage of the life and legacy of Margaret Thatcher. One of her intentions was to eliminate the influence of Marxism on intellectuals and class-conscious workers. In this respect she was an abject failure.

Like many of her generation and upbringing, she was unable to distinguish between Marxism and Stalinism. Nevertheless, she made a small contribution to ending the Soviet system and the political influence of its critical and uncritical supporters in trade unions and the social democratic left. This has had the unintended consequence of creating a favourable environment for the revival of a pristine form of socialism and communism. For this reason alone, Marxists can rejoice and be thankful.

**Paul B Smith**  
email

## Workers' war

David Walters points out that the battles of Khalkhin Gol occurred in 1939, not 1941. Quite right, which is why I had written: "By 1941 [rather than *in* 1941], the USSR had seen off the Japanese in the largest tank battle ever, to such an extent that Japan decided it was easier to attack the US rather than USSR."

The fact remains that already by that time the USSR, under its own steam and despite huge hostility from the surrounding imperialist states, had managed not only to develop its industrial production, but also its technological development to such a stage that it was not only able to defeat Japan, which by then was an advanced capitalist, industrial power, but to do so on such a scale that Japan believed the United States was an easier target! This is just 15 years after the industrialisation programme in the USSR had begun and

## Fighting fund

## Identify yourself

I feel I must mention comrade JA, who recently set up a standing order to the *Weekly Worker* for £20 a month. Since the beginning of the year it has been landing in our account regular as clockwork. But the only trouble is, no-one here knows who he or she is. Well, comrade, we are really grateful, but why not identify yourself?

Presumably JA, not being a subscriber, reads us online (one of 9,663 who did so last week, by the way) and organised the standing order with his/her bank without telling us. It's all very well being modest, comrade, but there is such a thing as going too far!

There were eight other standing

orders last week, ranging from £10 to £30, plus a handy £50 PayPal donation from EJ (yes, comrade, I remembered to mention you this month!). Then there were three cheques - from KT (£25), AC (£20) and CJ (£10). All that comes to £283, taking our running total for May's fighting fund up to £466. We need £1,500 every month, plus we still have £36 to make up from March's shortfall.

So another £1,070 would do nicely, please ●

**Robbie Rix**

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



after all of the devastation caused by the civil war and intervention.

David says that Britain was only penned up “like a wolverine in a cave”. But, as Trotsky pointed out, the problem that a workers’ state in Britain would face is precisely that it depends upon huge amounts of imports and could be easily cut off and starved out. It was actually touch and go whether Churchill would survive after 1940. Halifax was sending his representatives to negotiate with Hitler, and Hitler had offered to allow Britain to keep its colonies if they gave him a free hand across Europe. Had the Italians not been so badly prepared, needing Rommel to come to their aid, Britain would have lost North Africa before the US entered the war (the US only really began military operations in north Africa in 1943), and it would have been ‘bye-bye, Britain’, because it would have had no oil and no supplies from the empire via Suez. That’s probably why after 1940 there was opposition to Churchill from people like Stafford Cripps, who was seen as an alternative leader and proposed forming an alliance with the USSR - which could have provided the necessary oil and other materials.

David then spins the roulette wheel of historical fortune in the hope that he can deny the industrial and technological development in the USSR, by claiming that it was the ‘The US wot won it’ all along. That reminds me of the *Dad’s army* line that

in World War I the only thing the US charged was the interest on its loans. And, of course, the Arctic convoys going back to Britain were heavily laden with Russian gold in payment for US supplies. David seems to forget that, by the time the US actually did get round to joining the war at the end of 1941, the USSR had already defeated the Germans outside Moscow. He also seems to forget that during the 1930s, and right up until the US declared war on Germany at the end of 1941, US corporations like Ford and General Motors were busy, in Germany itself, churning out tanks and other military vehicles for the Nazis by the shed load. In fact, when Britain bombed those plants, the US response was to stick in a claim for compensation for the damage to them. There were some ‘pre-lend lease’ supplies after June 1941 to the USSR, but these were tiny compared with the resources the USSR itself brought to bear at that time in the battle for Moscow. Lend-lease supplies proper only started after the Germans had been defeated outside Moscow, which was the turning point of the war.

It’s undoubtedly the case that the USSR benefited, after 1941, from US supplies, but that does not account for the technological advances that the USSR made during that period. Nor, of course, does it account for the difference between then and World War I. In the first war, adversity and a cruel, tyrannical rule back home brought revolution. In 1941-45, it brought one

of the most heroic struggles of workers and peasants ever seen in defence of what they saw as ‘their state’. A Marxist has to see that some serious material change had occurred that brought about such a hugely different emotional and class response in the two cases.

**Arthur Bough**  
email

## Solidarity

On May 7 Sheffield call centre workers held a very solidly supported strike in defence of a sacked colleague and union rep. Around 95% of our members at the department for work and pensions site stayed away from work in a dispute over the sacking of high-profile union rep Lee Rock.

Lee was sacked for unsatisfactory attendance, despite the vast majority of his time off being related to his recognised disabilities. We believe he has been treated very harshly and fear the decision to dismiss him was influenced by his role as an effective rep who has been a thorn in management’s side.

The department failed to follow its own guidance on dealing with attendance management issues for disabled staff. Lee has the support of a senior union rep to help with his appeal and we have taken up his case with senior managers to press for reinstatement.

**Public and Commercial Services Union**  
www.pcs.org.uk

# Need to engage with existing left groups

In April, the CPGB applied for observer status at Left Unity’s May 11 gathering. Here is the exchange of letters that resulted

## Kate Hudson to Mark Fischer, May 4

Thank you for your request, Mark.

Our forthcoming meeting is an internal meeting rather than a conference, so we aren’t having any press or outside observer spaces available on this occasion.

We may be having a national conference later in the year, in which case we may decide to welcome observers or press on that occasion.

Best wishes

**Kate**

## Mark Fischer to Kate Hudson, May 7

Thanks for your reply of May 4, which we found disappointing. Left Unity is at an embryonic stage, but it is clear from the reports we have gathering from around the country that sections of the organised left are already involved at a local level alongside ‘independent’ activists - in fact a number of CPGBers have been delegated to attend the May 11 “internal meeting”, as you frame it.

So it is clearly wrongheaded to think of the CPGB or other left groups as “outside” elements, particularly as the whole project is branded ‘Left Unity’. Aren’t the CPGB, the Socialist Workers Party, the Socialist Party or socialist organisations in the Labour Party all component parts of the left that should be united?

This is not to minimise the difficulties associated with an orientation like this. You will be aware that we have comprehensively documented such problems over the years in initiatives like the Socialist Labour Party, the Socialist Alliance, Respect, etc. Indeed, we have not simply chronicled the trials and tribulations of the fight for left unity, but have been harshly and openly critical of the groups’ sectarianism that has derailed it time and again. However, we have never ceased to regard this section of the movement as an essential element of the answer, not simply part of the problem. We note from the prominent role played in LU by Socialist Resistance comrades that you have a version of this approach, but applied rather selectively, it seems.

Ideally, we believe that what is needed

is a unity conference of the left, something that would require frank and open prior negotiations between the respective leaderships of the groups and a commitment to abide by the majority decisions taken at it by all those who attend. We are obviously some way from that, but LU can make a useful contribution if it invites left organisations, even those that have been critical of the initiative so far, to attend as observers with full speaking rights. It seems to us that a unity project that does not make real efforts to engage all elements of the *actual left*, as it exists in the here and now, may be off to a rather shaky start.

We presume the decision you convey has been made either by the LU’s organising committee or a working group delegated from it to handle arrangements for the meeting. Could you clarify this for us, Kate? Many thanks ●

With communist greetings

**Mark Fischer**



**Kate Hudson: on whose behalf?**

## 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 May 12, 5pm:** Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by open discussion and *Capital* reading group. Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. This meeting: Vol 1, chapter 15, section 3, ‘The proximate effects of machinery on the workman’ (continued). Organised by CPGB: [www.cpgb.org.uk](http://www.cpgb.org.uk).

### Radical Anthropology Group

Introduction to anthropology

**Tuesday May 14, 6.15pm:** ‘Early human culture as reverse dominance’. Speaker: Chris Knight.

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).

### Migration justice

**Saturday May 11, 10am to 3pm:** Training sessions for activists, the Hub, Turl street, Oxford.

Organised by National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns: [www.ncadc.org.uk](http://www.ncadc.org.uk).

### Defend education

Rallies against government plans.

**Birmingham:** Saturday May 11, 11am, ICC, Broad Street, Birmingham B1.

**Leeds:** Saturday May 11, 11am, The Hilton, Leeds City Hotel, Neville Street, Leeds LS1.

**Cardiff:** Saturday May 18, 11am, Motorpoint Arena, Mary Ann Street, Cardiff CF10.

**Newcastle:** Saturday May 18, 11am, Centre for Life, Times Square, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1.

Organised by NUT: [www.teachers.org.uk](http://www.teachers.org.uk); and NASUWT: [www.nasuwat.org.uk](http://www.nasuwat.org.uk).

### Lewisham Carnival Against Cuts

**Saturday May 11, 11am:** Protest march. Assemble Catford town hall, Rushey Green, London SE6.

Organised by Carnival Against Cuts: [www.carnivalagaincuts.org.uk](http://www.carnivalagaincuts.org.uk).

### Radical books

**Saturday May 11, 10am to 5pm:** Book fair and speakers, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1.

Organised by London Radical Book Fair: [www.londonradicalbookfair.wordpress.com](http://www.londonradicalbookfair.wordpress.com).

### Socialist films

**Sunday May 12, 11am:** Screening, Renoir Cinema, Brunswick Square, London WC1. Stevan Riley’s *Fire in Babylon* (UK, 83 minutes).

Organised by London Socialist Film Co-op: [www.socialistfilm.blogspot.com](http://www.socialistfilm.blogspot.com).

### No to evictions

**Sunday May 12, 2.30pm:** Networking for action. Rich Mix, 47 Bethnal Green Road, London E1.

Organised by Unite Housing Workers: [www.housingworkers.org.uk](http://www.housingworkers.org.uk).

### Media and trans people

**Wednesday May 15, 6.30pm:** Public meeting, Grimond Room, Portcullis House, 1 Bridge Street, London SW1. ‘How do we transform the media’s treatment of the trans community?’

Organised by LGBT Labour: [www.lgbtlabour.org.uk](http://www.lgbtlabour.org.uk).

### Save Clapham fire station

**Thursday May 16, 6.30pm:** Anti-closures protest. Assemble Brixton Fire Station, Gresham Road, London SW9, followed by march to Lambeth town hall for consultation meeting.

Organised by the Fire Brigades Union: [www.fbu.org.uk](http://www.fbu.org.uk).

### Israeli apartheid

**Friday May 17, 7.30pm:** Talk by journalist Ben White, Friends Meeting House, 6 Mount Street, Manchester M2. ‘Palestinians and a “Jewish and democratic” state’.

Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: [www.palestinecampaign.org](http://www.palestinecampaign.org).

### Band together to beat bedroom tax

**Saturday May 18, 8pm:** Gig, Sun Inn, Knowles Street, Stockton-on-Tees. Music with Pellethead, Joe Solo and Dinnernanny. £2.

Organised by Stockton People Against the Bedroom Tax and Teesside Solidarity Movement: <http://teessidesolidaritymovement.wordpress.com>.

### Axe the bedroom tax

**Saturday May 18, 11am:** Protest, City Hall, Barkers Pool, Sheffield S1.

Organised by Sheffield Unite the Community: [www.facebook.com/UniteCommunitySheffield](http://www.facebook.com/UniteCommunitySheffield).

### People’s Assembly

**Saturday May 18, 10.30am to 5pm:** Public event, Friends Meeting House, Clarendon Street, Nottingham.

Organised by People’s Assembly Nottingham: [www.peoplesassemblynottingham.org](http://www.peoplesassemblynottingham.org).

### 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.



**PARTY**

# The spirit of '45?

What do we hope will come out of the May 11 Left Unity conference? Following Nick Wrack's speech at the April 27 London Communist Forum, **Jack Conrad** replied for the CPGB. This is an edited version of his response

**An obligation to intervene**

**N**ick Wrack says he agrees with much of the CPGB's *Draft programme* and for my part I agree with much of what he is saying.<sup>1</sup> So we can call this a discussion rather than a debate, because I am genuinely interested in achieving a convergence of viewpoints.

