

weekly worker

**SWP opposition springs
back to life: new blog, new
polemics, new information**

- Left Unity debate
- Platypus dissected
- Polish sectarianism
- Tory disarray

No 963 Thursday May 23 2013

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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What drives capital's
global crises?

LETTERS



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

Piss and wind

I've come to the conclusion that the CPGB has hired Eddie Ford as a human bomb detector, stomping his way through political minefields with his fingers in his ears.

Eddie on Churchill draws the conclusion that the public at large has seen the decision to stick Churchill on the new fivers as "unproblematic" ('A reactionary bigot', May 2). He then bounces to still greater heights of assumption and concludes that the working class has no collective memory, and the lack of protest indicates a lack of class-consciousness. He contrasts this, on the other hand, to the widespread outpouring of rage in traditional working class communities against the eulogising of Thatcher. Then, by way of an exception to prove his rule, he notices that in south Wales Churchill is still hated due to his actions and attitudes to the miners.

Of course, Eddie's conclusions are nonsense and based on nothing more than the view out of his bedroom window. Traditional working class communities across the length and breadth of Britain and Ireland *hate* Churchill, and there is a rich *collective memory* alive and well almost everywhere - though I can't speak for the south-east corner of England from where Eddie and the *Weekly Worker* take their world view. Bedtime stories for children growing up in the pit communities of the north, rather than 'Goldilocks and the three bears', tended to be 'Churchill and the 26 lockout', and we were weaned on things he allegedly said about us: "Drive them back down their holes like rats" and "We will make them eat grass". We were raised on jokes about him and Lady Astor and a whole folklore of tales abounded, most of them (probably) factually untrue, about his cruel and heartless actions against the miners, the class in general, soldiers and people around the world. Churchill, I can assure Eddie, is still regarded as a fiend quite as bad as Thatcher.

It is important to note that coal communities objected very strongly to various previous attempts to eulogise Churchill - I remember how, during attempts at a national fundraising drive to build a monument by popular subscription, collectors stopped trying to go door to door in the Tyneside and Wearside pit communities for fear of life and limb. This fiver question is a different matter. Firstly they *never* consult us on who we want on the currency, but it isn't a yardstick of class-consciousness or a sign of failing class memory.

However it's Eddie's May 16 article on global warming I really wish to take issue with. I'll confine myself to two points.

Firstly the assertion that CO₂ is the most damaging greenhouse gas. According to *Time* magazine, methane is one of the worst, if not *the worst*, source of greenhouse impacts. Miners do not produce this on any scale, although it is a by-product of coal mining, but mass and widespread global

meat production *does*. Slurry, made up of manure and urine, contains high levels of ammonia, which encourages the bacteria that produce acid to thrive. This directly contributes to acid rain. Slurry can be 100 times more polluting than untreated domestic sewage. Silage effluent is 200 times more polluting.

Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, there is the ongoing destruction of the earth's forests, mostly to make way for the animals. The destruction of the rain forests and areas of dense vegetation in ancient woods and tundra is producing a spiral of desertification and killing the lungs of the planet, taking away the ability of the earth to change the CO₂ into oxygen and maintain a balance of breathable air.

The single most important factor in the whole 'global warming' process is this feature: destruction of forests, desertification, animal meat production. We have yet to see anything like the clamour directed at this as is directed at coal mining. Odd when you consider that replanting the woodlands and stopping the ongoing destruction could be achieved in a very brief period if the will was there.

Next is transport, private cars, planes - not simply their emissions, but also the road building devastation which accompanies them. These too eat up the oxygen-producing vegetation of countryside and woodlands. Could this be addressed by a return to public transport, mass transit rail systems fuelled on clean power? The by-product of the clean-coal hydrogenation process is hydrogen - an inert gas which can be used to fuel mass public transit systems without pollution. Again it requires only the will.

Finally, yes, there is the burning of coal up the chimneys of mass-polluting coal power stations. Actually, the expansion of coal production is being led by the developing countries - China, India and countries like Vietnam. Not "growth for growth's sake", as Eddie says, but for basic features of life we have enjoyed in the west for over a century.

We as miners unions have fought against this waste of our labour and fuel for a century. Clean-coal power is possible and the development of these systems focus at present on carbon capture and storage (CCS) plants. As I never tire of preaching, it isn't the mining of coal which is the problem, but the method used to extract power from it. We already have, and have had for some time, the science and technology required to burn coal without CO₂ emissions. What is lacking is the political will and funding to develop them.

Ed Davies, the energy secretary, presiding over the suicidal game of 'principle', insists that in the long run, with alternative forms of energy, it will all be cheaper. Indeed if what remains of British industry is closed and forced into economic exile abroad, where governments do not strangle them to death, there *will* be less pollution - *because there will be even less industry and more unemployment*.

Global warming and climate change can't be stopped: they are hard-wired into the universal system of which we are a tiny part. We can and should attempt to reach a global balance

for humanity, wealth and ecology, and develop the most effective ways of surviving, while minimising the inevitable impact we will have on the planet and our fellow, non-human occupants.

David Douglass
South Shields

Discussion

Ten people attended the introductory meeting of Milton Keynes Left Unity which took place on Tuesday May 21. In a town where we will, as one participant remarked, "be building from the base up" this was not a bad turnout for our first meeting.

Unfortunately I was the only current member of a revolutionary group at the meeting - the two members of the Socialist Workers Party and the Socialist Party in Milton Keynes did not attend, though a sympathiser of the latter did. There was one Labour Party member in attendance, as well as former members of the International Socialists, Militant, Respect and the Greens. One of the 10 was completely new to involvement in organised politics and keen to build an alternative to the establishment parties.

First on the agenda was a trailer for Ken Loach's film *The spirit of '45*, which we decided we would organise a showing of and use the event as an opportunity to kick-start a debate on what socialism is. After introductions we were encouraged to brainstorm ideas for activities and issues that we would like a left party to prioritise. Many of these were policy issues that any political party would have to form an opinion on. However, 'socialism', 'democracy', 'international solidarity' and 'equality' were amongst the final 10 issues we whittled it down to. Part of the idea is that our group will now go on to look at these issues in more detail.

However, a motion which I proposed seeking to provide a framework to do just this was rejected by the meeting with only two in favour. My motion highlighted the fact that the basis of Ken Loach's appeal which formed the basis of LU was a call for a discussion: "Let's discuss the formation of a new political party of the left to bring together those who wish to defend the welfare state and present an economic alternative to austerity." At LU's first national meeting I had opposed moving the date for a founding conference forward to November this year, as I felt it would be premature and cut short the period of discussion on important foundational issues. Yet this is the date that was agreed on by the national meeting and provides the time frame we must work to.

Considering this, I argued that if our local branch was going to be able to engage in a serious manner with the discussions leading up to a founding conference, then we would need to lay down a plan of how we do so. I proposed five discussion topics ('socialism', 'democracy in LU', 'internationalism', 'challenging oppression', and 'our relations with Labour and the left groups'), but emphasised that we could be flexible about how we implemented this discussion plan over the next five to six months before conference. In spite of this it was complained that the motion was too prescriptive.

However, it seemed that the main problem people had with my motion was that it stipulated that we host "open discussion meetings" and "seek to include a wide range of voices from across the left". It was argued that at this stage in LU's development, before we have established our own political platform, we should limit such a discussion process to those who have already committed themselves to LU and keep it "internal" for now.

By this point we were running out of time, so we were not able to fully explore our differences. But I was able

to counter that we needed to have a perspective that sought to draw more forces, both individuals and groups, into the discussion that Ken Loach called for. So far the ambiguity of keeping meetings "internal" in a group that has no established membership criteria has been reconciled locally by limiting them to those that support Ken's appeal - but by definition anyone who seeks to join the discussion is in accordance with the appeal. Groups such as the SWP have welcomed the appeal in spite of the fact that they are not supporting LU as an organisation. We should be going out of our way to get the SWP and other groups involved if LU is to do what it says on the tin. On a national level it is impossible to keep outsiders out of the discussions on the LU website, other blogs and social media. It seems a shame to do so at a local level where we could have constructive face-to-face discussions.

I was pleased that the idea of discussion was not completely lost, however, as the ex-Militant comrade made a proposal that all meetings should begin with a political discussion and that the next meeting of LU in Milton Keynes should tackle the first of my suggested topics: socialism. This was agreed. We elected a chairperson for the group and will elect a secretary at the next meeting. I was elected branch delegate to the LU national coordinating committee. We also agreed to organise street stalls to try to recruit more people to LU.

Dave Isaacson

Milton Keynes CPGB

Hacked off

Given the CPGB's obsession with the unity of the left, I would have thought that the initiative from the Alliance for Workers' Liberty would have been welcome, if only as the occasion to propose face-to-face discussions ('Pull the other one', May 16).

The AWL proposal is flawed; a transitional organisation to do what most of the left does anyway. Transitional to what? If the answer to that is known, there is no need for an intermediate form.

Paul Demarty offers two main reasons to reject the proposal out of hand. Firstly, the AWL have some contentious positions (eg, Libya). Secondly, the Socialist Workers Party and the Socialist Party (England and Wales) would not like it. This seems to imply that no movement is possible unless all and sundry can move at once.

I don't like AWL positions either, but I don't find those of the SWP (Syria, Islamists) any better. This has not prevented the CPGB from doing some serious foraging in the SWP milieu, while the *Weekly Worker* has been rather quiet on Syria.

Is the AWL proposal very far removed from what is under discussion in parts of Left Unity, where they already rub shoulders with the CPGB? So the response to it has more than a whiff of factional considerations.

In local discussions on Left Unity, I have put the view that the task ought not to be finding formulations - most likely the lowest common denominator - to bring the left together, but to define the objective interests of the working class. These cannot be confined to protests against cuts or pressing union hacks to lead us.

Mike Martin
Sheffield

Top-down?

I stumbled across a discussion of Tina Becker's article last week on the Left Unity website and I came across a lot of hostility toward the 'top-down' formulation. Something that I think was misunderstood. So I offered my own view on this, only to note that my comment has not been approved, even after submitting it a second time. This

might have been a technical glitch, but if it was suppressed I can only note how this isn't evolving in the right direction.

I call upon the Left Unity comrades to send in letters and articles of their own, to come to the Communist University in August and use these platforms to debate. Surely this is to be preferred to sniping on a blog.

I think this 'top-down' comment is being misunderstood, given the many 'allergic' responses to it on Left Unity. For that reason it probably requires more explanation (I have only seen this specific formulation once previously from the CPGB - in a short book from the 1990s titled *Problems of communist organisation*).

So, I'll give my take on it, hopefully a helpful one. The 'top-down' comment does *not* mean a cliquish organisation in the spirit of the Socialist Labour Party, Respect or the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, where all decisions are effectively made by a few self-assigned left-bureaucrats, behind closed doors.

Instead, the focus of the CPGB lies on programme. So, the 'top-down' formulation refers to this *programmatic* view. The *Draft programme* of the CPGB is intended to be a contribution to a programme-centric unity debate, although in the end, of course, the majority decides.

So, from this programme (whatever Left Unity is going to adopt), an organisation can then be built. This 'top-down' view of party-building is only a rather logical view. It is, after all, down to us communists to win the vast majority in society toward this programme, to make them accept the communist project of universal human liberation.

In contrast to this 'top-down' (more accurately, programme-centric) party-building would be a programmatic 'broad' organisation or no programme at all. Without a programme there is then no basis on which to build. So we see disillusionment grown, sectism played up again, as the comrades tend to fall back on the practices that they already knew in the lack of a common perspective. This is certainly a factor in all of the unity attempts in the past 15 years or so.

But I strongly agree with comrades here that such 'programme-centric unity' must be radically democratic. Only then can we achieve lasting unity. Only in a culture where the critics may freely organise to try and achieve a majority, only where a minority can *publicly* raise criticisms, can the collective develop and, more importantly, can it start to become a politically relevant factor in the daily lives of the working class.

Benjamin Hill
email

Transcend them

Mike Martin writes in defence of Trotsky's *Transitional programme* (Letters, May 17). But Trotsky wrote the programme in 1938 for a pre-revolutionary period, which he assumed was around the corner. The *Transitional programme* does not prepare us for the long historical slog we commit ourselves to when the working class is not yet prepared to take power. We cannot spend a historical epoch contemplating the dialectic while we wait like Buddhist monks for a new generation to overthrow capitalism.

The *Transitional programme* leaves out crucial issues which we have to face.

Firstly, what is revolutionary 'leadership'? Most Marxists interpret the word to mean they are an elite. Of course, most capitalists also think they are an 'elite', so that their methods of thought sometimes resemble each other.

Secondly, what is a revolutionary party? Lenin wrote in 1902 about the organisation of an underground party. The type of vertical, militarised

London Communist Forum

May '68 and its lessons

Saturday May 25, 12 noon

Lucas Arms, 245a Grays Inn Road, London WC1

Speaker: Mike Macnair, CPGB.

"The events of the year 1968 were not, except in a very limited sense, a 1905, a dress rehearsal for a coming 1917 revolution of similar shape (either globally or in Europe). Rather, they were the upshot of the policies and political dynamics of the cold war, and part of the causes of the turn of international capital away from these policies."

structure then required has little relevance to our situation now, though even now our legality under ‘democracy’ is tenuous.

Thirdly, what is the purpose of revolutionaries when there are no revolutions imminent? Often we see militants becoming trade union bureaucrats, running so-called ‘non-profits’, or developing parliamentary ambitions.

Trotsky did not anticipate the ‘crisis of leadership’ within the Trotskyist movement. It is clear now that many so-called ‘Trotskyists’ are in practice leftwing social democrats.

The *Transitional programme* needs to be updated to include the lessons of the class struggle since 1938, to include the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Chinese and Vietnamese revolutions, the lessons of Chile from 1973, including the workers’ *cordones industriales*, the lessons of the Oaxaca commune in Mexico. We do not need to throw out old revolutionary programmes - we need to transcend them and their methods of thought.

Earl Gilman
 email

Ukip mirror

On May 16 Ukip leader Nigel Farage was confronted by an angry group in Edinburgh. The demonstration had been part-organised by the Radical Independence Campaign (a group supporting Scottish independence). The BBC reported a spokesman for the RIC saying: “It is Ukip who are stoking division ... Everyone who opposes the politics of fear and division should unite against Ukip - whether you live in Scotland or England.” Liam O’Hare, the Radical Independence Edinburgh organiser, claimed in *The Guardian* that “The people who demonstrated yesterday were internationalist” (May 17).

This is hypocrisy, just as nationalism always is. The Radical Independence Campaign is arguing in favour of dividing workers in Scotland from workers in England. Ukip is arguing in favour of dividing workers in the United Kingdom from workers in the European Union. What is the difference?

Farage commented: “I have heard before that there are some parts of Scottish nationalism that are akin to fascism, but yesterday I saw that face to face.” No, Nigel, what you saw was a mirror image of your nationalism.

Jon D White
 SPGB

Pedantry

I found David Walters’ latest argument very strange indeed (Letters, May 16). I had originally responded to a comment, by Jack Conrad, that the USSR could not revolutionise the means of production. Actually, rereading that, I might have been over-harsh on Jack, because there is a difference between having already revolutionised the means of production, and an ability to continue doing so. However, my original point was that the USSR clearly *had* revolutionised the means of production, and in a fairly dramatic manner. I gave as evidence the difference between the defeat by Japan in 1905 and the victory over Japan in 1939; and between the inability of Russia to even provide basic weaponry to its troops in 1914 and its ability to produce advanced weaponry, including the best tanks in the world, on a massive scale, to defeat the Germans , in 1941.

David had responded by denying that this represented the kind of revolutionising of the means of production I claimed, because, he argued, it was really the United States that had provided the USSR with the basis of this response. But, the whole reason I had stated that the USSR had

massively defeated Japan “by 1941”, rather than simply saying in 1939, or even in 1945, which David now claims would have made as much sense, is precisely that the USSR had achieved this, using its own resources, *by 1941*: ie, before the US eventually joined the war! Indeed, the reason I made the point in that way was to highlight that, because it had defeated the Japanese on its eastern front in this way in 1939, it was able to draw large numbers of Siberian troops, prepared for winter warfare, into the defence of Moscow in 1941 - again *before* the US had joined the war at the end of that year.

So, it is simply not tenable for David to claim that these victories, which were decisive, were down to the US, rather than to the USSR. In fact, by insisting on the point that the USSR had defeated Japan in 1939, rather than simply by 1941, David only weakens his case! It simply means that the USSR had sufficiently revolutionised its means of production to overwhelmingly defeat Japan in 1939 rather than by 1941! How David thinks his pedantry on this point helps his case eludes me.

David, then claims that I said that Japan had decided, on the basis of the huge industrialisation in the USSR, that it would be easier to take on the US. I said no such thing. I said that it was the decisive defeat at Khalkin Gol that led Japan to that decision, and a look at the discussions of the Japanese imperial general staff demonstrates that. Before the defeat, the Japanese Northern Strike Group, backed by the army, favoured seizing Siberia, up to Lake Baikal, for its resources. After the defeat, it was the Southern Strike Group that came into the ascendancy, supported by the navy, which favoured seizing the resources of south-east Asia. What made that “*easier*” was its proximity to Japan and distance from the US, along with the perceived weakness of European powers.

David also again tries to explain history by referring to events that occurred *after* those he’s trying to rationalise. So he tries to explain the Japanese decision on the basis of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. But again, by the time that was signed the Japanese had already gone down to their crushing defeat at Khalkin Gol! It is not that the Japanese had never wanted to invade the USSR, as David seems to now be suggesting, and that the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact now gave them the opportunity not to! They wanted to and got whooped.

David then says: “I never downplayed Russian/USSR industrialisation as the material basis for the defeat of the Japanese or the Germans.” But he then goes on to explain that the Japanese defeat was really nothing to do with the USSR’s

superior strength or technology, but Japanese weakness, and logistical disadvantages! He says nothing about the Soviet T-34 tank, which, when it appeared on the battlefield in 1941, was described by German tank commanders, von Kleist and Guderian, as “the deadliest tank in the world”. Others have described it as the “most effective, efficient and influential design of World War II”.

In fact, despite the crimes of Stalin that had led to the loss of 25% of the USSR’s industrial and agricultural production at the start of the war, these factories were physically moved across the country to begin production again. More T-34s were produced than any other armoured vehicle during the war, and the cost of doing so was halved by revolutionising their method of production - even though, with skilled workers having gone to fight, it had been taken over by new, mostly female, workers.