Let us begin with the Left Unity project. We have written to the organisers of Left Unity asking for observer status and speaking rights at the May 11 conference (see p3). We want to attend the conference and speak with an authoritative voice. We have not attempted to get as many delegates there as possible - that would not be the right approach. So in the spirit of left unity hopefully the comrades will welcome our request.

As Nick was saying, if a new unity project comes into being which has any sort of viability, it is obligatory for Marxists to engage with it. It has to be said that our experience has largely been negative. Disappointment and disenchantment with the Labour Party, exemplified by 8,000 signing up in support of the Left Unity statement, is hardly new. For example, when Arthur Scargill broke from the Labour Party the potential existed to immediately rally many thousands. But Scargill did not want any of the groups. He wanted

to be the unchallenged labour dictator.

So when in 1996 the Socialist Labour Party was launched, Scargill began it with a witch-hunt. The first SLP conference was open to anyone - except stationed at the door were people from a curious organisation called the Fourth International Supporters Caucus. And what were they there for? To keep out members of the CPGB! Well, a lot of our comrades got in anyway - the doorkeepers did not know every face. Because of that, Scargill got a couple of prominent leftwing lawyers to write *his* party's rules. The SLP's rulebook contained clauses specifically designed to keep the communists out. Clauses which were almost borrowed word for word from Labour. So the SLP was eerily like the Labour Party, except that it banned and excluded the communists on day one rather than after 20 years.

The most farcical of the SLP's anti-democratic practices was Scargill's use of the bloc vote of an 'affiliated organisation' - the North West, Cheshire and Cumbria Miners Association, made up of retired members of the National Union of Mineworkers. If conference looked as though it would vote the 'wrong' way, Arthur would ensure with just a nod and a wink that the NWCCMA delegates put their 3,000 votes to good use.

But the main thing to criticise about the SLP concerns its reformist political basis. And we could make the same criticism about subsequent organisations. Namely, the Socialist Alliance, Scottish Socialist Party, Respect and the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition.

## Not in front of the children

There is an extraordinary paradox. As capitalism has gone into deeper and deeper into crisis, not only have we seen the Labour Party move further and further to the right, along with the whole of bourgeois society: the left itself has also been moving to the right.

And it is common sense amongst comrades on the left that, while within the privacy of our own groups we can talk about Marxism, socialism, the history of our movement and the difficult ideas it has grappled with, when it comes to the 'children' - that is, the working class, a class that is meant to liberate itself - we pretend, especially when standing in elections, that really we are just like Labour used to be. That we are committed to a parliamentary road to socialism, to welfarism, to some sort of Keynesian golden age: in short that we are born-again Labourites.

Now, I am not arguing that we ought to stand under a banner which simply reads 'Revolution now!' In fact we do stand for reforms. Quite clearly we are not in a revolutionary situation and in terms of readying our class to become the ruling class reforms are essential. We must have more democracy, we must have more power within capitalism. So it is not an argument about reform or revolution: it is an argument about what *sort* of reforms we want and how we go about getting them. That is the question.

Within the Socialist Alliance the CPGB put forward the proposal that our election manifesto should prioritise democratic questions - eg, annual parliaments, abolition of the monarchy and House of Lords, self-determination for Wales and Scotland, a united Ireland, opposition to immigrations controls, scrapping the standing army, establishing a system of local workers' militias, etc. We were told that this was "too radical" (Weyman Bennett). The SWP was in firm control and it insisted on what we would call economism; ie, improving the terms and conditions of a slave class which cannot see beyond capitalism. The idea was that we should limit our demands to simple proposals, around which the

working class can be mobilised into militant action: pay, hours, the NHS and other such questions. Democracy is far too complex.

Indeed, whenever the left has supported unity projects, its comrades have almost invariably put forward programmes far to the right of where they themselves formally stand. That, for me, is another paradox.

The most extreme example was Respect. The SWP killed off the Socialist Alliance just as the anti-war movement was reaching mass dimensions. It refused to countenance the Socialist Alliance alternative to war: instead it threw its weight behind what was to become Respect. A party that was initially premised on uniting socialists with greens and Muslims, crucially the Muslim Association of Britain (the British branch of the Muslim Brotherhood). Although the greens never came on board and the Muslims who did were always equivocal, that perspective says everything about how far to the right the left had gone. After all, a party which stands in elections is putting itself forward as a potential party of government. Presumably, though it has never been theorised, or even admitted, the SWP envisaged a grand coalition that would lead to a



Respect stage of capitalism (only then could socialism be envisaged). The Stalinists called it a popular front that joined the working class organisations with progressive elements of the petty bourgeoisie and national bourgeoisie. But, whether you call it a popular front or Respect, the programmatic dynamics are exactly the same.

And we all know that under the leadership of the SWP the Respect project ended up dumping one principle after another. For example, the SWP itself is historically wedded to a “democratic, *secular*, one-state” solution for Israel/Palestine. But come Respect we had the SWP’s Elane Heffernan get up to successfully *oppose* the adoption of secularism. Not only in Britain - that would supposedly put off religious people. But when it came to Israel/Palestine too.

The SWP behaved in exactly the same fashion over the question of abortion. When we put forward a resolution that would have committed Respect to a woman’s right to choose to terminate a pregnancy, we were told by comrades in the SWP that this was not something that voters ‘on the doorstep’ were bringing up. True, in the end there was a political fudge and the phrase, ‘a woman’s right to choose’, was included in Respect’s election manifesto - except that *what* women had a right to choose was left out! The clause could be interpreted as the right of Muslim women to wear a headscarf.

Apparently Respect needed to base its programme not on what conference delegates thought and believed. No, what was important, what should decide, is what the “millions out there” will agree with. A crass form of opportunist surrender. The reality was that the SWP killed off one principle after another in order to appease Muslim clerics, MAB, George Galloway, Yvonne Ridley, Salma Yaqoob and all those who stood on the right of Respect. Not because of their voting strength at conference. At the end of the day, the right set the political agenda because of its ties with bourgeois society, because what it says echoes the media’s common sense. Of course, exactly the same happened with the popular fronts of ‘official communism’.

Indeed that has been the history of the unity projects thus far. The right wing always sets the agenda, even when the right is actually in a tiny minority. The left, rather than putting forward its own programme, agrees to water it down. That is certainly the case with Tusc. Last year, *Socialism Today*, the magazine of the Socialist Party in England and Wales, featured a debate between SPEW’s Clive Heemskerk and the left journalist, Owen Jones. Comrade Heemskerk boasted about the success and potential of Tusc, comparing it with the early Labour Party.

Crucial for him was the support Tusc had gathered from the trade union movement. Support which he suggested was bound to grow. And towards that end he assured the trade union bureaucrats who apparently will soon be decamping from the Labour Party and eagerly knocking on Tusc’s door, that they will be in charge. They will certainly set the programmatic limits. In his own words, “the trade union leaders that are involved in Tusc have a veto over what’s decided, because Tusc operates on a consensus basis - in other words, they have ownership of Tusc”.<sup>2</sup> So, the RMT, Tusc’s only union affiliate, can veto any decision, just like the NWCCMA (in reality Arthur Scargill) could in the SLP. Before any policy is adopted in Tusc, SPEW has to approach RMT general secretary Bob Crow and humbly ask, ‘Is that all right, brother Bob?’

## Left unity

So I am glad that comrade Wrack is going into Left Unity, just as we in the CPGB will do, armed with the

idea that any Left Unity programme should explicitly state that it is about superseding capitalism. With that in mind it is also vital to stress internationalism. Socialism cannot be achieved in Britain alone. Nor can it be achieved even in Europe alone - though I think we need a bold, pan-European strategic perspective. Socialism is the task of the working class of all countries; socialism is the total transformation of all existing conditions. So, yes, we must argue in Left Unity for a clear programme that commits us to the global supersession of capitalism. Of course, we have to defend and advance the existing gains of the working class. But that can best be done through a class struggle that does not stop at the shores of Britain.

Given the negative experience of the SLP, the Socialist Alliance, Respect and Tusc, it is vital that any new party is thoroughly democratic. Not just ‘one member, one vote’: the rights of minorities to organise and to publicly express their views must be explicitly recognised. In the same spirit there must be transparency when it comes to political differences, programmatic and theoretical arguments at the top. The presently constituted left is absolutely mad. Too often it is organised into what we have dubbed ‘confessional sects’. Every member is expected to publicly ‘agree’ with the line (even if they do not).

I can remember one group changing its attitude to the Soviet Union. After the fall of the USSR the comrades debated whether or not the successor countries remained “workers’ states”. For many years the old line prevailed - yes, they were “workers’ states” because over 51% of the economy remained nationalised. A stupid idea, only rectified when the minority became the majority. But all of that was kept secret, kept internal. In other words, for years those who led what was the minority had lied to the working class (or at least those who took notice of the group’s pronouncements). However, once the minority became the majority it was now the turn of the new minority to parrot the latest ‘truth’ (even though they might still be committed to the old line). What nonsense. What an insult to the science of Marxism. How can we ever expect to be taken seriously with such a ridiculous method?

No, that is not how the left should behave. Of course, if it comes to organising an armed uprising on Wednesday at 3pm, then obviously we think such things should be kept quiet. But the nature of the Soviet Union? Such a question, like differing explanations for the present crisis, like the nature of the Labour Party, like the attitude towards feminism, ought to be debated openly. Anything else is bonkers.

So, yes, transparency in terms of debate. And the right to organise platforms, the right of those platforms to get publicity in the party’s press - for us these are basic principles.

And that is why I for one am worried. Of course, Left Unity has not even had its first conference, but at the moment it is being promoted on the basis that it is inspired by Ken Loach’s film, *The spirit of ‘45*. Ken Loach is not just one of the initiators of Left Unity, it seems. Left Unity is the party of his film. To me this is hopeless. Looking back to 1945 is not about learning from history. It is about being determined to repeat the mistakes of the past. Such politics are bound to fail, even when it comes to defending existing gains from the ongoing attacks of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat privatisers. That does not mean that Left Unity should be dismissed as not being ‘pure’ enough. But it shows us the nature of the task we have in front of us. In other words, communists and revolutionary socialists should join with their eyes open. We have been

here before and, given the balance of political forces, we should expect a hard fight.

## Marxism

In terms of its fundamental propositions Marxism is extraordinarily simple. Marxism can be grasped by anyone. Marxism can be summed up by saying that the working class needs democracy in the state and its own organisations, that the whole of society must be run from below according to the principle of need, not profit. That is easy to understand.

But in terms of building a Marxist party we must begin in a fundamentally different way. A Marxist party is not built on the basis of going out and getting thousands of signatures. Nor is it built through activity for the sake of activity. Nor is it built by smoothing over differences, fudging the 20% where we differ in favour of unity around the 80% where we agree (or some such other rotten formulation). The Marxist party is built top-down. It is built through the struggle for the correct theory and the correct politics. It is built around its programme. Not, it should be emphasised, the programme of warmed over social democracy. But the sort of minimum-maximum programme the Social Democratic Party of Germany and the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party had. In other words, not a confession of faith, but a statement of basic principles and a practical, testable, road map which can take us from the hell hole of capitalism to the high heavens of communism and human liberation.

So Marxist parties must be built top-down, around a historically informed and fully theoretised programme.

The CPGB has its *Draft programme*, and the word ‘draft’ is not used accidentally. It is there in order to make a very important point. We may have the name, Communist Party of Great Britain, but we are not a party. The word ‘party’ is derived from ‘part’: ie, part of the class. And a Marxist party must by definition be based on the advanced part of the working class. At present the CPGB is simply one of many different groups on the left and, even if the existing left was to unite into single organisation, in itself that would not constitute a party in the genuine sense.

Our *Draft programme* is actually what we bring to all unity projects. We do so not as an ultimatum, but as a contribution. For example, comrade Wrack says he agrees with much of it, but does not particularly like some of the language. Well, we are not precious about that. If he disagreed with its internationalism and the need for a pan-European strategy, then we would have a furious argument ... an argument that could continue and gain full clarity within the space of a single organisation. All we would demand is the unrestricted right to combat and defeat all forms of opportunism: eg, Stalinism, British nationalism, left economism, general strikism, pacifism, etc.

So the Marxist party begins with the programme. Some people say that such an approach is sectarian, excludes anarchists, syndicalists and Labourite nostalgics, and is therefore bound to fail. Well, one of the advantages of studying history is that you can learn to avoid making the same mistakes again and again. However, far from providing only negative lessons, history also provides positive ones - which we must always treat critically, in context, and never mindlessly copy, of course. That said, if we apply the positive lessons of the past to our current political impasse then perhaps we can find a way forward that will bring victories instead of yet more heroic defeats.

I am thinking in particular of the mass parties of social democracy and the unity symbolised by the Second International. Not the social democracy that treacherously voted

for war credits in August 1914, but the social democracy that became a mass movement across the whole of Europe, to the point where in Germany it became a ‘state within a state’. A model that was applied in Russian conditions by Lenin and the Bolsheviks. It is a myth that Lenin ‘broke’ with the SPD model in 1914 or 1917. In fact, October 1917 was the vindication of the correctness of that model.

We can argue about the particulars of the SPD and the RSDLP. But what is unarguable is that they were successful in organising the advanced part of the working class and through that not only in leading the mass of the working class, but other sections of the population too (crucially, in Russia, the peasantry). That success did not come from watering down principles, from fudging differences, from unity for the sake of unity. No, in the last analysis it came from the Marxist programme.

## Transitional

I shall now turn to what frequently excuses and certainly explains the all too common rightism of the left. Whether it be the SWP’s Alex Callinicos, the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty’s Sean Matgamna or Peter Taaffe of SPEW, they all say that are guided by what they call the ‘transitional method’.

The ‘transitional method’ is widely held on the left to be the highest achievement when it comes to programmatic demands. In fact, it represents a regression to a pre-Marxist conception of revolution. It certainly owes something to the anarchism of Mikhail Bakunin and general strikism. Anyway, I can well understand Leon Trotsky coming out with his *Transitional programme* in 1938. He knew that the world war was looming. He had seen what had happened in Spain. He knew that humanity faced the threat of fascist barbarism.

But how many people were organised under the banner of the so-called Fourth International? It was smaller in global terms than the left is today in Britain. In the absence of real forces Trotsky turned to spontaneity. Out of desperation he proposed that if his comrades put forward ‘reasonable’ demands, such as resisting factory closures and pay cuts, then in the fight to realise those ‘reasonable’ demands the logic of struggle would take the working classes one step at a time from the politics of the defensive to the politics of the offensive. Through that process the working class would eventually find its way to power. That is basically what the much vaunted ‘transitional method’ amounts to.

Here is the logic that says resisting cuts, fighting for pay demands, mobilising to save the NHS are revolutionary. Hence what the working class needs is not Marxist consciousness, not Marxist theory, not a Marxist programme, but protests, strikes, occupations. In a word, action. Of course, no Marxist would oppose resisting cuts, striking for pay demands or fighting to save the NHS. But we do emphasise consciousness and therefore polemics and the struggle of ideas.

In many cases the ‘transitional method’ results in what I would call *honest* rightism. Nevertheless, even the most honest rightism is thoroughly elitist. So-called ‘ordinary people’ are treated as if the only thing that motivates them is wages, conditions and the NHS. The implication is that they are incapable of anything higher and therefore the members of the revolutionary sect, especially when they are enlodged in trade unions, reformist parties and protest campaigns, should lead them by the nose, should not confuse them with factional arguments, should keep any differences safely behind locked doors. Only the members of the elect

are really aware of what is going on and where things are expected to go.

As I say, I can understand why Trotsky put forward such a perspective in 1938. But it did not work, it will not work, it cannot work. No, we have tell the working class the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Sometimes that will involve difficult concepts, obscure references and fine nuances. That is why Marxists place such stress on theory. As Lenin once famously said, “Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement.” So we in the CPGB do not consider theory as some kind of hobby for intellectuals. The working class needs theory as much as the body needs food and drink.

So, when it comes to the nature of the Soviet Union, this is no side issue. There are those who say it was just state capitalism. If that was the case, what happened in 1991? Did the USSR go from capitalism to capitalism? If so, what was all the fuss about? What about the ‘degenerate workers’ state’ theory. Was Stalin’s mass murder regime really an example of the working class in power? Was Brezhnev’s USSR really a ‘planned’ economy superior to capitalism? What about those who remain with the Stalinite tradition and say that China, North Korea and Cuba are conquests of the working class? Do such people have anything in common with Marxism apart from a few deracinated phrases and slogans? These and other questions will not only be asked by our class enemies. They will be asked by intelligent members of the working class and we must have full, frank and honest answers.

There can be no short cuts to communism and human liberation. To become a ruling class the working class needs to master all the big political questions. That is also why we cannot compromise on the fight for democracy at every level. Without democracy leaders cannot be held to account; without democracy there can be no control from below; without democracy wrong ideas cannot be overcome.

## Labour

I will finish by touching on the Labour Party. All unity projects so far have either dismissed or fundamentally belittled the importance of Labour. Of course, the Labour Party has never been a socialist party. Therefore calls to ‘reclaim’ it are historically ill-informed and politically naive. After all, when did the Labour Party go wrong? With Tony Blair? With Harold Wilson? With Clement Attlee? With Ramsay MacDonald? No, the Labour Party remains an organisation of the working class, but an organisation of the working class led and dominated by pro-capitalist reactionaries of the worst kind: that has been its nature since its formation.

Nevertheless, we need an orientation to the Labour Party because most the big trade unions are affiliated to it and because most people who self-identify as working class vote for it. So when the CPGB was in the Socialist Alliance we suggested the tactic of giving critical support to all Labour candidates who declared their support for the SA ‘priority pledges’. Today that would almost certainly include MPs such as John McDonnell and Jeremy Corbyn.

That is something Left Unity should seriously consider. We need to develop a dialogue, develop an intervention, develop a hearing from the Labour Party’s mass base. Without that there can only be life as a fringe group ●

## Notes

1. For Nick Wrack’s speech, see ‘How can we supersede the sects?’ *Weekly Worker* May 2.
2. *Socialism Today* October 2012: [www.socialismtoday.org/162/representation.html](http://www.socialismtoday.org/162/representation.html).



## UKIP

# Not just a protest vote

Ukip's success at the county council elections reflects its voters' prejudices, but also long-term alienation from official bourgeois politics, argues Paul Demarty

**M**any different stories came out of Thursday's elections. There was a fraught but ultimately comfortable Labour hold in South Shields, where the Liberal Democrats limped in with a humiliating seventh-place finish. There was the unseating of Doncaster's mayor, Peter Davies, an eccentric far-right fruitcake who hit the headlines with his admiration for the Taliban's keen grasp of family values.

Overwhelmingly, though, the post-election talk has been of the United Kingdom Independence Party, which is undoubtedly the big winner overall. Ukip leader Nigel Farage's decision to field over 1,700 candidates looked a little over-ambitious in the run-up to the polls, especially when it became clear that some pretty odd people had slipped away with a Ukip ticket amid the deluge (we need only mention Alex Wood of Somerset, who attempted to explain away a picture of himself apparently making a Roman salute by claiming he was reaching over to grab the camera from his girlfriend, who was taking pictures of him "imitating a pot plant").

As with Boris Johnson, however, behind Nigel Farage's 'lovable buffoon' public image lies a savvy political operator. He, and his advisers, knew that there was a good showing to be had in these elections, so they threw everything into them. It was a very, very good call, and the momentum is very definitely behind Ukip going into the European parliament elections next year, where (thanks to the party's particular hot-button issues and the shape of the British political cycle) it usually over-performs.

Where they stood, Ukip candidates averaged over a quarter of the vote and overall they picked up 23% of all votes cast. Ukip gained 139 councillors, and retained another eight. Its candidate, Richard Elvin, knocked the Tories into third place in the South Shields by-election, picking up 24.2% of the vote.

Understandably, Farage is cock-a-hoop: "We've been abused by everybody, attacked by the entire establishment, who did their best to stop ordinary, decent people going out and voting Ukip, and they have done in big, big numbers," he said. "If you speak to the Westminster elite, they will tell you, 'It is just a protest - nothing to worry about really.' [But] When I meet Ukip voters they say, 'Nigel, we're voting for you because we believe in what you stand for'."

Is his enthusiasm justified? For the most part, it could well be. It would be ridiculous, of course, to suggest that there was *no* 'protest vote' element to Ukip's strong showing. It is that point in the electoral cycle when exhaustion frequently sets in with a government, and big votes will traditionally go either to the

official opposition or non-mainstream parties who happen to be riding high. The Labour Party's bloodless, technocratic, PR-operation approach to politics failed to get any section of the electorate particularly energised (although its showing was by no means terrible); Ukip certainly captured a cynical anti-establishment mood, which we will examine more closely later.

Yet a quarter of the vote - many tens of thousands of people at least - cannot consist *entirely* of people who are ignorant of Ukip's political complexion and merely like the cut of Farage's jib. Indeed, it would appear that the vast majority of these people knew exactly what they were in for. Dan Hodges, *The Daily Telegraph's* pugnacious Blairite-in-residence, estimates that Ukip took four votes from the Tories for every one it took from Labour<sup>2</sup>; other estimates put the ratio at six to one. These voters knew what they were buying into.

## Rightwing populism

So what exactly *are* they buying into? Ukip is part of a broader phenomenon in politics, to which the British establishment laughably imagined this country, with its great traditions of 'tolerance', 'pragmatism' and so forth, was immune - the emergence of large and influential right-populist parties and movements worldwide. Across Europe, from the French Front National to Hungary's anti-Semitic Jobbik party, in the core northern economies and the beleaguered southern states, mass organisations of this kind may be found. Ukip - along with the American Tea Party movement - represents the Anglo-Saxon contingent of this right-populist resurgence.

Many of these parties are at daggers drawn with each other, of course - rightwing Germans blame the 'lazy Greeks' for their problems, and Greeks and Italians blame the tyrannical Germans.

But

their underlying unity as a political species is undeniable - Ukip, like the FN, the Vlaams Blok, Geert Wilders's Party for Freedom and the rest, tout a pretty toxic political brew of petty-bourgeois prejudices. A fierce, xenophobic national chauvinism, with its attendant contempt for migrants and crypto-racist (at best) elements, is allied to a populist hatred of a liberal political establishment out of touch with the common-sense morality of the 'man in the street'.

In Ukip's case, it is clear that most emphasis has historically been put on the question of Europe, to the point that Ukip has been portrayed (sometimes not unfairly) as a Eurosceptic, single-issue campaign. What is more alarming is that it has equally managed to harness a reactionary-populist fear of mass migration - a phenomenon easily linked up to the supposed tyranny of Brussels. A broader narrative of social decay is also at work - the sense that certain people have that London is now a 'foreign city' due its ethnic composition - and the apparent ascendancy of 'liberal values' on issues such as homosexuality is also at work.

If this sounds familiar, it is because it is an old, old concoction and, more to the point, is equally an adequate description of the output of the *Daily Mail*. The parallels, in fact, are striking. A slightly waggish poll by YouGov found that Ukip voters are twice as likely as the general population to believe the utterly discredited hypothesis that the MMR vaccine is linked to autism<sup>3</sup> - a scare promulgated most energetically by the *Mail* at its height and of a piece with its hysterical promotion of idiotic health scares in general. Across the board - Europe, immigration, gay marriage, hatred of a notional 'lefty elite' - Britain's most unhinged daily sells Ukip's politics to millions of people every morning.

If the *Mail* provides the programme, it is the rightwing media more generally that has promoted Ukip as a serious challenge to David Cameron from the right. Yes, there have been the amusing

stories about plant-pot impersonations, but it is clear - for example - that Rupert Murdoch's hatred of Cameron and his clique (not to say the European Union) is boundless. His papers have consistently touted the likes of Michael Gove and Boris Johnson - noted, if eccentric, figures on the Tory right - as potential challengers, and wish to ramp up the pressure from this direction.

## Threat to Tories

Direct media support, of course, is a fickle thing, and even the *Mail* will inevitably come out behind Cameron in 2015. Yet it would be fatuous to dismiss Ukip as a flash in the pan on this basis. It is clear that it draws on a real reservoir of support, on issues that are artificially kept on the daily agenda by the reactionary press. The BNP had *some* success in mobilising that support to get significant votes in the last decade. A group of semi-reformed ex-fascists, however, with a known record of Jew-baiting and stiff-arm salutes, was hardly likely to truly emerge as a mass force in a country where Winston Churchill is about to appear on the five-pound note. Farage and co are incontrovertibly British - and thus far more dangerous.