And, while David is quick to claim credit for the US in the USSR’s success in defeating Germany, he has said nothing about the fact that, right up to the US entering the war, firms like Ford and GM were busy churning out shed-loads of tanks and other military equipment from their German factories for the Nazis!

I have never denied that US aid played a significant role in defeating Germany. I do deny it played a part in the USSR’s defeat of either Japan or Germany in 1939 and 1941, which is indicative of the significant revolutionising of the means of production already by that time. That compares with the fate of Britain at that time, which was clearly defeated. In every encounter with Germany it had lost, often badly. Churchill himself had no faith in his army.

The main beneficiary of US involvement, indeed, was Britain, which was able to defeat Rommel in 1943, and thereby avoid disaster in losing north Africa and Suez, when the US began military operations. Despite Stalin’s repeated request for a second front, the US and UK essentially left the USSR to fight alone. When the US and UK did open operations in Europe, it was almost certainly as much based upon guarding against a Soviet roll-over of western Europe as anything else, just as, according to general McArthur, Japan surrendered because they feared being rolled over by the USSR, and favoured instead a US occupation.

Finally, none of the central planning of Gosplan, etc could have won the war, had it not been for the dramatic change in the attitude of Soviet workers, compared to that of Russian workers under the heel of the tsar.

Arthur Bough
 email

Fighting fund

Touching distance

With a week to go before the end this month’s fighting fund, we are within touching distance of our £1,500 target. Thanks to donations amounting to over £400 this week (£401 actually!), our total now stands at £1,104. Which means that we need the same amount again this coming week.

The bulk of the contributions over the last seven days came in the shape of four substantial standing orders - let me thank that old stalwart, SK, for his brilliant £230 and MM for his generous £75. And a new donor, EW, has given £25 - the same amount as DT.

We also received two rather more modest PayPal gifts - a fiver each from CA and RW. But I have to say that a total of £10 from 11,056 online readers last week is not a huge return. Finally comrade OG added the rather eccentric, but nonetheless welcome, sum of £36 to her £30 subscription.

I am confident that by this time next week we will have the £396 we still need - not to mention that March shortfall of £36 I have been going on about! ●

Robbie Rix

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

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 26, 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 5: ‘The strife between workman and machine’.

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

Radical Anthropology Group

Introduction to anthropology

Tuesday May 28, 6.15pm: ‘Greenham Common: a modern matriarchy’. Speaker: June Cleevly.

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.

May Day Manifesto

Thursday May 23, 6pm: Relaunch seminar, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1.

Organised by *Soundings*: www.soundings.org.uk.

Restore legal aid

Thursday May 23, 4.30pm: Protest, Central London County Court, 13-14 Park Crescent, London W1.

Organised by Prisoners Advice Service: www.prisonersadvice.org.uk.

Secret city

Saturday May 25, 2pm: Film screening, followed by Q&A with film-makers. Brighthelm Centre, North Road, Brighton. ‘The City of London and the economic crisis’.

Organised by Sussex Labour Representation Committee: www.sussexlrc.com.

Drone warfare

Saturday May 25, 1.30pm to 5.30pm: All Wales anti-drones conference. Wallace lecture theatre, main building, Cardiff University, Park Place, Cardiff. Free admission.

Organised by Abergavenny and Cardiff Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.cardiffpsc.weebly.com.

End Cuba blockade

Tuesday May 28, 6.30pm: Public meeting, 54 Grafton Way, London W1. Speaker: Dr Salim Lamrani.

Organised by Cuba Solidarity Campaign: www.cuba-solidarity.org.uk.

What future for Sheffield libraries?

Wednesday May 29, 6pm: Meeting, Library Theatre, Tudor Square, Sheffield S1.

Organised by Sheffield Library Campaign: sheffieldlibrariescampaign@gmail.com.

Hackney against welfare cuts

Wednesday May 29, 7.30pm: Anti-cuts meeting, the Round Chapel, Powerscroft Road, London E5.

Organised by Hackney Unison: www.hackneyunison.wordpress.com.

Free state education for all

Wednesday May 29, 7pm: Public meeting, Friends Meeting House, Ship Street, Brighton. Speakers include Christine Blower, NUT general secretary. £4 waged, £2 concessions.

Organised by Sussex Labour Representation Committee: www.sussexlrc.com.

Against border controls

Wednesday May 29, 6pm: UCU conference fringe meeting, Stanmer room, Brighthelm Centre, North Road, Brighton.

Organised by No-one is Illegal: www.noii.org.uk.

Left Unity Glasgow

Thursday May 30, 7.30pm: Launch rally, Kinning Park Centre, 40 Cornwall Street, Glasgow G41.

Organised by Left Unity: www.leftunity.org.

People’s Assembly

Launch rallies

Brighton: Thursday May 30, 7pm, Brighthelm Church and Community Centre, North Road, BN1.

Organised by the People’s Assembly: www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk.

North London: Thursday May 30, 7pm, the Twelve Pins, 263 Seven Sister’s Road, London N4.

Organised by the People’s Assembly: www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk.

ANC’s London recruits

Tuesday June 4, 7.30pm: Discussion, Bishopsgate Institute, 230 Bishopsgate, London EC2.

Organised by the Bishopsgate Institute: www.bishopsgate.org.uk.

Unite the Resistance

Birmingham: West Midlands conference, Wednesday June 5, 6pm. Priory Rooms, Bull Street, Birmingham B4.

Bristol: Regional anti-austerity conference, Saturday June 8, 12 noon to 4pm. City of Bristol College, Ashley Down Road, Bristol BS7. £3 waged, £1 unwaged.

Organised by Unite the Resistance: www.uniteresist.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.

SWP

Opposition springs back to life

The fightback must be principled and programmatically armed, urges Peter Manson

The *Weekly Worker* has previously pointed out that, however much the Socialist Workers Party central committee insists that the March 10 special conference had determined to “draw a line” under the bitter disputes and factional alignments of the recent past, things could never be the same again. There could be no return to ‘business as usual’, where the cadre simply respond to CC exhortations to get active and forget such key questions as the oppressive and totally undemocratic nature of the internal regime.

When well over 100 comrades announced their collective resignation from the SWP after the special conference, going on to form the International Socialist Network, the leadership did not even report this to the membership, let alone comment. A line had been drawn and that was that.

But the problems involved in behaving in such a way are obvious: a membership that has just emerged from the most intense period of internal debate in decades will not lightly comply with CC demands for unthinking activism. The fact that the leadership has not commented on the split does not mean it has not happened - just about every SWP member knew about it anyway, and the CC’s silence brought yet more discredit upon itself.

It was a mistake of the ISN comrades to walk out, just as it was a mistake of the opposition In Defence of Our Party faction (IDOP) to meekly close down after conference in accordance with SWP rules. But it was only a matter of time before forces within the opposition would reorganise and once more launch an open campaign for free speech, for open debate and for SWP democracy in defiance of the leadership.

And now it has happened. Last week a group of SWP comrades “who opposed the leadership’s handling of the crisis that enveloped the organisation” set up *The Fault Lines* blog.¹ The comrades write enthusiastically in their founding statement about “the experience of being part of the opposition that kept many of us as members”. They passionately recall how they were “energised by the comradely spirit, inspired by the debate and discussion, welcomed as people who could make valuable contributions, regardless of length of time spent in the party. It felt like an organisation we wanted to be part of.” Key questions were being “debated as if for the first time” and the whole SWP was “buzzing with creativity, energy



Alive and kicking

and political insight”.²

Why would anyone want to end such an experience? It should be the normal state of affairs for revolutionaries, for whom the constant regeneration of ideas informs practice and actually helps unite us. But not in the SWP, where communication between members across the organisation is only permitted - in a carefully controlled way - in a narrow, three-month slot before conference (the March 10 gathering tightened up the wording in the constitution to ensure that there is no longer any ambiguity about this crippling restriction, after it had been directly called into question by oppositionists campaigning for a special conference).

So the “space available for discussion and debate inevitably closed and we are left with a choice of ‘wait in silence’ or quietly leave the organisation. We intend to do neither.” That is the firm and principled declaration of *The Fault Lines* comrades. In a further statement a few days later they ask rhetorically: “Are we expected to keep quiet until October [the start of the next pre-conference period] and then, like a jack-in-a-box, spring up with fully formed arguments and perspectives?” Of course not. After all, the situation is urgent: “without quick, serious change, the SWP will no longer be any vehicle for working class struggle”.³

All communists, all revolutionary democrats will welcome this new development. But it is only a first step, however positive. As the comrades write, “we don’t necessarily agree in

totality how we go forwards, or our individual analysis of what went so badly wrong”. The aim now, therefore, is to “provide a space where comrades can explore and discuss the range of issues with which we are now faced”, including, significantly, “What should a revolutionary organisation look like?”

In fact there is a strong possibility that they do not agree *at all* on how to “go forwards”. What unites them is a common abhorrence of SWP internal practice, not a clear vision for a genuine Marxist party fighting for a genuine Marxist programme. In a sense that is natural - the SWP regime has been antithetical to the development of such a vision. But it will mean that collective excitement could give way to a sense of anticlimax, if the blog merely becomes the vehicle for numerous, inevitably eclectic, ideas and criticisms. There is an urgent need to bring people together around a coherent alternative programme - a fully fledged faction, in other words. But at the moment the nearest we get to a programmatic statement is: “We deeply value the International Socialist tradition”.