And, behind the inevitable spin coming out of Tory headquarters, it is clear that many at the heart of the party are rattled. Among the worries is Nadine Dorries, the rightwing Tory MP who famously described Cameron and George Osborne as "two arrogant, posh boys who don't know the price of milk" and was later stripped of the Tory whip for taking time out to go on *I'm a celebrity ... get me out of here!* Senior Tories are concerned that Dorries may defect to Ukip, giving them a voice in parliament - and, in the current atmosphere, that others might follow. Bob Spinks similarly defected in 2008, but lost his seat in 2010. Ukip is riding higher now, though, and Dorries may have more staying power.

Come the next election, of course, it is unlikely that Ukip will be sitting pretty on 25% of the vote, or that it will send scores of fresh-faced MPs to parliament. But that is not the issue. If Ukip can perform well enough, in the right constituencies, then the Tory vote could be hopelessly split where it most needs to hold up; it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that Ed Miliband will sail into a comfortable victory with an unprecedentedly small share of the vote - given the vagaries of 'first past the post', it is possible to imagine him doing so with less than 30%.

This is the broader story at work. In the last three decades, Britain has certainly remained a functioning two-party system so far as general elections go. Yet the times when a victorious party could claim close to an absolute majority of the popular vote are long gone.

Tony Blair's crushing 1997 victory was on 43.2% of the vote; Margaret Thatcher never obtained more than 44%. No party has breached 40% since 2001.

In the meantime, 'outsiders' have started to gain serious

traction. The Scottish National Party is now in government in Holyrood, and shows no signs of shrivelling to nothing (which is more than can be said for the Scottish Labour and Tory parties, the latter of which is already effectively dead). The Liberal Democrats may be in deep trouble *now*, but their place in a longer-term trend away from the *total* dominance of Labour and the Tories is nonetheless clear.

This, in a sense, is peculiar - Britain's deeply undemocratic electoral system almost *demands* two-party politics. Yet the decay has a real objective basis, in the progressive erosion of local government under Thatcher and her successors (devolution notwithstanding), in the judicialisation of politics in the same period, and the concomitant atrophy of the main parties at the base.

The Tories, indeed, are worried for *another* reason about the outcome of this election - councillors are your foot soldiers in national elections, the people who go out on the knocker and get your vote out. Yet this is being presented in the press as a timeless truism, which it certainly is not. Councillors are the parties' foot soldiers because *the parties have shed their activists*.

Along with the activists, increasingly the connection to 'ordinary people' and the mass of voters that previous leaderships could take for granted disappears. Politics in the Blair-Cameron mode is an utterly technocratic, soulless affair: boffins with PhDs in statistics and bourgeois sociology decide political strategy, and it is quite transparent to the objects of this discourse - the people whose political behaviour is being cynically calculated - that they are being had.

A party like Ukip is ideally placed - far more so than the Lib Dems ever were, in fact - to exploit this disaffection and alienation from the major bourgeois parties. It is written directly into the script. How terribly easy it is to portray Cameron, Ed Miliband and Nick Clegg - three products of the Westminster machine, so similar in speech and appearance that they may as well have been grown in the same vat in a research lab somewhere - as the foremost representatives of an aloof, arrogant elite!

Lukács observes that the ever more precise calculation of phenomena in society simply makes the eventual reversal into irrationality all the more catastrophic. Something like that may be going on today. The burst of support for this revanchist, loopy, far-right ideology is not some minor blip on the great Whig theory of history, but an inevitable backlash in a situation where the working class - thanks to the stupidity of the left - is unable to assert its own agenda. Whether it finds political expression, ultimately, in Ukip, or a nastier Tory Party, or something worse, is an open question - that 21st century Britain is fertile soil for such deeply reactionary views is undeniable ●

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## Notes

1. <http://news.sky.com/story/1086321/local-council-elections-ukip-make-big-gains>.
2. <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/dan-hodges/100215160/ukips-local-election-surge-whatever-happened-to-the-great-progressive-realignment>.
3. <https://twitter.com/MSmithsonPB/status/325849726241083392/photo/1>.



Nigel Farage: on a high



## EUROPE



Constructing an alternative

# Being pulled to the right

Ukip's anti-EU nationalism is mirrored by the CPB. Michael Copestake takes a look

The main success of the UK Independence Party, despite its results in last week's local elections, should perhaps not be measured in terms of votes, but rather in its ideological influence on wider society and political discourse. This ferociously nationalist, Thatcherite party threatens to pull not only the Tory Party, but the whole of national politics, to the right, totally nullifying the positive effect it may have in splitting the Conservative vote. However, the fact that so much of the allegedly 'internationalist', 'Marxist' left finds itself fundamentally in agreement with Ukip's programme in relation to the European Union is a cause for despair and a symptom of the opportunism that will only assist in the further ratcheting of society to the right.

This is most clear in the case of the *Morning Star* and its Communist Party of Britain. One gets the feeling that the national-roadist *Star* is embarrassed by the proximity of its own Europhobia to Ukip's. It is for that reason perhaps that these Stalinists would like to wish Ukip out of existence, as indicated by the headline above its April 30 editorial just two days before the elections: "Ukip's just a distraction". While the *Star* accepted the possibility that the Ukip vote may "cost the Tories hundreds of seats", it thought this would mainly come in the form of "assisting Labour". In the event Ukip enjoyed 139 gains, taking its total number of councillors to 147.

By contrast, its May 4 editorial, titled "Ukip success a wake-up call", demonstrates a rather different estimation - no longer should the party be regarded as "a distraction", it seems. The media is blamed for giving Ukip coverage "out of all proportion to its importance" and the *Star* complains: "Even negative coverage ... usually comes accompanied with a suggestion that

[Ukip] may be speaking for voters' real concerns on key issues". What an outrageous thought.

Or is it? The *Star* goes on: "Ukip does speak for ordinary voters on one key point - withdrawal from the EU." After all, "You don't have to be a fruitcake, lunatic or closet racist ... to be deeply alarmed by how the EU is ordering public-sector cuts right across Europe." Quite true, of course, but one's political response to this, and to the wider European question, has a lot to do with whether one is a nationalist, of the left or right variety, and whether or not one has a positive programme to confront capitalism as it is, in its most historically developed form, and which seeks to raise working class consciousness to that level.

But, like Ukip, the *Star* longs for a mythical past. It yearns for the time when capital was less integrated on a global scale and national social democratic parties (in a very historically specific context, ironically enough) could extract concessions from the 'national' capitalist class, thanks to a good, old-fashioned Keynesian economic regime. Nostalgia, in other words. A nostalgia that the *Morning Star* shares with voters who it says are "hungry for a return to the spirit of 1945 and Labour's creation of the NHS and the welfare state".

This sort of utopian pining for days gone by is entirely reactionary. Ukip's attitude to Europe is reactionary because it is a petty-bourgeois nationalist outfit, for whom political achievements can only be implemented by the nation-state and which is therefore bereft of any programme to take society - international, global society - forward. In its own way this is equally true of our CPBers (not to mention those on the revolutionary left who similarly call for a British withdrawal from the EU). Their entire political

project is fundamentally nationalist in character, based as it is upon a cross-class 'anti-monopoly alliance' to be operated on the level of the UK state. The EU appears to the national socialist only as an obstruction - something alien that must be shielded away from, not confronted and positively superseded.

The nostalgia of the right nationalist finds its mirror in the nostalgia of the left nationalist. The former is at least in part an expression of British post-colonial decline, looking back to a rose-tinted past when Britain was commander of its own empire and master of its own destiny. The latter wishes to return full political power to its 'own' (allegedly more democratic) capitalist state in order to facilitate the advance of the national working class. For them the class struggle is basically a confrontation between the national proletariat and the national bourgeoisie: look after the national struggle and the international struggle will take care of itself!

### Progressive nationalism?

It is basic Marxism that larger, more unified states are objectively progressive relative to smaller and fragmented states. This is because the formation of larger, more integrated state units is but itself the reflection of the development and integration of the world capitalist economy - as capitalist production supersedes non-capitalist production, big capital displaces small capital and each nation-state is ever more integrated into the economic life of every other nation-state. This same progressive historical process generates a global working class - as opposed to local atolls of workers isolated in a sea of non-proletarians, as was the case in tsarist Russia.

The more integrated capitalism becomes economically and politically,

the more developed is the international working class. This is a process that cannot be rolled back because it upsets nationalists, just as the existence of the nation-state, no less a "bosses' club" than the EU, cannot be wished away by those who might long for a return to pre-capitalist forms of society; or just as the domination of big capital cannot be abolished for the benefit of small capital, or machine production be replaced by handicraft production.

The call to withdraw from the EU represents a failure to face up to reality, and not just in the broad sense of historical development. Just as the growth and centralisation of industry comes at a price, it nonetheless brings into being the international working class, and thus creates the possibility of the eventual victory of communism. The acquisition by the EU of state forms is also multifaceted, with its positive and negative sides. Positive, because it raises the class struggle to the continental level and obliges us to forge a common identity with workers throughout Europe through *practical confrontation* with the EU. It allows us to bring our internationalist programme to the fore, making internationalism an integral, tangible part of the actual political practice and outlook of the European working class in its common actions. This is at the level of actually existing political necessity.

Imagine for a moment the political consequences of British withdrawal from the EU following a referendum. Ukip leader Nigel Farage will once again feature on many front pages, pint of British beer in hand; the Murdoch press will carry jingoistic front covers sticking a finger up to the Germans; small capital will rejoice that it is now free to ignore the various EU social charter regulations; and the Stalinite CPB will celebrate the return of power to the 'democratic' national bourgeoisie, thus taking us a further step down "Britain's road to socialism". At last we can start moving

towards an 'independent', 'socialist' Britain - as if the failure of the left to advance the cause of the working class can be laid at the door of that damned EU. In reality nationalist sentiment will have been strengthened and society will probably experience a sharp shift to the right.

Perhaps our national socialists should take the fragmentary process further and apply it to Britain itself. They could proclaim that the break-up of Britain would open up the way to a "socialist Scotland", as does the Scottish Socialist Party. If the UK state is weakened, that must strengthen us, surely? Sections of the British left seem to be thinking along the same lines as the Scottish left nationalists - after all, the Socialist Workers Party is to recommend a 'yes' vote in the referendum on Scottish independence (in contrast to the CPB British left nationalists, who will vote 'no').

This does not mean for one second that the *Weekly Worker* is soft on the EU. The problem with much of the left is that it is already *too soft* - abandoning the field without a fight in favour of its imagined nationalist or economic utopias. Instead our aim must be the energetic, coordinated pursuit of the class war across the EU by a united European working class. That is why we aim for the establishment of European-wide trade unions campaigning for the levelling up of working conditions and wages across the continent, and a Communist Party of the European Union fighting for a united Europe under the rule of the working class.

Far from demanding the withdrawal of Britain, we should demand democratisation of the EU in the interest of our class. That means, to start with, the abolition of the council of ministers, the concentration of political power in the EU parliament, not the Brussels bureaucracy, and the right to recall MEPs ●



## SYRIA

# Netanyahu attempts to provoke new confrontation

Over the weekend of May 4-5 Israel launched air raids against targets in Syria. **Yassamine Mather** and **Moshé Machover**, two members of the Hands Off the People of Iran steering committee, discuss the issues raised by this latest development

**YM:** The two Israeli air raids into Syrian territory have to be looked at in the context of the current Syrian civil war and realignment of regional powers. However, there is an Iranian dimension to all this. According to some Iranian military strategists, "Syria is the 35th province [of Iran] and a strategic province for us. If the enemy attacks us and wants to appropriate either Syria or Khuzestan [in southern Iran], the priority is that we keep Syria."<sup>1</sup>

According to ayatollah Ali Khamenei's most senior foreign policy adviser, Ali Akbar Velayati, "Syria has a very basic and key role in the region of promoting firm policies of resistance ... for this reason an attack on Syria would be considered an attack on Iran and Iran's allies."<sup>2</sup>

Until May 4-5, there could have been no doubt that, in the event of a military attack by US or Israeli forces, Iran's first line of defence would be a retaliation against Israel using Hezbollah, who in turn would rely on Syrian military support. The Israeli bombings have clearly changed the situation and weakened Iran's position considerably. What do you think? Am I right or is this a very Iran-centric analysis?

**MM:** You can regard these air raids as a narrow intervention in the Syria civil war, but this is not the way to understand their wider significance. If you look at it only in this way, it appears very paradoxical. If it was aimed at helping the forces opposed to president Bashar al-Assad, there was no logic to it.