There are, it goes without saying, encouraging signs of new thinking. For example, ‘Comrade Layla’ writes: “I have come to the conclusion that a revolutionary party such as the SWP can no longer base itself on the mantra of state capitalism (as important as it is to me). Even when we have people who agree with us on state capitalism (Rees, German, etc), we split with them. So it burns down to a question of perspectives, revolutionary trust and the tenet of socialism from below.”⁴

Or ‘Senex’, who declares: “The goal is a mass party, [with] a decent leavening of the best comrades carrying into that organisation *something* of the IS tradition. The large majority of the potential members of the party are neither in the SWP right now, nor in any other organisation” (my emphasis).⁵

Theory and practice

In a separate development, a comrade associated with the IDOP opposition, SWP veteran and Latin American specialist Mike Gonzalez, has written a highly critical document that has been widely circulated on the internet.⁶ Comrade Gonzalez not only describes the SWP’s democratic failings, and the total absence of vigorous debate, but identifies one of the basic causes: the “growing gap between our theory and our practice”, in that “the experience of the real world does not consistently inform or

shape our theoretical development”.

He gives the example of the SWP’s attitude to the trade union movement and the need to resist austerity. He locates a “serious contradiction” that has arisen in the absence of any theoretical underpinning: “... in reality we appear often to be working with the bureaucracy at various levels in developing initiatives which are essentially top-down, while at the same time denouncing the trade union bureaucracy”. He refers to the SWP leadership’s “quite dangerous assumption” - that “the working class is essentially combative, but is constantly held back by the bureaucrats”. That, says comrade Gonzalez, was “the narrative on November 30 2011”. However, “When the predicted rise in the level of working class resistance did not appear, there was no explanation - only a sort of repetition of the same narrative in the hope that something would happen.”

Comrade Gonzalez talks of the “extraordinarily rich theoretical tradition on which the SWP stands” and in a sense that is true. The International Socialists were indeed characterised by the development of new ideas, however flawed.

Think of how the theory of state capitalism came about - through the rejection of the orthodox Trotskyite view that the USSR remained some kind of workers’ state. Of course, despite the fact that partisans of the “IS tradition” - whether loyalists or oppositionists - still swear by the theory, it always was totally unsatisfactory as an explanation of the Soviet Union, which bore no resemblance whatsoever to capitalism of any kind. In the USSR there was no real money, let alone anything resembling the law of value. Nevertheless, the development of this new theory was based on a simple insight - the Soviet Union was not an example of socialism or the rule of the bourgeoisie, but a totally new type of society.

Comrade Gonzalez states that the SWP’s theory “has not developed as it should in recent times” (some might think this is an understatement). He says that “The experience of argument and discussion which was once the feature of the party’s internal political life, and the source of its political development, has now all but disappeared.”

And he quotes Duncan Hallas: “The self-education of militants is impossible in an atmosphere of sterile orthodoxy. Self-reliance and confidence in one’s ideas are developed in the course of that genuine debate that takes place in an atmosphere where differences are freely and openly argued. The ‘monolithic party’ is a Stalinist concept. Uniformity and democracy are mutually incompatible.”

But monolithism and uniformity have been virtually synonymous with the SWP, as the leadership has set up a whole apparatus and adopted routine measures to suppress opposition and perpetuate its own hold over the membership - “to the extent that it is now defending its own interests against the interests of the party and the class”. Yet “In the history of our movement it has been common for leading committees to reflect internal debates - for factions, for example, to be represented there. Why not now?”

Comrade Gonzalez links the SWP’s bureaucratic-centralist regime to the absence of theoretical renewal and strategic thinking: “The hostile and confrontational attitude towards

party comrades *over time* has led to a deeply flawed strategy, or to be more accurate to an absence of strategy - a gap then filled by frenzied activity, and in particular paper-selling and campaigning around specifics.”

Programme

The *Weekly Worker* has pointed out on numerous occasions that the lack of any accountability on the part of the leadership is directly linked to the absence of an official programme.

But now another SWP veteran has revealed how, 40 years ago, a programme was in the final stages of development, but was suddenly ditched without explanation. Ian Birchall’s article, ‘The programme of the International Socialists 1972-1974’, recalls “the extensive discussion within IS” about the programme’s contents: “A substantial draft programme was prepared and discussed at several meetings of the national committee [equivalent of today’s CC]. A considerable amount of material debating the programme appeared in the monthly *Internal Bulletins* of this period.”

According to comrade Birchall, “The draft was taken to the 1973 conference, where it was remitted to the NC for further editing. This job was then given by the NC to a sub-committee consisting of [founder-leader Tony] Cliff, Duncan Hallas and myself. However, Cliff, without consulting the sub-committee, let alone the NC, passed it on to Roger Rosewell, who turned it into a pamphlet called *The struggle for workers power*.”

By the following year’s conference, the question of programme had been relegated in the IS list of priorities. The 1974 annual conference gave over just 30 minutes to discussing it and comrade Birchall recalls that it was adopted “more or less on the nod” - although he is not sure about this: “it may have been remitted again”. But “In any case it is my fairly clear recollection that nothing more was ever heard of the programme.”⁷

This story also points to the true nature of IS/SWP democracy even back then. How can a programme be adopted by conference and then quietly dropped? But since then things have deteriorated to such an extent that comrades considered oppositionists are met in their branches with insults and driven out of the organisation. And comrade Gonzalez is right: in the place of theory and strategy the leadership resorts to instrumentality - whatever might get the members active and (at least temporarily) enthused is used as a substitute.

The SWP has not been fit for purpose for a very long time. That is why the opposition must fight back with ideas. It must defy the CC’s ban on factions and the free exchange of ideas. It must champion a genuinely democratic culture, where questioning is regarded as normal, not akin to treachery ●

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Notes

1. <http://the-faultlines.blogspot.co.uk>.
2. http://the-faultlines.blogspot.co.uk/2013/05/the-fault-lines-statement_14.html.
3. <http://the-faultlines.blogspot.co.uk/2013/05/the-fault-lines-update.html>.
4. <http://the-faultlines.blogspot.co.uk/2013/05/a-reply-to-mike-gonzalez.html>.
5. <http://the-faultlines.blogspot.co.uk/2013/05/a-letter-to-those-who-are-passionate.html>.
6. ‘Who will teach the teachers?’, www.scribd.com/doc/141977026/Who-Will-Teach-the-Teachers-2?secret_password=2ecnhcy9zk0z2fgp8x8s.
7. <https://skydrive.live.com/view.aspx?resid=198B99A2FF3AAC581302&cid=198b99a2ff3aac58&app=Word&authkey=!ABhzvNS4DJ08JQ>.

Appeal from the editor

I am afraid that no new contributions have been received for our legal appeal this week. I suspect this could be linked to the fact that we still have not been able to inform readers as to the final amount we will have to shell out. Following the publication of an inaccurate article published last year, we were obliged to pay £1,000 damages plus expenses yet to be agreed (see ‘Unreserved apology’ *Weekly Worker* February 7).

The total raised now stands at £3,530, although the complainant’s solicitors are not rushing to inform us of the sum they wish to claim for their expenses. While that will be subject to negotiation, it will not

be trivial.

You can contribute to the appeal by sending a cheque or postal order, made payable to ‘Weekly Worker’, to BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX; by going to our website and using our PayPal facility; or by transferring your donation directly from your online bank account - our account number is 00744310 (sort code: 30-99-64). Please remember to specify the purpose of the donation. You can also ask your union branch or other progressive organisation to contribute. Download the draft motion and covering letter from the revolving carousel near the top of our home page.

Peter Manson

LEFT UNITY

Broad party illusions

Ben Lewis offers some critical thoughts on a recent International Socialist Network article

Having recently decamped from the Socialist Workers Party, the International Socialist Network splinter, which is commonly associated with China Miéville and Richard Seymour, is trying to navigate its way through the choppy waters of the British far left. Usefully, the group publishes brief reports of its meetings.

The ISN is now involved in the Left Unity project, with ISN member Tom Walker elected to its national coordinating group. It has become apparent from the minutes that, having rejected offers for discussions with the CPGB and the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, the ISN has "agreed in principle" that it "should look to forming a joint organisation in the future" with the liquidationist Anti-Capitalist Initiative and the soft-left Socialist Resistance. No "firm plans were made regarding either a timetable, or the nuts and bolts of a merger", however. Instead, "a number of joint initiatives were proposed, with an eye to having as many members as possible in all areas united in joint activity."

Yet what, other than this much-vaunted "joint activity", is going to be the actual political basis of such unity, and how will it impact upon LU? After all, despite LU's "anti-sectarian sectarian" take on cooperating with left groups, all three organisations are involved, Socialist Resistance particularly so. In this sense, a recent ISN article on left unity, written by comrades Paris Thompson and Tim Nelson, should be of interest to the movement as a whole.² It shows that, since they have left the SWP, the two comrades have been doing some thinking about the left, regroupment and unity.

Unsurprisingly, one aspect of this rethink concerns the thorny question of the revolutionary party. The comrades partly trace the ingrained sectarianism and stagnation of today's groups to objective factors, such as the low level of class struggle and the defeats of our movement over the last few decades. Yet they also highlight subjective shortcomings, such as the "underlying problem" of the "traditional Trotskyist model of organisation as a whole".

Partisans of the *Weekly Worker* will recognise and probably nod along with some of the points the comrades make about the "sectarianism, dogmatism and substitutionism" bound up with this model, and it is good to see that at least some of the arguments advanced by this paper are beginning to have an impact.

Yet there are also signs (more evident in some of the other ISN postings and comments) of the baby being thrown out with the SWP bathwater, such as the comrades' championing of an "inclusive, pluralistic party of the left" (rather than one based on commitment and dedication to a particular set of programmatic principles), a party "which is democratic and built from the bottom up" (rather than democratically built top-down as a 'superstructure' on the 'base' of a revolutionary programme).

The comrades rightly criticise those who make noises about the need for a mass socialist party, yet see "their own particular sect, which is the only true manifestation of the socialist tradition, as the mass socialist party in embryo". However, it is slightly disconcerting that the comrades chide the left for producing "abstract propaganda" (as if the comrades' article itself is not



"abstract propaganda" from the point of view of 99% of the population) and then refer to the "artificial divisions" and "petty arguments" on the left. After all, many arguments between left groups are not "petty" or "artificial", but reflect radically different conceptions of the class, democracy, socialism, etc. Overcoming these differences, or at least separating the wheat from the chaff, actually means ... having a serious argument and dialogue, instead of kidding ourselves that we are 'speaking to the masses' in (often dull) publications like *Socialist Worker* or *The Socialist*.

It shows how far the comrades have come from the 'We're the only game in town' perspectives of the SWP when they stress that "it's an objective necessity to realign the left" and, accordingly, that LU "should be treated with the seriousness it deserves".

Disappointment

Yet the article's title, 'Left Unity and the need for a broad party', is a big disappointment. Rather confusingly, it seems to flit back and forth between making the case for "revolutionary groups" to use LU as a site of struggle for the kind of revolutionary party we need, and arguing that a "broad party of the left", including reformists, would be a good thing in and of itself, with LU having "the potential to play the role of a broad, class-struggle party."

Indeed, while it is welcome that the comrades argue that people need to be won "to a revolutionary programme through argument", they seem to imply that a "broad party" could provide a "vehicle" for this. Indeed, at one point the authors seem to conflate a "broad party of the left" with one that "brings about the socialist transformation of society" (presumably with syndicalists, reformists and Labourites in its "broad" ranks). For the most part, then, the article is a defence of a broad-left, Syriza-esque realignment. "Of course", the comrades point out, there will be "divisions between those who wish to pursue a reformist agenda and those who are revolutionaries". (As though that would be a minor problem in bringing about the "socialist transformation of society").

Fundamentally, this evident tension between the two outlooks - a 'broad left' unity project and revolutionary realignment - seems to reflect a confusion about LU itself and the aims of its main motivating forces. Undeniably, for groups like Socialist Resistance, the objective is to establish a 'left of Labour' halfway-house party along the lines of Die Linke or Syriza that, to use an old Fourth International phrase, is not "programmatically delimited between reform and revolution".

But can there be a British Syriza

or Die Linke? Interestingly, the ISN comrades seem to allude to the 'lack of space' for such a project, asserting that the Labour Party continues to be a "capitalist workers' party": that is, "It continues to have the affiliation, and active participation, of much of the trade union movement. Its programme, and leadership, is capitalist." "Marxists", they add, therefore argue that the Labour Party is a "typical social democratic organisation".

So why, then, is there a need for another social democratic party - this one attempting to base itself on the "spirit of '45"? What is the point in such "realignment"? Surely one of the most decisive reasons behind the failure of "previous attempts" at left unity, such as the Socialist Alliance, etc, must be attributed to the 'revolutionary Marxist' groups, which were content to advance Labourite politics in such formations.

The comrades do not deal with these questions in any detail. Instead, they contend that such projects failed because they were dominated "by one particular organisation", or because they were "alliances of already existing far-left groups" that "tended, therefore, to paper over the problems that exist on the left, rather than solve them".

Yet "papering over" problems on the left - or, rather, seeking to avoid left groups like the plague - is precisely what the main string-pullers such as Andrew Burgin, Kate Hudson and SR appear to be doing. They think that the existing left can be circumvented and that masses of disillusioned Labourites and Labour voters can be immediately won over, as *disillusioned Labourites*. It is as if they are unwilling, or unable, to learn anything from the disasters of the Socialist Labour Party, SA, Respect, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, etc. You can't fight Labourism with Labourism, comrades!

Phantom right wing

So while communists could broadly agree with comrades Thompson and Nelson's assertion that "the role of revolutionary socialists is to articulate a clear strategy within [LU] that shows the necessity of taking it in a radical direction and confronting capital, as opposed to tailing Labour and the trade union bureaucracy", we cannot get around the fact that it is *precisely* some of these self-professed "revolutionary socialists", (such as SR, with whom the ISN is in talks about "revolutionary unity", remember) that are, to use Thompson's and Nelson's phrase, *fudging* "the distinction between reform and revolution, almost pretending to be reformists".

For comrade Terry Conway of SR, however, the LU project is presumably part of some 'transitional' master

plan, a kind of conveyor belt towards the 'genuine Marxism' of SR. After reassuring us that "members of far-left groups should be individually welcomed [into LU], but ways have to be found to protect the organisation and its members from the manipulation that has happened on previous occasions" (SR itself has *never* been manipulative, of course), she then gets rather upset about comrade Nick Wrack's characterisation of Kate Hudson's draft proposal for the LU platform as "a call for the formation of a social democratic party, which seeks to reform capitalism". According to comrade Conway, Nick "ignores the fact that Hudson's draft talks about 'redistributing wealth to the working class' and 'transforming our economy in the interests of the majority'".³

Yes, comrade, as if one of the things social democracy, either historically or today, cannot countenance are vague, motherhood and apple pie platitudes that do not commit it to anything concrete! Can you really see Ed Miliband *disagreeing* with statements like "transforming our economy in the interests of the majority"? Even David Cameron could happily spout such nonsense.

In this sense, comrades Thompson and Nelson are totally off the mark to argue that "revolutionaries should expect to be in a minority for the foreseeable future - as is the case in the most advanced sections of the working class in all periods except objectively revolutionary situations."

Let us be clear: within LU, as with previous projects, the 'revolutionary' left waters down the Marxist politics it purportedly upholds in order to accommodate a phantom right wing. This right wing then serves as the excuse to limit the new formation's world view to politics that the left knows, or should know, to be wholly inadequate. The implication is that revolutionary Marxism 'scares people off', whereas bullshitting them, apparently, does not.

Let us quote the words of comrade Conway, echoing those of John Rees in Respect: "I think that for Left Unity to blossom into its full potential it has to include people who may not agree with Ken [Loach] or me, or those who may not have thought through their approach to these questions. People have signed up who have not had any involvement in organised politics before, while others, with decades of Labour Party membership, have joined Left Unity because we are standing firm against austerity." We must simply hold a mirror up to such people. Comrade Conway continues: "I want to be in a political organisation with them, as well as with people who became politically active through Occupy, ... with those whose *primary*

identification is as environmentalists, as feminists, as campaigners for civil liberties, as well as those who have a more far-left analysis and practice" (emphasis added).

Labour(ism) of Sisyphus

In his report of the LU national meeting, comrade Nick Wrack draws an analogy between the Greek king, Sisyphus, and the far left's repeated attempts to create a new party: "Sisyphus was condemned by the gods to roll a huge boulder up a hill every day, only for it to roll back down when he neared the top, forcing him to begin again each sunrise. Our task is to push the boulder over the top; to build a party that is an integral part of the working class and which aims to assist the working class to become the ruling class."⁴

If we are serious, then our politics must begin with what we are fighting *for*: the struggle for working class rule and an end to capitalism. We cannot peddle any kind of nonsense in the hope that the revolution will one day *appear* to save us all. Parties are formed by the conscious intervention of historical agents around particular ideas and programmes. As such, the "question of revolution or reform" today is not an "abstract debate", but something real. Labourism and social democracy are outlooks alien to the working class movement: they do not serve as signposts on the way to revolutionary politics, but lead to a completely different place altogether.

Our starting point is straightforward: the ideas, organisation and consciousness that are *needed* in order for our class to organise into a party that can defeat the system. It seems paradoxical, but lasting and serious unity can only come about through clarity, programme, theory, honest debate and protracted struggle. This is the enduring lesson of all *partyist* initiatives worth mentioning in our history: the small left grouplets that formed the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, the groups that came together to establish German Social Democracy, and the organisations that founded our very own Communist Party in 1920. In different ways and at different times, such unifications provided these forces with the critical mass necessary to have a real impact on the class, as opposed to the posturing so widespread on today's left. Such processes were inexorably bound up with all kinds of controversies over the concrete and scientific meaning of particular terms, concepts and categories (too often dismissed as "abstract language" today).