First of all, it compromises the Syrian opposition, which is very heterogeneous. Some elements are genuine popular forces, others are supported from the outside by Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and indirectly by the US. Those sponsors don't mind collaborating with Israel, but the forces on the ground, even the forces supported by Qatar, the Islamists, are not happy being in a common front with Israel. In this respect, it gives Assad a means to denigrate the opposition and he has taken it. So this is not the context in which to understand the logic of these attacks.

I think that context is a wider regional one. Israel is doing everything it possibly can to widen the confrontation and there are several reasons for this. A couple of weeks ago there was a hoo-ha about weapons of mass destruction, specifically poison gas. The Israeli intelligence agency alleged that poison gas had been used, knowing that president Barack Obama had said this was a "red line" for intervention. Clearly the intention was to draw Obama into a more direct intervention in Syria: in other words, to widen the confrontation.

Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu is not working hand in hand with the Obama administration, but with some more rightwing forces in the US. The announcement about poison gas was very much welcomed by senator John McCain and various other rightwing elements. It turns out that Obama and his administration were not very keen to take up this infringement of the "red line". (Let me add there is no serious proof about the use of poison gas: it isn't clear



**Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei and his sponsor, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad**

how much was used and who actually used it. There are even reports that it was sections of the opposition who were responsible.)

This attempt to widen the conflict failed, so now Israel has embarked on a new adventure. Following the weekend attacks, all commentators are saying this was an attempt to stop Syria delivering missiles to Hezbollah. This may or may not be true. However, I don't think this is the whole answer. The key point is that Israel is trying to widen the confrontation. This is expressed well by a cartoon I saw, showing Israeli planes spouting petrol over the flames of the civil war.

Why? I think there are two parts to this. First, there is an attempt to prevent a settlement both in Syria and more generally between the US and Iran. There are various attempts at arriving at a *modus operandi* in both the limited Syria context and with Iran. There is a long history of this and I don't need to go into details about it. Some elements within the Obama administration would like to achieve a compromise and the same is true of elements of the Iranian regime, but the more hawkish circles in the US, with whom Netanyahu is allied, want to prevent it.

Israel wants to prevent it because for it an upgrading of relations between Iran and the US via a settlement of their conflict would mean that Israel loses its position as the unique and most reliable franchise-holder of US imperialism in the region. It would be a relative loss of status for Israel.

The other issue is more strategic. Netanyahu is doing everything he can to create a major conflagration in the region. I have conjectured several times that this is because he would like to use it to perpetrate massive ethnic cleansing in the West Bank and with a big war, win or lose (whether the Iranian regime were overthrown or not), that one

thing can be achieved. The chances are improved if the war is widened sufficiently and if it creates regional upheavals; under those conditions it offers an effective smokescreen for ethnic cleansing.

I think this is his plan and for this he would be ready to accept casualties on the Israeli side - a real possibility for which there are already various estimates. For this strategic aim of securing Israel's future as a Jewish ethnocracy, Netanyahu is prepared for sacrifices, as such a war would solve Zionism's historical dilemma, the so-called 'demographic peril'. Israel is holding occupied territories with a Palestinian population that is roughly the same size as the Israeli Hebrew population. Israel has done everything to prevent a Palestinian state; it wishes to annexe territories, but without a large Arab population. Logically, expelling a large part of the indigenous population in the West Bank would solve the demographic problem and a major regional conflict would present the opportunity. This is my interpretation: it is only a conjecture, but it relies on facts.

**YM:** Sections of the Iranian press are saying that Israel has accepted responsibility for, or at least hinted strongly that it was behind, the air raids. An unusual admission, but intended to provoke Iran into retaliation.

In fact, an Iranian retaliation seemed to be very likely and, let me stress, I am glad it did not materialise. It would have provided the perfect excuse for military attacks against Iran by the US and Israel. However, the fact that this did not happen is both a reflection of the weakness of the Iranian state and, indeed, an expression of the weakness of the supreme leader, Khamenei. There are two reasons for this: the terrible economic situation in Iran and the political chaos in the country.

Iran's currency continues in free fall. Sanctions, combined with economic mismanagement, have crippled the economy. The US department of energy estimates that Iran's oil exports fell by 27% from \$95 billion in 2011 to \$69 billion in 2012.<sup>3</sup> Inflation is estimated by Iran's central bank to be around 40% and there is a zero growth rate.<sup>4</sup>

The political situation is fraught. We are in the middle of a presidential election that was supposed to be a *fait accompli*. However, all predictions of the make-up of the future government are on hold, as the conflict within the regime widens. The supreme leader's relationship with his former protégé, president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, is at an all-time low. Rumours circulate that Ahmadinejad was arrested for seven hours last week. The supreme leader is accusing him of trying to delay the elections. Until a couple of weeks ago, everyone expected the nomination of Ahmadinejad's chosen successor, Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei, to be rejected by the Guardian Council, which would have allowed the uncontested election of a 'principlist' candidate loyal to the supreme leader.

This was before it became apparent that Ahmadinejad was not giving up power so easily. His determination to hold on has gone as far as threatening the very foundations of the regime. He has hinted at possession of tapes purporting to show electoral fraud in 2009 and the corruption of 'principlist' candidates. To add to the turmoil, in the last week before the deadline for registration of presidential candidates, two 'reformist' leaders, Mohammad Khatami and Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, issued statements indicating that one of them might stand.

Candidates have to register by May 11. Those putting forward their name will be vetted by the ultra-

conservative Guardian Council and no-one expects a 'reformist' to win. However, it is conceivable that the Israelis are concerned that the new Iranian president, whether a reformist, a 'principlist' or even Ahmadinejad's favoured candidate, will move the negotiations with the 'P5+1' countries forward. Even some of the supreme leader's close supporters have made conciliatory comments about the nuclear issue.

Sanctions are destroying the country and the expectation is that the presidential elections will not solve anything. One could say that Iran's Islamic Republic is politically and economically weak and the timing of the Israeli attacks against Syria cannot be a coincidence. And, of course, when it came to the threat of war, an important weapon in Iran's hand was Hezbollah and the potential danger it poses to Israel. The Syrian bombings allegedly destroyed deliveries of heavy artillery from Iran via Syria to Hezbollah. This is a major blow to the Islamic Republic of Iran, making it far more vulnerable to a serious attack by Israel or the United States.

**MM:** Let me stress that there has not been an official Israeli admission that it was responsible for the weekend's air raids. However, Israeli military experts and other commentators have made comments which are as good as an admission. Not that there was any doubt about it anyway.

There is a little twist to this. There were two attacks. There is good reason to believe that Israel got approval from the Obama administration for the first attack, which was relatively minor. The second was a much more powerful explosion - the ground around Damascus shook. I think Israel got the green light to attack - in fact, the announcements about the May 4 attack were first made by the US. But, as so often happens, it seems that in the second attack Israel exceeded the prior agreement.

**YM:** On the other hand, all the current and potential candidates in Iran's presidential election (reformists, 'principlists' or Ahmadinejad's favourite, Mashaei) are united on one issue: they all want to negotiate an end to the nuclear debacle. So the question of the timing of these bombings against Syria is very indicative.

**MM:** Yes this timing question is very important - why now? All bourgeois commentators are happy to look at the issues country by country - Israel versus Syria and Hezbollah, etc - but they cannot see that all the issues are linked. Israel's conflict with the Palestinians, with Iran and with Hezbollah - all are interconnected; and in that context the best explanation for the timing of the attacks on Syria is the forthcoming presidential election in Iran ●

## Notes

1. www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2013/02/130214\_nm\_tayeb\_syria\_basij.shtml.
2. www.reuters.com/article/2013/01/26/us-syria-crisis-iran-idUSBRE90P05620130126.
3. www.upi.com/Business\_News/Energy-Resources/2013/05/01/Irans-economy-declines-as-sanctions-bite/UPI-33591367443395/#ixzz2ScLFEa3.
4. www.uskowiainiran.com/2013/04/rate-of-economic-growth-in-iran-drops.html.



## REVIEW

# Imagination, inspiration and betrayal

Kevin Callahan **Demonstration culture: European socialism and the Second International, 1889-1914** Troubador Publishing, 2010, pp324, £24.95

At the end of the 19th century, the movement we now know as the Second International was starting to set the pace of European and indeed global politics, completely transforming the way that democracy, citizenship and activism were understood.

Against the then rife ideas of nationalism, imperialism and chauvinism, it was able to rally its “greatest asset”, its huge supporter base, around an image of “humanity, international fraternity and universal peace” in a way that was simply incomparable with anything that bourgeois politics has ever been able to offer (p292). Crucially, it was in a position to do so through what the historian, Lars T Lih, has described as socialist “campaignism”, providing the working class with a world outlook that transcended the workplace and sought to politicise all aspects of its life. The aim was to imbue the masses with an understanding of their “world-historic mission” - overthrowing the capitalist order and ushering in a genuinely human society.

What is remarkable about this book is its detailed description of the vast array of means and methods that were deployed in order to get this message across: the spectacle of international socialist congresses, (“parliaments of humanity”), mass demonstrations, rich political symbolism, metaphor and iconography; songs, banners and slogans, speaking tours, rituals of reception to welcome delegates to socialist congresses, the issuing of manifestoes and statements against injustice, the avidly read socialist press, workers’ sport, theatre, dance and much more. International congresses embodied far more than mere meetings of international socialist leaders: they were the “highest form of demonstration”, a “model and vision of the socialist future, wherein nationalities coexist in a peaceful international framework”. This was exemplified by the Japanese socialist, Sen Katayama, shaking hands with the father of Russian Marxism, Georgi Plekhanov, at the opening of the 1904 Amsterdam congress, during the Russo-Japanese war.

Callahan’s argument is that the newly formed parties of the International “created a mass-based political culture of demonstration that effectively displayed a united image of socialist solidarity in the public sphere, while promoting a sense of common purpose and fraternity amid great ideological, national and cultural diversity within its sections. As such, international socialism in the time of the Second International may best be defined as an inter-national performative movement of symbolic demonstration” (pxii).

For Callahan, this demonstration culture created a socialist “common language” (p294) that reconciled the goal of having a real impact in the public sphere with uniting the movement in the face of differing strategies and approaches. As such, “demonstration culture thus became itself a type of symbolic language, through which socialists communicated amongst themselves, with their followers and to external audiences” (p294).

### Delimitation

Instead of looking at the problems and shortcomings that brought about this movement’s capitulation before the challenge of World War I, Callahan actually turns the question around: how did the International become



Kevin Callahan

the biggest political movement in the world and one of the most important of recent world history? What held it together for so long in the face of the various differences it contained?

Callahan’s approach dovetails with that of the French socialist, Jean Longuet, whose semi-official history of the International divided it into two distinct periods: 1889-1900 and 1900-13. The former, Longuet stressed, was characterised by discord, controversy and disorder, with congress business “absorbed by the purely negative need of the delimitation of the boundaries of socialism” (p1). The latter period moved beyond this, and was characterised by a growing sense of unity, common purpose and progress.

This should serve as a reminder to those in our movement today who cling to the idea that the Second International represented an approach that failed to distinguish between “party and class”, that it was open to more or less all shades of opinion in the class itself and that it therefore had nothing whatsoever in common with Lenin’s Bolsheviks of 1917.<sup>1</sup> “Delimitation” was dominant - at least in the early years.

After all, there were actually *two* separate founding congresses in 1889 - a “possibilist” one and a “Marxist” one. In the 1890s there were constant fights with, and attempts to exclude, the anarchists, as well as (occasionally farcical) public fallouts over congress credentials, to which a young Rosa Luxemburg also fell victim! As Longuet puts it, the anarchists “sought to slide into the movement by denying the fundamental methods”, a struggle that, in many ways, was a “prolongation of the old struggle between Marxists and Bakuninists in the old International” (p1).

These issues were doubtless compounded by the chaos involved with language and translation. Yet they did reflect real problems: what was to be the political basis of the International and what was to be the relationship between the International and its sections? These difficulties refused to go away. Callahan notes some of the suggestions put forward in the early days: the Independent Labour Party’s Keir Hardie, for example, sought a typically bureaucratic solution of separate congresses or caucuses for the trade unions, the social democrats, the free communists and the anarchists respectively, each of which would then report back to the whole congress so that “friction could be avoided” and the International could “present a solid front to the enemy” (p8). The arch-revisionist, Eduard Bernstein, argued that the International should avoid theoretical issues, focus on practical politics and allow for a wide-ranging freedom of manoeuvre for individual sections in their application of the International’s politics. *Quelle surprise!* (p10).