For Marxists, such things are not "petty" or "abstract" "squabbles", but absolutely integral to moving out of the impasse we currently find ourselves in. As usual, we in the CPGB will make every effort to raise the level of the debates on the party we need: particularly now, this means fighting 'broad party' illusions ●

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Notes

1. <http://international-socialist-network.org/index.php/is-network/minutes/114-2013-05-13-steering-cttee-minutes>.
2. <http://international-socialist-network.org/index.php/ideas-and-arguments/organisation/left-unity/116-tim-nelson-and-paris-thompson-left-unity-and-the-need-for-a-broad-party>.
3. T Conway, 'Thoughts from the first national meeting of Left Unity': <http://socialistresistance.org/5214/thoughts-from-the-first-national-meeting-of-left-unity>.
4. N Wrack, 'Socialism - or something less? Let the debate begin': www.independentsocialist-network.org/?p=2148.

REVIEW

What drives capital

Guglielmo Carchedi **Behind the crisis: Marx's dialectics of value and knowledge** Haymarket Books, 2012, pp303, £20

This book's subtitle is a better guide to its contents than the main title: it is *primarily* about the philosophical underpinnings of Marx's critique of political economy, and only secondarily - in part of chapter two and in chapter three - about the immediate origins or explanation of the 'great crisis' of 2008-09 and the relative stagnation which has followed it in the central imperialist countries. This point is not meant as a criticism - or, rather, at most it is a criticism of its marketing. It is an important work which should be widely read, though not uncritically.

The book has four chapters. Chapter 1, 'Method', offers Carchedi's reading of the dialectical reasoning found (he argues) in Marx, as an *alternative* approach to Hegelian versions of Marx's dialectic. Chapter 2, 'Debates', concerns fundamental theoretical issues in political economy - especially the labour theory of value, 'abstract labour' and the tendency of the average rate of profit to fall. Chapter 3, 'Crises', is addressed to the general theory of crises, connected, Carchedi argues, to the tendency of the average rate of profit to fall; to the 'subprime debacle' or crisis of 2008-09; and to the question whether Keynesianism offers a way out. Chapter 4, 'Subjectivity', addresses the theory of knowledge, its production and - he argues - its necessary 'class content'. Along this road a critique of Hardt's and Negri's work is offered.

The structure of the book thus moves from the abstract (the dialectic) to the concrete (the crisis), to return to the abstract (the theory of knowledge and its class constitution), although there is a 'concrete' aspect in the last chapter in Carchedi's critique of fashionable ideas of the 'knowledge economy' and of Hardt and Negri. However, for the purpose of grasping the interconnections of the argument, it is probably most convenient to work in a different direction: from the treatment of the crisis and the theory of crises, to the class constitution of knowledge, and from there to the issues of the fundamentals of the critique of political economy and Carchedi's version of the dialectic. This review will be in two parts: this first part will cover the first two issues, the second will focus on Carchedi's interpretation of 'abstract labour' and on the dialectic.

Crisis and crises

Chapter three of *Behind the crisis* offers a 'falling rate of profit' (FRP) explanation of the tendency of capitalism to produce crises, and in particular of the present crisis. This general approach will be to some extent familiar to regular readers of this paper from Hillel Ticktin's critique of it published in 2011, from 2012 my own review of Paul Mattick's *Business as usual*, Nick Rogers' review of Andrew Kliman's *The failure of capitalist production* and later interview with Kliman.¹ Carchedi is closer to 'temporal single system interpretation' (TSSI) authors like Kliman than to Mattick, but unlike them places a heavy emphasis on dialectics.²

At its core, Carchedi's account of crisis holds that the falling average rate of profit in productive industry



A global system

leads to state stimulus by increasing the quantity of money, and movement of capital into unproductive sectors, especially financial speculation, leading in turn to a bubble which has to burst, because the growth in asset values is accompanied and, indeed, results from declining real purchasing power. The bursting of the bubble makes a new expansion possible if sufficient capital *as social relation* - meaning capital invested in productive industry - has been destroyed in the crash phase: this allows a fall in wages, in the prices of means of production, and in total debt, and bankruptcies allow both means of production to be acquired below value, and an increased market space for survivors (pp144-51, especially 150-51).

The bulk of chapter 3 is, however, not elaboration on this scheme, but critique of alternative views. It contains four sections. Section 1, 'Alternative explanations', criticises arguments that crises are to be explained by policy failures; underconsumptionism; the 'profit squeeze' argument (most associated, in this country, with the names of Andrew Glyn and Bob Sutcliffe). The 'disproportionality' account most associated with Hilferding is not discussed. Section 2, 'The cyclical movement', begins with a critique of the idea that crises are caused by *falling* productivity, before moving into the version of FRP which I have summarised in the last paragraph.

Section 3, 'The subprime debacle', gives a narrative of the crash of 2008-09 with a certain amount of explanation of the particular financial devices which triggered the form of the crash. This is a conventional element of books and articles on the crisis, but is a little dislocated from the rest of the discussion. In a sense, it is analogous to providing a detailed explanation of the functioning of the 'accommodation bills' and similar devices which were implicated in late 18th century and early 19th century crashes. The section does not include, as such, a *theorisation* of the relationship between the productive sectors - where the explanatory driver is found in Carchedi's account - and money and finance, or of the recurrent tendency to baroque financial elaborations, which is expressed in different ways in 'accommodation bills' around 1800 and in 'collateralised debt obligations' around 2000.

Section four, 'Either Marx or Keynes', is an argument for the ineffectiveness of Keynesian policies, which is also available online

elsewhere.³ The substance of the argument is that Keynesian policies at best *postpone* crisis in the very short term. The workers' movement should fight for policies which redistribute in favour of the working class and for state investment financed by takings from capital - not from the perspective of Keynesian claims, but on the basis of fighting for social relations based on "cooperation, equality and solidarity" (p181).

I made the point in my review of Mattick that there is a problem with FRP theories, in that they tend to be methodologically nationalist: ie, rely very heavily on single-country data, particularly US data. Hence, what may be shown is not a crisis caused - at a level standing immediately behind the financial crash - by an overall fall in the global average rate of profit, but one caused - at this level - by *relative US decline*. The same is true of Carchedi's account.

This problem may be partially assisted by Michael Roberts' 2012 paper, 'A world rate of profit',⁴ but it should be noted (a) that Roberts is considerably more cautious with 'pure' FRP reasoning than Kliman, Mattick or Carchedi, and (b) that even Roberts' 'world rate of profit' data are for the G7 countries (US, UK, France, Germany, Japan, Italy and Canada) plus the Brics (Brazil, Russia, India and China), not for the whole global economy. So a couple of very different examples - Amazon's EU profits (for tax reasons, supposedly all made in Luxembourg) and the real growth of mining in Australia - will both be out of the picture. The construction of Roberts' data sharply illustrates the difficulties pointed to by Ticktin in his critique of FRP theory.

The problem of the theoretical relation of the productive sector to money and finance is also relevant to the critique of Keynesian policies. Carchedi's argument that these merely *postpone* crisis rests on the supposition that debts must be repaid. Hence, stimulus policies can only be at the expense of capital through taxation, or at the expense of the working class. But Bill Jefferies, in a critique of an earlier article by Carchedi in *International Socialism*, sharply makes the point that printing money - at negligible cost to the issuing state - has the effect that non-floating debts denominated in that money are *partially defaulted*, with a result which is, characteristically, redistributive between states.⁵ At the end of the day, both the question of money and that of methodological nationalism are posed.

Relatedly, Carchedi in a footnote on p148 criticises Kliman for including unpaid debts in the destruction of value, because there is "only a transfer of value from the creditor to the debtor". But, of course, the normal case of unpaid debts is that the debtor is bankrupted and his/her/its goods sold at distress prices below current market level (though the effect may be to drive current market prices down) in the hope of paying a dividend of some sort - say, 5p in the pound - to the creditor. The monetary loss is *usually* a real loss - or, more exactly, the realisation of losses made earlier.

In fact, Carchedi's account at p151 of how the crisis creates the conditions for the next recovery includes these effects, which a Keynesian would argue can be produced by inflation as an alternative to full crash: falling real wages, acquisition of means of production at distress prices net of amortisation, and a lower debt burden. The account itself is in a certain sense paradoxical. If what drives the crisis is *simply* the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, one might expect that a reduction of the population of capitals, the money valuation of their assets and nominal debts, would be sufficient to promote an upturn *without* either falling wages or (Carchedi's second point in his list on p151) falling prices of the means of production due to technical innovations; and, conversely, that falling wages and technical innovations cutting the cost of machinery would not provide the basis for an upturn without disappearance of firms and devaluation of capital assets.

Debated

What is, or should be, visible from these picky queries is that Carchedi's interpretation of the crisis is a part of a much larger debate among Marxists, which involves both complex questions about the use of the data and equally difficult questions about how to read (or use) Marx. A recent example of the latter point is an article by German value-form theorist Michael Heinrich in the April 2013 edition of *Monthly Review*.⁶

Heinrich argues that we can see from Marx's manuscripts a series of distinct *projects* in his work on the critique of political economy, which each involved very substantial revisions of his ideas: the first project was the *Grundrisse*; the second the *Contribution to the critique of political economy* of 1859 and the manuscripts of 1861-63, intended to be in six books of which 'capital' would only be the first; the third project was 'Capital in four books', but even within the latter project, a first draft of 1863-65, a second draft in the form of *Capital* Vol 1, as published and manuscripts of 1867-71, and a *third* draft making substantial further changes represented by the second German and French editions of 1873 and 1875, and by manuscripts of 1874-81.

Within this framework, Heinrich argues that Marx sought a fully logical derivation of the idea that the tendency of the rate of profit to fall is the law - ie, the dominant tendency - and the 'counter-tendencies' are *merely* counter-tendencies, but failed to achieve it, and recognised in around 1865 that he had so failed. The *appearance* of a FRP theory of crisis in *Capital* Vol 3 resulted from Engels selecting the 1865 manuscript, rather

than a later one, as the basis of his edition, and further editorial changes which Engels made to add coherence of presentation to what were merely rough drafts as he found them. On the contrary, Heinrich argues, the manuscripts of the 1870s, and Marx's research activities in this period, show that he had come to recognise that it was not possible to theorise crisis simply on the basis of the FRP (even if this could be proved), but that an analysis of the credit system was a necessary precursor stage. Heinrich adds that, given the role of central banks, this, in turn, would require theorising the state in the economy.

I am not entirely persuaded by Heinrich's objections to the logical necessity of a *secular, long-run* tendency for the rate of profit to fall (which involve hypotheticals that are at most remote possibilities). But I bring his article in because it seems to me that he must be right that an account of the *cyclical return* of crisis in capitalism will necessarily involve theory of money, and hence of the credit system, and hence of the state. Carchedi's account, I think, moves too *immediately* from FRP in productive industry to the cyclical return of crisis.

Carchedi, however, has two answers to alternative views of Marxist crisis theory. The simpler, though treated second in the book, is one which played a central role in the debates on crisis theory in the 1970s. It is to argue that alternative views are to be rejected because they are opposed to the interest of the working class in the supersession of capitalism. The more complex, treated earlier in the book, are Carchedi's readings of fundamental categories in terms of his interpretation of Marx's dialectic.

Class and science

Chapter 4 of *Behind the crisis*, 'Subjectivity', begins (section 1) with a critique of the 'information society' and 'service society' ideas, which is very useful both in distinguishing the different kinds of 'information' and 'services' (productive, unproductive and, indeed, destructive of value as well as of use-values), and in flagging up the continued presence of an imperialist-organised global division of labour. Section 2, 'Individual knowledge', proceeds to criticise the unhelpful idea of a division between mental and manual labour ('manual' work involves thought; less significantly for ideology, mental work involves both the consumption of energy by the brain and - in most cases - activity by the hands). He replaces this distinction with a distinction between subjective mental transformations (changing ideas subjectively held, aka research or learning) and objective transformations (eg, building a car). The first of these two has to be distinguished between individual mental transformations - of individuals' ideas - and social mental transformations - of "the knowledge shared by the members of a social group" (p195).

In this context, Carchedi offers a polemic against Lenin's *Materialism and empirio-criticism* (MEC) as leading to a "theoretical cul-de-sac" inconsistent with modern neuroscience (pp200-02). There is a point of importance here. Carchedi is, of course, correct that mental phenomena

Capital's global crises?

are neither immaterial nor simple 'reflections' of exterior 'material' phenomena. The point that brain states are material had already been made by Dietzgen when Lenin was writing (and in a limited sense reaches back to Spinoza), so that it is not *dependent on* modern neuro-science. What Carchedi omits is the *political* context of *MEC*, which was a debate between the political voluntarism of the group round Bogdanov, Lunacharsky and others, and the 'Engels-Kautsky-Plekhanov' idea that "freedom is the recognition of necessity",⁷ in the sense that real choices are made more possible by the recognition of objective limits to these choices: eg, you can build road bridges, but not out of papier-mâché.

I addressed this issue in 2008 in the second part of my polemic against John Robinson, 'Against philosopher kings'. To repeat a point I made there, material forces in the real world vary in power. The power of the ideas in my head, or the words I write, is very limited. Using the methods of the sciences requires us to presuppose the real existence, or more exactly the recalcitrance, of the material world outside our heads. If I had the idea that I could walk on water, it would not prevent me getting wet. It is this fundamental point which Bogdanov and his co-thinkers in effect denied, and which Lenin defended in a muddled way in *MEC*.⁸

What is involved here is replacing a *deterministic*, causal approach, as in *MEC*, to the relation of ideas to the external 'objective' or 'material' world (the 'reflection theory') with an approach based on *limits or constraints* of the 'objective' or 'material' world on the power of ideas. The point bears on the issues of the foundations of the critique of political economy, and the dialectic, to be discussed later.

Towards the end of the section Carchedi begins the analysis of the next section, 'Social knowledge', with a formulation which is quite problematic: "each concrete individual belonging to a social group shares potentially a common view of reality which becomes realised as and through the knowledge of its *intellectual representative*" (p202, emphasis added). The problem is the idea of the "intellectual representative", which carries a deeply unhelpful burden of misleading overtones about the role of intellectuals (and, at that, *individual* intellectuals). "If all concrete individuals develop different forms of social knowledge, only some expand their knowledge into forms of knowledge that represent the interests of social groups ... in the case of the intellectual representatives, the knowledge produced is, as it were, the *representative knowledge*, the knowledge accepted by other members of that knowledge-group ..." (p204, original emphasis).

The struggle of social knowledges thus becomes an element, and, indeed, the central element, of the struggle of classes. A result is that "radically antagonistic movements (for example, women, racial, student, ecological) are indeed elements of labour as a class ... inasmuch as they express an anti-capitalist social content, one based on equality, cooperation and self-management" (p206).

A peculiar corollary of this approach is that "Women's oppression is the outcome of the successful attempt by capital to change the social content of the social relation between male and female workers", but "Similar considerations hold also

for those social relations which have pre-existed the capitalist system, like racism" (both at p207). In the concrete history, the oppression of women under capitalism perfectly clearly grows out of oppression of women in prior class societies, and modern racism is a novelty which emerges with *capitalist* imperialism in the 'age of discoveries'. Carchedi's account of class struggle in terms of the struggle over knowledges *inverts* this history.

Section 5, 'Labour's knowledge', identifies labour's class rationality with the "superseding tendency" (pp209-10) which appears in capitalist society episodically and partially, interpenetrated with pro-capitalist ideologies. Carchedi offers a brief critique of the 'analytical Marxist' approach of Erik Olin Wright, which he argues is actually Weberian, static and individualistic. He proceeds to use as an example the idea of the labour aristocracy, coming in the end to the (correct) conclusion that, while labour aristocracies *exist*, they remain a segment of the working class and the phenomenon is not consistently in capital's interests.

Section 6 then addresses briefly the production of knowledge as a form of productive labour within capital's terms (productive of surplus value). It is followed by section 7, 'The general intellect', which is addressed to criticising the theory of Italian workerism, or *operaismo*, and the more recent version of this school represented by Hardt and Negri.

Egalitarian future

With section 8, 'Science, technique and alien knowledge', we return to the core of the issue of the class determination of knowledge production, this time in relation to the physical sciences and the choices of technique made by capital with a view to controlling the working class.

Carchedi provides a series of examples of ways in which capital's control of choices about technology and research programmes, and the internalisation of capitalist ideas by scientists, produce pro-capitalist science and technology. Section 9, 'Trans-epochal and trans-class knowledge', attempts to rebut the argument that these forms of knowledge are an objection to class determination of knowledge by using examples such as the ontology of the number one and the medieval invention of the mechanical clock and its early modern development as affecting the concept of time. Carchedi does, nonetheless, recognise a class of knowledge "that has been conceived by mental labourers to be used both by capital and labour and to the advantage of both capital and labour"; this knowledge "contributes to reproduce capital and its rationality even when it is used by labour to resist capital's domination" (both p262, original emphases removed). This conception almost certainly overstates the coherence of "capital and its rationality".

Finally, section 10, 'Knowledge and transition', attempts to cash these arguments in a concept of the transition from capitalism to socialism, which takes its starting point in the rejection of both Lenin's arguments for the socialist use of 'Taylorism' (the assembly line or 'scientific management'), and the early Gramsci's argument for socialist compulsion at work (p267). Carchedi states that socialism, in contrast, is based on egalitarianism, cooperation and self-management: this requires

reorganisation of the material division of labour, so that "all positions (jobs) are 'balanced' in the specific sense that they all, while requiring different tasks, offer roughly the same possibility for self-realisation (including a balanced 'mix' between objective and mental labour)". He adds to this flexibility of jobs the facility for individuals to move between jobs, and "constant requalification of labour" (both p269).

In response to arguments that reducing specialisation will reduce productivity, he responds with the (not uncommon left) argument that increased self-realisation will increase productivity; in addition, socialism will do away with forms of capitalist waste (advertising, weapons production, crises/unemployment and speculation (pp269-70)). In response to Taylor's argument (much more widely maintained by pro-capitalist ideologues) that specialisation *increases* self-realisation, he responds that Taylor's example of a surgeon is inapposite, since most division-of-labour specialisation produces deskilled, repetitive tasks (p270). In response to the argument that even in an egalitarian society there will always be undesirable tasks, requiring someone to do them, even if on the basis of rotation, he responds with "balanced positions" (above), but also with "a type of social interaction, to begin with at the level of production, based on altruism, as opposed to the egoism inherent in the capitalist production-relations (p271).