Callahan argues that the International’s ability to more effectively deal with internal tensions from around 1900 onwards was attained through the “reform

of congress procedures (the use of commissions whose debates were held in private and the formation of the International Socialist Bureau to assist in convening congresses) the art of forging congress resolutions and the creation of a vigorous congress demonstration culture”, all of which helped to contain dissent “for the sake of projecting an image of socialist unity” (p3).

### Rubber resolutions

In the pursuit of such socialist unity, or at least the outward *appearance* of it, discussing and agreeing International congress resolutions became a type of intricate art form, in which key differences were diplomatically downplayed in the name of achieving unity and satisfying the prerogatives of the different national sections and political outlooks.

Nowhere was this clearer than in the case of Kautsky’s famous 1900 “rubber resolution”, which was supposed to address the question of ‘Millerandism’ - ie, whether socialists should join capitalist governments - but was so vague that the editorial board of *Iskra* called it the “caoutchouc [rubber] resolution”, not the “Kautsky resolution”. In summing up the discussion on such an issue of cardinal importance, the Belgian leader, Emil Vandervelde, was clear: the Kautsky resolution “should neither be envisioned as a condemnation of nor a tacit approbation of the conduct of the French socialists”. After all, the International was “not, moreover, a court of justice destined to condemn or to pronounce decrees of excommunication” (p9).

This was not the last “rubbery resolution” passed by the International either. Callahan notes that, while constantly achieving such “paper demonstration” unity can be seen as “significant feat” in and of itself, such an approach led to resolutions (and therefore politics) that were “vague and imprecise, often representing the lowest common denominator of all vested parties” (p293).

Yet for Callahan such ‘unity’ was a key aspect of demonstration culture in two respects: firstly in presenting the movement as a strong, united counter-order to the capitalist world (especially before the hordes of the world’s press and government spies who packed the congresses) and secondly because it instilled the movement’s supporters with a sense of cohesion and strength. Yet this obviously had deleterious implications for the International’s clarity and sense of purpose, with Callahan pointing out how potential divisions and discord could be submerged in the “seemingly ineluctable progress” (p140) represented by the International movement and the (ever more impressive) ritualised displays of its organisational muscle.

### ‘Inter-national’

This cannot have been helped by the fact that in many ways the International essentially remained a “loose association of autonomous working class parties” (pxviii), in which the relationship between its various bodies was never really formalised. It could be argued that, as the International grew, so did the disparity between the rhetoric of the socialist future and the possibility of actually bringing into being through a *common* international strategy.

In order to theorise the problems

associated with formulating a strategy across the different national sections, Callahan introduces the concept of “inter-nationality”, which he describes as “most accurately” capturing the “socialist self-identity” of the International, with the nation forming the “rudimentary basis” of the identity of most socialists at this time.

He details this by analysing the relationship between the French and German parties, both of which reckoned themselves to be key sections of the International. He details the rather defensive response of French socialists to the attack on German SPD members by nationalists at a joint congress in Lille and also provides an interesting table of French and German stereotypes/countertypes that occasionally surface in the heat of polemic (the Germans would see themselves as strong and organised, whereas the French were badly organised - in turn the French would counter that the German party was ineffectual and dogmatic, etc). Callahan then provides an interesting examination of the famous clash between the French leader, Jean Jaurès, and the German, August Bebel, at the 1904 Amsterdam congress, where a passionate exchange on the question of the republic<sup>2</sup> occasionally took the form of Jaurès and Bebel arguing over which form of government was worse: ‘our’ French Third Republic or ‘your’ kaiser empire.

Shedding light on some of these tensions with the concept of ‘inter-nationality’ is a useful exercise that helps us to understand the limits of the movement’s internationalism and how this was manifested in its “demonstration culture”. Although the former concept has obvious limitations (the different stereotypes of the parties described above were held on both sides of the border, after all), it highlights the relationship between the International’s various sections and how the International often went out of its way to avoid challenging the particular perspectives of its national sections when formulating policy.

That said, I disagree profoundly with the author’s conclusion that “Voting for war credits was not forfeiting the conviction of internationalism and certainly cannot be construed as a failure”. “Both assertions,” he continues, “rest on false premises”: “The latter defines internationalism

narrowly to mean that one is obligated to meet war with revolutionary agitation, a definition that the vast majority of socialists never espoused.” Further, “both assertions strongly imply that the International actually had the ability to prevent war” - “Leaders of the International were for the most part not naive about the amount of power their affiliated parties and trade unions held” (p300).

These statements are worth unpicking. Callahan is probably right to argue that the International allowed for its sections to define their own policies in a relatively autonomous fashion, but I do not think it is then possible to argue that voting for war credits can be in any way consistent with its “main preoccupation” (pxviii) from the outset: seeking to *oppose*, or *prevent*, a global conflict, however successful or unsuccessful this may have been. Moreover, this conclusion seems to be part and parcel of Callahan’s understanding of the International as a “possible forerunner to the United Nations” (!) (pxiv), which I think reveals a right reformist mindset.

Indeed, while it is true that the European movement was not in a position to stop the war *in 1914*, it could have been in such a position by 1916-18. Callahan’s narrative also overlooks another key issue here: namely that the turn to war by the ruling class should in no small part be seen as a response to the challenge represented by the European workers’ movement.

Even on its own terms, the August 4 war-credits vote in Germany, and the *Burgfrieden* (civil peace) policies of the unions agreed the day before, was a *break* with the International’s “internationalism”: instead of pursuing an undeviating opposition to capitalism, the workers’ movement effectively played its part in helping the war aims of the state ●

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### Notes

1. Most recently by Alex Callinicos - see B Lewis, ‘Haunted by the real Lenin’ *Weekly Worker* March 7.
2. I also would humbly suggest that the author has not quite got to grips with the actual *strategic* issue at hand (he calls it a “tactical” dispute) in the confrontation between Bebel and Jaurès: namely the significance of Marxist republicanism and the form that classical Marxism has generally envisaged for working class rule.

## Appeal from the editor

For the second week in succession there are no contributions to our legal appeal to report, so the total raised remains stuck at £3,380. Which is a little worrying, to say the least.

As readers will know, we have agreed a settlement of £1,000 plus costs following the publication of an inaccurate article last year (see ‘Unreserved apology’ *Weekly Worker* February 7). But the complainant’s solicitors do not seem to be in a hurry to inform us of the sum they wish to claim for their expenses. While that will be subject to negotiation, it will not be small.

If you have already contributed or perhaps are unable to afford to do so, perhaps you might consider taking our appeal to your union branch or other progressive

organisation. If you have a meeting coming up, you can download the draft motion and covering letter from our website. As I write, it is the third item on the revolving carousel near the top of our home page.

To make an individual donation, you have three options. The easiest is by bank transfer from your online bank account - our account number is 00744310 (sort code: 30-99-64). Secondly, you can click on the PayPal ‘Donate’ button at cpqb.org.uk. And finally we would be pleased to receive a cheque or postal order, made payable to ‘Weekly Worker’, at BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX. Please do not forget to let us know the purpose of the donation, especially if you have made a bank or PayPal transfer ●

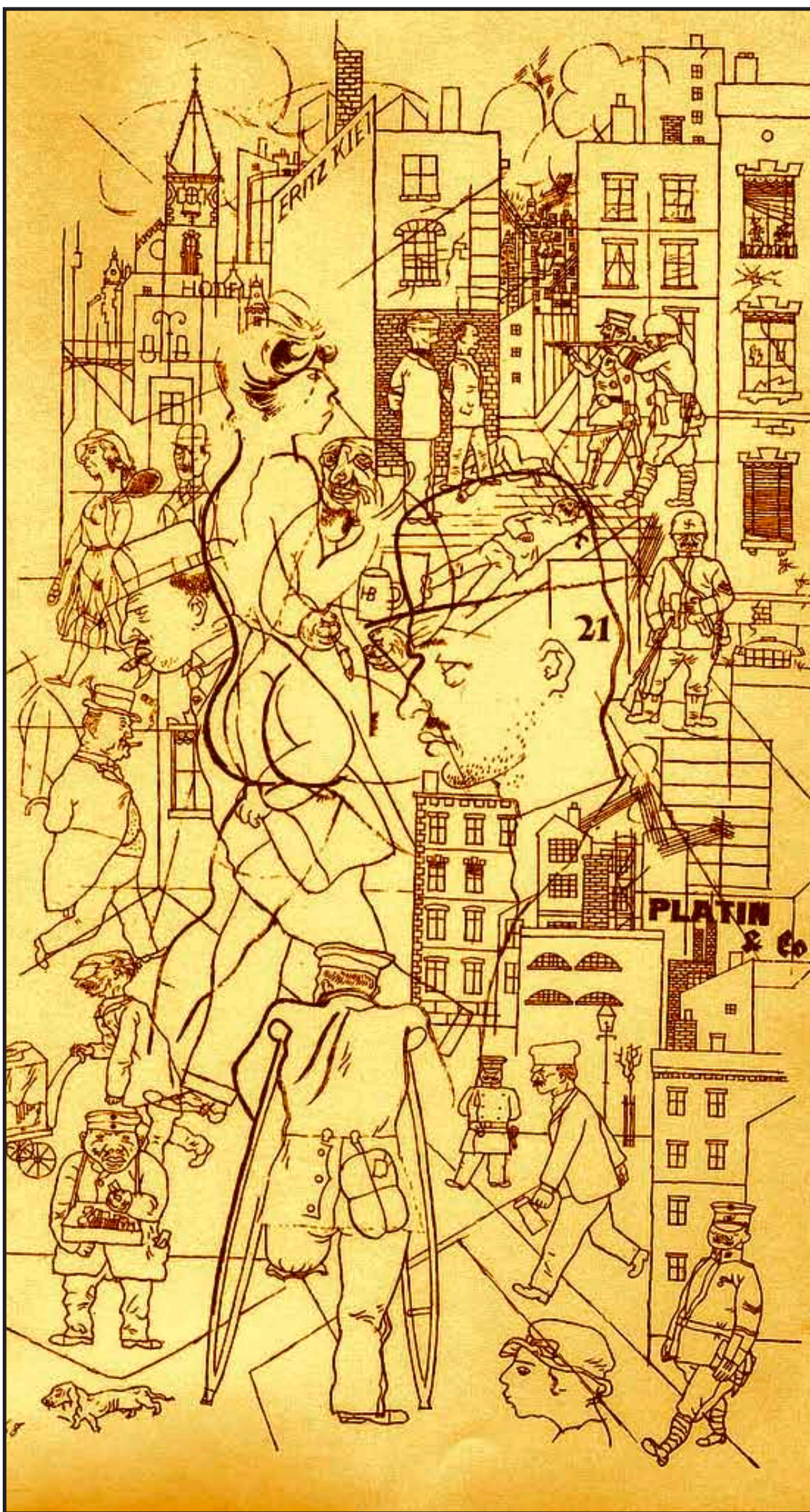
Peter Manson



## DEBATE

# A matter of Korsch

Far from making a fetish of the 'revolutionary moment', Karl Korsch's seminal *Marxism and philosophy* is focused on preparation for revolution, writes **Lawrence Parker**



Horror of war and defeat of revolution forced a rethink

In the 'Kautsky and the myths of Manchesterism' introduction to the recent *Karl Kautsky on colonialism* pamphlet, Mike Macnair writes: "In *The proletarian revolution and the renegade Kautsky*, Lenin referred casually to Kautsky's

'substitution of eclecticism and sophistry for dialectics. Kautsky is a past master at this sort of substitution'. Through this route the idea entered post-1918 communist discourse: notably in Trotsky, but also in philosophers of left communism [such

as] Korsch and the young Lukács..." He adds: "... the critique of Kautsky as an undialectical thinker is closely associated with a politics of fetishism of the revolutionary moment at the expense of the gradual phase of the preparation for revolution; hence with

fetishism of the mass strike and of 'direct action'; and with a voluntarist conception, in which the revolutionary will to action substitutes for the maturity of the objective political conditions for revolution."<sup>1</sup>

Macnair ties up the inexact formulation in his first quote by tying in the "young" (37 years young!) Lukács to *History and class consciousness* (1922) and Korsch to *Marxism and philosophy* (1923).

As I have expressed previously, *History and class consciousness* cannot be strictly associated with the voluntarist theory of the mass strike, as this work showed a clear movement away from such conceptions toward what I call the baroque theory of 'Leninism', underpinned by a motion into state ideological representation (from which, nevertheless, useful concepts can, from time to time, be salvaged).<sup>2</sup> Some of this motion can be seen in the career of Korsch in the Comintern, and *Marxism and philosophy*, like *History and class consciousness*, cannot be considered as anything other than *transitional*.

## Lukács and Korsch

Of course, Macnair is not the first to attempt to weld together the works of Lukács and Korsch in the early 1920s. Korsch himself in an 'Afterword instead of a foreword' to *Marxism and philosophy* said: "So far as I have been able to establish, I am happily in fundamental agreement with the themes of the author [Lukács], which relate in many ways to the question raised in this work, if based on a broader philosophical foundation. In so far as there are still differences of opinion between us on particular issues of substance and method, I reserve a more comprehensive position for a later discussion."<sup>3</sup>

Years later, Lukács remarked that in the 1920s he, Korsch and Gramsci were attempting "in our different ways to come to grips with the problem of social necessity and the mechanistic interpretation of it that was the heritage of the Second International".<sup>4</sup> More famously (or infamously), Zinoviev ignorantly attacked Lukács and Korsch at the 5th Congress of the Comintern in 1924, as impudent 'professors', while Soviet philosopher Abram Deborin treated Korsch as a 'disciple' of Lukács.

My introduction to Lukács, Korsch and Franz Jakubowski (whose 1936 work, *Ideology and superstructure in historical materialism*, owed an obvious debt to Lukács and Korsch) came in the late 1980s from the Revolutionary Communist Party/*Living Marxism* group. These works were not introduced to us as adjuncts of mass strike/mass action theory, but rather as counterpoints to a post-war Marxism that had become ossified and wrapped around with dogma. The other thing notable about the RCP (compared with organisations such as the Socialist Workers Party and Workers Power, for example, which did hinge on mass strike/mass action theories) was the relative stress placed on ideology and the manner in which a relative lack of ideological preparation was seen to warp traditional far-left strategies, which made thinkers such as Korsch fairly obvious bedfellows. This stress was, of course, completely warped itself by being turned into the shibboleth of a dead-end sect and suggested that the RCP ultimately had many more things in common with other 'new left' advocates of

Lukács and Korsch than it would have admitted at the time.

With the exception of those from Lukács and Korsch themselves, none of these narratives involving the conjoining of these two thinkers have very much to recommend them. Yet, Lukács and Korsch in their early-to-mid-1920s modes, despite obvious differences and emphases, clearly belong together. This is not due to any of the discredited reasoning of the 'new left' or Macnair's latter-day critique (which essentially feed off each other into a circular logic); rather it is due to the concrete historical circumstances of the time: the failure of the post-war offensive against capitalism in countries such as Hungary and Germany; the collapse of ultra-leftism (at least in ideological terms); the search for an explanation for these twin failures; and the Comintern's shift toward the united front. Leftism and voluntarism had run into a brick wall and this pushed Lukács and Korsch into intellectual motion.

There is also a slightly later shift, related to the subsequent isolation of the Soviet Union, which is the rise of 'Leninism' as a state ideological construction, in which both Lukács and Korsch played some role in elaborating. It is this conjuncture and the resulting intellectual movement that should inform the debate around Lukács and Korsch in relation to their most enduring works, not abstract importations about the 'mass strike' and suchlike, which, in themselves, rely to some extent on the misunderstandings that the 'new left' of the 1960s and 1970s pasted upon this debate (I am taking it for granted that no-one will want to defend Zinoviev's amateur dramatics of 1924).

Korsch's early years in the KPD (he joined with the majority faction of the USPD in 1920 when that organisation split) were marked by his espousal of what can be best characterised as council communism, tinged with anarcho-syndicalism. But what is interesting about his writings of this period is that Korsch is clearly seeking a route out of this problematic towards a more directly political theory. Thus, for example, in 'Labour law for factory councils' (1922) he characterised such councils as "the most advanced outposts of the proletarian army ... as the real battlefields in an economic or social struggle", but reminded his readers that this at "the same time necessarily means a political struggle".<sup>5</sup>

Korsch was clearly looking away from factory councils as the ultimate source of political authority in the revolution and, far from glorifying this perspective with the tincture of the 'revolutionary moment', appeared to draw a set of gradualist political conclusions. "In the epoch politically characterised as the transitional period of the 'proletarian dictatorship', a proletarian constitution of labour, resting on the firm foundation of 'industrial democracy', and with it a real councils system, will, after long, difficult and ruthless struggles in the whole economy, and in all individual branches of the economy, and in every individual factory, be gradually realised by the state power placed at the service of the proletarian class."<sup>6</sup>

## Schematised

*Marxism and philosophy* can perhaps be best characterised as a brilliant and suggestive polemic on one hand,



# What we fight for

bolted onto a heavily schematised historical narrative. We should not draw upon *Marxism and philosophy*, for example, for any summary judgement on Second International Marxism; but, crucially, this does not directly impact on the *political conclusions* to be drawn from it, which are anchored in the conjuncture of the early 1920s.

Korsch looks at the problem of *Marxism and philosophy* through the lens of three broad historical periods, through which he sees Marxism travelling since its birth: “The first phase begins around 1843, and corresponds in the history of ideas to the *Critique of Hegel’s philosophy of right*. It ends with the revolution of 1848 - corresponding to the *Communist manifesto*. The second phase begins with the bloody suppression of the Parisian proletariat in the battle of June 1848 and the resultant crushing of all the working class’s organisations and dreams of emancipation ... The third phase extends from the start of this [20th] century to the present and into an indefinite future.”<sup>7</sup>

It was the second phase that impacted upon the “minimisation of philosophical problems by most Marxist theoreticians of the Second International”, and this “was only a *partial expression* of the loss of the practical, revolutionary character of the Marxist movement, which found its *general expression* in the simultaneous decay of the living principles of dialectical materialism in the vulgar Marxism of the epigones”.<sup>8</sup> Korsch uses the example of Franz Mehring’s rejection of “philosophic fantasies” to illustrate the “generally dominant position on all philosophical problems found among the prominent Marxist theoreticians of the Second International (1889-1914)”.<sup>9</sup> According to Korsch, this group “regarded concern with questions that were not even essentially philosophical in the narrower sense, but were only related to the general epistemological and methodological bases of Marxist theory, as at most an utter waste of time and effort”.<sup>10</sup>

Korsch sees this approach to philosophy as leaving open a dangerous flapping door for the practice of revolutionary politics. “The problem is ... how we should understand the abolition of philosophy, of which Marx and Engels spoke - mainly in the 1840s, but on many later occasions as well. *How* should this process be accomplished, or has it already been accomplished? By what actions? At what speed? And for whom? Should this abolition of philosophy be regarded as accomplished only for Marxists, or for the whole proletariat, or for the whole of humanity? Or should we see it (like the abolition of the state) as a very long and arduous revolutionary process which unfolds through the most diverse phases. If so, what is the relationship of Marxism to philosophy, so long as this arduous process has not yet attained its final goal, the abolition of philosophy?”<sup>11</sup>

Thus Korsch, rather than seeing philosophy as something that can be voluntarily wished away or destroyed by the ephemeral ‘revolutionary moment’, advocates a need for preparatory intellectual struggle in philosophy, in ideas, in ideology: “To evade a definite stand on these ideological problems of the transition can have disastrous political results in the period after the proletarian seizure of state power, because theoretical vagueness and disarray can seriously impede a prompt and energetic approach to problems that then arise in the ideological field.”<sup>12</sup> So the “higher ideologies of the art, religion and philosophy of bourgeois society” need to be “subjected to the revolutionary social criticism of scientific socialism, which embraces the whole of social reality”.<sup>13</sup> Korsch adds: “Just as political action is not

rendered unnecessary by the economic action of a revolutionary class, so intellectual action is not rendered unnecessary by either political or economic action.”<sup>14</sup>

The historical schema that underpins *Marxism and philosophy* relies on a set of very broad, and sometimes questionable, brush strokes. While there is a critique of theorists such as Mehring and Hilferding, his account relies too much on the assumptions about the Second International that have since become widely diffuse dogma on the revolutionary left. Kautsky is mentioned in passing on a few occasions, but *Marxism and philosophy* offers no clinching proof as to whether or not he is guilty of undialectical thought (Korsch could have done worse than look at the recent essays in the *Colonialism* pamphlet, which offer some concrete examples of a lapsed dialectic).

In a similar vein, Korsch is confused, like Lukács, as to the exact political physiognomy of the Bolsheviks in the Second International. He cannot be unaware of the solidarity between Lenin and Kautsky up to World War I, but he smuggles away the idea of a principled ‘centre’ as an illusion: “For some decades there had been an apparent crisis in the camp of the social democrat parties and trade unions of the Second International; this took the shape of a conflict between orthodox Marxism and revisionism. But with the emergence of different socialist tendencies over these new questions, it became clear that this apparent crisis was only a provisional and illusory version of a much deeper rift that ran through the orthodox Marxist front itself.”<sup>15</sup> With the onset of 1914, this “deeper rift” obviously became manifest, but there is clearly an attempt to ‘read back’ the splits around the war onto the earlier construction of the Second International centre, which Korsch implies was merely tactical. This has become a standard interpretation for wide sections of the contemporary revolutionary left.

While there is certainly room for a very intense scepticism towards Korsch’s reading of the Second International and key organisations such as the SPD, it must be added that he did isolate something of an empirical truth in relation to a tendency inside the SPD to incorporate alien class ideas into its work. For example, Mehring’s above-mentioned rejection of so-called Marxist “philosophical fantasies” led to his incorporation of Kant and Schiller into his aesthetic outlook.<sup>16</sup> In the words of Vernon Lidtke, Mehring was part of an SPD view of the world that failed to “develop a special set of socialist or Marxist aesthetic principles”, thus passing up “an opportunity to clarify their relationship to all of the arts”.<sup>17</sup>

On similar lines, Social Democratic cultural groups such as the Friends of Nature sometimes revolved around a cult of nature;<sup>18</sup> while Workers’ Gymnastic Clubs chose the “holy veneration” of nationalist and anti-Semite Friedrich Ludwig Jahn.<sup>19</sup> This ‘supplemental’ logic, that Marxism was apparently inoperable in certain societal spheres, was abroad in the SPD and, as an aside, makes the CPGB’s current fetish for the SPD’s cultural organisations something of a dubious preference for ‘mass cultural action’ over preparation for revolution (this can be the only conclusion from reading Lidtke’s careful analysis).

## Partyism

Unlike *History and class consciousness*, which is much more consciously *partyist* in its application, *Marxism and philosophy* has little to say on the party issue and the practical outcome for its programme of ideological struggle. However, it is also clear that it cannot be fitted into the mass action/mass strike schema

demanding by Mike Macnair.

Macnair talks about how a “politics of fetishism of the revolutionary moment” comes at the expense of “the gradual phase of the *preparation* for revolution”. As we have seen above, Korsch was distrustful of this voluntarist revolutionary movement: the abolition of philosophy was not something to be achieved all at once, but as part of an “arduous process”. To neglect ideology and the consequent struggle for ideas (ie, part of the assumptions from proponents of the mass action/mass strike) is an error to be guarded against. Korsch had seen the logic of ‘mass action’ minus preparatory politics unfold in Germany after World War I and it is that history that is informing his conclusions.

In an essay from the early 1920s, he argued: “Thus it is by no means to be traced back to purely external coincidences that in the enormously fateful months after November 1918, as the political power organisations of the bourgeoisie collapsed and nothing external stood in the way of the transition from capitalism to socialism, that great hour had nonetheless to slip by unseized because the *social-psychological* presuppositions for its utilisation were greatly lacking: a decisive *belief* in the immediate capacity for realisation of the socialistic economic system which could have carried the masses onward was nowhere to be found, nor was there a clear knowledge of the nature of the first steps to be carried out.”<sup>20</sup> Like Lukács, this conclusion is leading Korsch back to a partial reiteration of some of the conclusions of the Second International centre, albeit in an abstracted form and dressed up as something hostile to that tradition.

The more rounded political outlook of *Marxism and philosophy* had begun to impact upon Korsch’s political practice. Thus at the Leipzig conference of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) in January 1923, he criticised Maslow and Fischer for an undialectical use of the ‘workers’ government’ slogan, in that they were employing it as a pseudonym for the dictatorship of the proletariat; Korsch preferred the position of Brandler, who he thought was using the slogan as a means of preparation for struggle.<sup>21</sup>

However, this unity with the KPD’s right-centre was unpicked by the farcical episodes surrounding the KPD/SPD coalition workers’ governments in Saxony and Thuringen in October 1923 (Korsch served as justice minister in the latter), which rapidly collapsed when confronted by the Reichswehr. This had a number of outcomes for Korsch, not least a growing sectarianism towards the SPD and support for the KPD’s ‘left’ Maslow-Fischer leadership. Kellner sees Korsch’s adoption of ‘dogmatic Leninism’ as an outgrowth of this period. However, the seeds of some kind of partyism can actually be seen in *Marxism and philosophy*, but, as with Lukács (in *History and class consciousness* and *Lenin*, which are much stronger political documents than anything Korsch ever produced), the form that this took in the mid-1920s, with the degeneration of the Russian Revolution and an ossified Comintern, had to be a baroque one.

It is thus an extreme irony of history that Korsch is remembered as a dissident on the receiving end of Zinoviev’s strictures at the Fifth Congress of the Comintern in July 1924, when he himself was indulging in exactly the same dead rituals of obeisance and control. Thus, in addressing what he saw as the key factors at the congress: “What is at issue here [referring to the agenda] is that the whole Comintern today can and must, after the shattering event of the death of its great founder and leader ... for the first time show that it is capable and willing to accept both theoretically and ideologically the legacy of Lenin.”<sup>22</sup> On similar lines, Korsch introduced Stalin’s *Lenin und der Leninismus* as “a study guide for the beginner in Leninism”.<sup>23</sup>

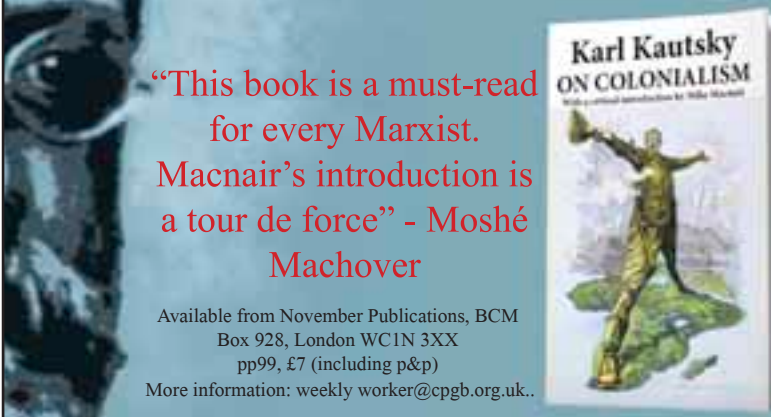
It was not until September 1925 at a party conference in Frankfurt that Korsch came out as an oppositionist - as against the new KPD leadership of Thaelmann and Dengler, who argued that KPD politics needed to be aligned with Soviet interests. This would put Korsch on a path that would eventually lead to him being expelled from the KPD in 1926 and espousing politics that could be characterised as ‘left communist’.

To some extent, both Lukács and Korsch have had narratives of tragedy written around them in the early to mid-1920s. However, this narrative is not the one espoused by Mike Macnair; it is simply not an issue of voluntarism, left communism, fetishising the revolutionary moment/mass action and so on. These issues have been imported from other historical junctures in their career to give instrumental sustenance to the attempt to rehabilitate the Second International centre.

No, the tragedy of these figures is that they had begun to think their way out of leftist dead ends and had begun to grow as *part of the Comintern*. But in the historical juncture of the mid-1920s, with the degeneration of the Soviet Union and the Comintern, embracing ‘partyism’ meant embracing the state ideological representations of ‘Leninism’ then in vogue ●

## Notes

1. M Macnair, ‘Kautsky and the myths of Manchesterism’ - introduction to K Kautsky *On colonialism* London 2013, pp10-11. Original emphasis unless stated.
2. L Parker, ‘Lukács reloaded’ *Weekly Worker* March 7.
3. Cited in F Halliday, ‘Karl Korsch: an introduction’ in K Korsch *Marxism and philosophy* London 1970, pp13-14.
4. ‘Interview with *New Left Review*’ in G Lukács *Record of a life* London 1983, p173.
5. Cited in P Goode *Karl Korsch: a study in western Marxism* London 1979, p46.
6. *Ibid* p59.
7. K Korsch *op cit* p51.
8. *Ibid* p61.
9. *Ibid* p31.
10. *Ibid*.
11. *Ibid* p47.
12. *Ibid* p63.
13. *Ibid* p84.
14. *Ibid*.
15. *Ibid* p49.
16. See G Lukács, “‘Tendency’ or partisanship?” in *Essays on realism* London 1980, pp33-34.
17. V Lidtke *The alternative culture: socialist labour in imperial Germany* Oxford 1985, p143.
18. *Ibid* p64.
19. *Ibid* p67.
20. K Korsch, ‘Fundamentals of socialisation’ in D Kellner *Karl Korsch: revolutionary theory* Texas 1977, p128.
21. P Goode *op cit* pp98-99.
22. Cited in *ibid* p103.
23. Cited in *ibid*.



“This book is a must-read for every Marxist. Macnair’s introduction is a tour de force” - Moshé Machover

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

■ There exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called ‘parties’ on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed ‘line’ are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.

■ Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members 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.

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

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# weekly Worker

## From saints to villains

# Fear and harassment as the norm

As Stuart Hall reminds us, writes **Eddie Ford**, bourgeois society and its institutions are far less safe for women and children than any far-left group

**A**llegations of “historic” child sex abuse against well known names are now almost a daily occurrence. The latest to stand accused are the 73-year-old Jimmy Tarbuck and the 69-year-old Eddy Shah. The former, a ‘light entertainer’ who has an OBE for services to show business and charity, has been questioned about a sexual assault on a “young boy” during the late 1970s. As for Shah, notorious for using Margaret Thatcher’s anti-union laws to defeat the print unions in 1983, he has been charged with six counts of rape involving an under-age girl during the 1990s.

Meaning that Tarbuck and Shah have joined the lengthening list of celebrities alleged to have committed child sexual abuse - Max Clifford, Jim Davidson, Freddie Star, Dave Lee Travis, Rolf Harris and Bill Roache. So far all have strenuously denied the accusations. Obviously, writers for the *Weekly Worker* - just like its readers - have no idea as to the guilt or innocence of those named above. But what we do know for sure is that another very famous celebrity connected to British showbiz, the late and now officially anathematised Jimmy Savile, was a sex abuser/offender on an industrial scale. Ever since the grim truth emerged, the not unreasonable - and growing - suspicion has been that Savile was not just an aberrant individual. Rather, he was in some sense the *product* - albeit an extreme one - of a much wider culture of abusive male behaviour and sexual exploitation that existed in the entertainment business and elsewhere.

## Familiar story

Appearing to confirm this view, recent headlines have been dominated by the 83-year-old Stuart Hall - another certified national treasure. For decades he has been a highly popular radio/television presenter and commentator. He is most famous, of course, for being the clownish compère of *It’s a Knockout* - the “Olympic Games with custard pies”. At its high point in the 1970s-80s, the show regularly attracted around 15 million and was near compulsory viewing for British people of a certain generation (including this journalist).

In 1999 various MPs signed a House of Commons motion “congratulating” Hall on 40 years in broadcasting. His colleague, Savile, was feted in the same way - Thatcher in 1981 described his work as “marvellous”. Indeed, Savile reportedly spent 11 consecutive new year’s eves at Chequers with the Thatcher family - and in 1984 he was accepted as a member of the Athenaeum, a gentlemen’s club in London’s Pall Mall, after being proposed by cardinal Basil Hume. In other words he was a fully accepted as part of establishment.

Stuart Hall mirrors Savile. From saint to villain. Described as “eccentric, erudite, egotistical” and a “distinctive personality who could balance light-entertainment buffoonery with sports and serious news”, he pleaded guilty to 14 charges of “indecently assaulting” 13 girls between 1967 and 1986, the

youngest being nine years old. Hall will be sentenced on June 17.

His story is depressingly familiar to anyone who followed the Savile scandal - two men allowed total licence to do almost as they pleased. As with Savile, the BBC bosses turned a blind eye to Hall’s behaviour - even though *everyone on the inside knew about it*. Showing their moral backbone, only *after* Hall had confessed did his former BBC colleagues start to line up and reveal what a “complete nuisance” he had been to women - he was “one of these people who had his hands all over you”, as one female worker recalled, saying she was now speaking up, as previously she had no idea that his “proclivities” included children.<sup>2</sup>

Hall would repeatedly invite women to an old medical room close to where the BBC filmed *Look north*. And he did not like to take no as an answer. Of course, we now hear, “it was common gossip that Stuart Hall used the room for assignations” - so says Gyles Brandreth, the former Tory MP and broadcaster. OK, admits Brandreth, the “atmosphere then was pretty sleazy”, but that is just how it was back then.

Similar stories emerge from others involved in the Manchester scene. Paul Jackson, BBC entertainment director in the 70s, believes that the “fame and the fans it brings with it” - coupled as it was in those days with a “suddenly sexualised society, led a lot of people to believe that anything goes”. But then again, he adds, it is “hopeless to try and apply today’s mores to a very different time”.

One of Hall’s victims recalls the trauma of being assaulted as she returned to the staff quarters of a hotel she was working at aged 17. The woman, who had just been selected as a cheerleader for an edition of *It’s a Knockout*, suddenly heard a voice behind her. “He grabbed hold of me and he started kissing me,” she told ITV News, and “then he tried to force himself on me”. She can “never, ever forget that voice” and over the

years every time she heard it on the television or radio, she thought: “How can you do it? How can you be like that in full view of everyone after everything you’ve done?”

## Abuse

Once again, the criminally complacent - and bumbling - BBC management was unable to keep up with events, eventually forced to do an embarrassing *volte-face* (bit of a BBC speciality these days). Initially, Lord Chris Patton, chairman of the BBC Trust, stated that Hall’s exploits would be examined as part of an existing review into the abuse carried out by Savile. However, it was then announced that there would be a “freestanding investigation” into Hall which would “feed” into the review. Patten said the corporation was also likely to face substantial compensation claims from at least six of Hall’s victims as a result of the “enormous suffering” inflicted on them.

Even more embarrassingly for the BBC, if not humiliatingly, on the very same day that Hall admitted his offences, another inquiry set up in the wake of the Savile scandal reported widespread allegations of bullying and a woefully inadequate complaints procedure - which just about says it all. The report, *Respect at work*, said there had been 37 complaints of sexual harassment at the corporation over the past six years. It highlighted the chronic problem of “known bullies”, reported by multiple members of staff in different parts of the BBC, who would verbally abuse people and leave them living in a “climate of anxiety and fear”.

Of course, communists have no interest in pursuing a narrow vendetta against the BBC - it is

hardly the only bourgeois institution where sexual abuse takes place, after all. Nor probably the worst offender, even after you leave out the Catholic church. The BBC, ultimately, is only *part* of the problem.

But the Hall revelations should really cause some on the left to rethink their absurd idea - eagerly endorsed by some radical feminists and mendacious, pro-imperialist, mainstream journalists - that the Socialist Workers Party has an ingrained ‘rape culture’ that makes it a *more* ‘unsafe space’ than the likes of the BBC, perhaps deserving to be no-platformed like the ‘Nazi’ British National Party.

Frankly, this is a crazy notion. Yes, the comrade Delta case was appallingly botched by the SWP’s leadership. For that the organisation needs to be severely criticised and that is what we in the *Weekly Worker*,

among others, have done. But the idea of ostracising the SWP or even driving it out of workers’ movement is a fundamental mistake that can only empower the trade union bureaucracy and all those with an anti-left agenda. The prime reason for the Delta debacle, if truth be told, was the SWP’s ingrained *bureaucratic* centralism - not its institutionalised ‘misogyny’ or nonsense like that (women formed a majority on the disputes committee that cleared comrade Delta, for instance). Its authoritarian culture privileged certain comrades, making them unaccountable and essentially beyond criticism.

But just think seriously for a moment about the reality of bourgeois society. Its institutions, whatever their formal ideology or ‘equal opportunities’ position may be, are massively more hierarchical - and sexist - than the SWP or any other far-left group. What do you think goes on *every day* in the offices of *The Guardian*, *The Sun*, the *Daily Mail*, etc? Or what about academia and the highly unequal power relationship between lecturer and student, where the pressure to get ‘good grades’ can lead to sexual exploitation? Nor should we forget the Liberal Democrats and the allegations of a groping Lord Rennard.

By any rational comparison, the SWP is a *much* ‘safer space’ for women ●

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## Notes

1. www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-22367849.
2. www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-22386373.



Stuart Hall: part of the establishment

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