The main body of the text curiously reaches a conclusion which includes a 'socialism in one country' and 'national roads' statement: "The specific features of this radically alternative system cannot be forecast. They will emerge from each country's specific history, including the history of its struggle to move from a capitalist society to an egalitarian one. However, just as there are general principles of capitalism which apply to all specific capitalist countries, so there are general principles which should apply to all egalitarian countries" (p271). I say 'curiously', because the logic of Carchedi's recognition of the international material division of labour in connection with the earlier discussions of the labour aristocracy and of 'information society' and similar ideas should be plainly inconsistent with such a perspective.

Critique

To begin at the end with the image of 'socialism' (CPGB usage is to call this society of cooperation and self-management 'communism', reserving 'socialism' for the period of transition which will immediately succeed capitalism). Carchedi is plainly right that the nature of communism is fundamentally different from capitalism: the 'social aim' is not the maximisation either of profit, as in capitalism, or of material output, but the maximisation of human development. He is also clearly right that this involves the supersession (*Aufhebung* in the language of Hegelian Marxism) of the individual specialisation of productive function, which is commonly called 'division of labour': a point made by Marx and Engels both in *The German ideology* early in their work and in the *Anti-Dühring* late in it.

Within this framework, he is probably mistaken to argue against the 'Taylorists' that self-realisation will increase productivity. This is an unnecessary wager, since a

society whose aim is to maximise human self-realisation will *not* have a necessary aim of maximising productivity, which is an aspect of the specific dynamics of *capitalism* and connected to capitalism's inability to cope with the metabolic relation of humanity and nature (ecological destruction in various forms). It is also an unnecessary wager to argue that increased altruism will remove the need for social compulsion in relation to disagreeable tasks: social compulsion (if only in the form of exclusion) is not absent from hunter-gatherer societies, and it is sufficient to make the point (as he does) that the *rotation* of employments makes disagreeable tasks no more than periodic chores.

Missing in the account is, strangely, the fact that the tendency of the productivity of labour to grow has already produced as its obverse a tendency towards large standing unemployment and underemployment: that is, relative growth of part-time work. Hence not only the rotation of employment and "constant requalification of labour" are posed, but also radical shortening of the working day or week to share out the necessary work - which also creates space for human social action and creativity outside the sphere of necessary work.

Carchedi is right to argue - not fully explicitly - that for the working class to be emancipated it needs to pursue these goals rather than goals of increased 'growth', 'efficiency' or whatever, which remain within the logic of capital. In this respect Carchedi's approach is massively superior not only to the advocates of a revival of Labourism or 1950s-60s 'social democracy', but also to all those concepts of socialism which leave untouched the 'division of labour' between the managers and the managed, technical specialisation or incentive structures to drive growth.

It is a paradox of his argument that the conception of the production of social knowledge precisely *does* instantiate, in a way which is not dependent on the capitalist context, a division of managers and managed in the form of the role of the "intellectual representative" of a class. The construction of a body of 'political ideas of a class' is necessarily a collective product, and one which involves *clashes* of ideas between individuals and groups, dialectic in its pre-Hegelian sense. In this context it is certainly true that individuals necessarily play, at particular points, leading roles; but this is by no means the same thing as acting as "intellectual representatives" of the class.

This issue leads into the more general problems of the idea of the necessary class content of knowledge. Carchedi's arguments here are substantially weaker and dependent on *examples*, which need not be examples of logical necessity, as opposed to *tendency* in a more limited sense. Or, perhaps, to put it another way, while these ideas are given necessary limits in chapter 1 (in relation to logical and empirical support for arguments) and chapter 4 (in relation to knowledge "that has been conceived by mental labourers to be used both by capital and labour and to the advantage of both capital and labour"), they are overstated in their application to disagreements on concrete questions of political economy in the rest of the book.

We will return to chapter 1 in the second part of this review. My point here is that there is a partial conflict

between two approaches in the book. Much of what Carchedi does is criticise theories on the ground of their logical coherence and predictive power (or lack thereof). But he also repeatedly treats as a 'trump' argument, at several points, that the consequence of adhering to a rival theory is to abolish the logical necessity of the supersession of capitalism, and thus to undermine the (potential) confidence of the working class in its own mission.

The problem is that we are unavoidably involved in arguing about what the interests of the working class *are*. Suppose, merely momentarily, for the sake of argument, that the marginalist crap was *true*: it would follow that workers' real objective interests would not include the collectivism and collective organisation to which - in marginalist eyes - workers are regrettably prone. Carchedi makes anti-capitalism so much the centre of workers' class interests that the class includes self-identified cross-class groups like women's and oppressed-race movements as long as they are anti-capitalist. This would just be wrong. Equally, suppose momentarily that Keynesian economics was *right*: it would be in the objective interests of the working class to pursue Keynesian solutions.

In the case of the debate between FRP and competing accounts of the tendency of capitalism to cyclical crisis, and of the larger secular tendency of capitalism to decline, what is at stake is not even whether the interests of the working class require collectivism, collective organisation, and an aim to replace capitalism. It is not even whether capitalism tends to decline: though it is certainly true that *some* opponents of FRP theory have used this opposition to argue that capitalism does not tend to decline, this is certainly not true of all such opponents: for example, Ticktin (cited earlier).

What is really in question in the debate over the drivers of crisis is the *form* of the decline of capitalism, and the strategic consequences for working class politics which follow from this form. But, once we see this, we see that this is *not* - as Carchedi tends to present it - a debate in which only one side can express the interests of the working class as a class. True, in the test of events, only one side in the debate - or, indeed, none - can be proved to be *right*. But that is not the same thing. Reducing it to a question of the class-representative character of ideas tends to produce merely sectarianism. The book would, I think, be more coherent without this type of argument ●

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Notes

1. Ticktin: *Weekly Worker* September 8 2011; Macnair: February 22 2012; Rogers: July 5 September 27 2012.
2. Carchedi's own point: p113, note 139.
3. Eg, in *ISJ* No136, autumn 2012: http://www.isj.org.uk/?id=849#136carchedi_1.
4. http://thenextrecession.files.wordpress.com/2012/07/roberts_michael-a_world_rate_of_profit.pdf.
5. www.permanentrevolution.net/entry/3375, responding to Carchedi and Choonara in *ISJ* No132, autumn 2011 (Carchedi at <http://www.isj.org.uk/index.php4?id=761&issue=132>). The *PR* entry does not identify the author, but I deduce that it is Bill Jefferies from the content and style; if this is mistaken, my apologies.
6. <http://monthlyreview.org/2013/04/01/crisis-theory-the-law-of-the-tendency-of-the-profit-rate-to-fall-and-marx-studies-in-the-1870s>.
7. An interesting take on this issue by Davie Maclean can be seen at www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/txt/davie07.htm.
8. *Weekly Worker* December 11 2008.

POLEMIC

Dissecting the Platypus

Where does “hosting the conversation” on the “death” of the left start and the actual opinions of the leadership begin? **Corey Ansel** looks at the enigma of the US-based Platypus Affiliated Society

In a battle consisting of little more than harsh language, the Platypus Affiliated Society has recently found itself hosting much more than a “conversation”. Coming off the organisation’s fifth international convention, recent accusations have been made against the group, primarily by Ben Campbell, the editor of *The North Star* website, regarding its alleged bureaucratic and cult-like nature.

This is certainly not the first time that the venomous claw of the Platypus has drawn blood from its political adversaries and, when the comments of Platypus president and lead pedagogue Chris Cutrone on the situation in Palestine resurfaced online, an assortment of comrades sought to repudiate the group for their alleged racism, social-imperialism and desire to “destroy the left”.

In a slightly ironic vein, it has been the “dark side of the internet”, as Alex Callinicos labelled it, that has been problematic for Platypus in recent weeks. Ben Campbell, briefly a member of the organisation, was portrayed on the Platypus members’ internal discussion list as a renegade when he abandoned ship after the convention in April. A mudslinging war would ensue, which led to Campbell spilling the entire internal discussions of the group onto Facebook in the interest of clearing his name, while also revealing many of the startling political positions taken by some of its leadership. Most of Platypus maintained a resolute silence, although other former members and supporters chipped in with their own contributions.

The darkness of the internet aside, this debate begs a multitude of questions. Platypus has been the centre of controversy before over issues such as the publication of articles from elements of the German ‘anti-Deutsch’ and blatant capitulations to American imperialism – not least an article from Stephen Grigat titled ‘To know the worst: anti-Semitism and the failure of the left on Iran’ in *The Platypus Review* No49.¹ These articles led to the accusations of racism and pro-imperialism. Thus, the question is raised: where does Platypus’s “hosting of the conversation” on the “death” of the left start and the actual opinions of leadership and members begin? Even the most seasoned veterans of leftwing sectology have failed to distinguish this incredibly blurred line.

The Platypus group, referred to by the infamous Spartacist League in its newspaper, *Workers Vanguard*, as a purveyor of “pseudo-Marxist, pro-imperialist, academic claptrap”, is very clear in its aims. Believing that what remains of the revolutionary left has utterly disintegrated, one of the group’s primary documents, titled ‘The Platypus synthesis’, states:

Because the left really is dead, we must first and foremost build intellectual milieus from scratch. As we have often said, we must “host the conversation” that would otherwise not happen, and we must demonstrate to others that the Platypus conversation can even happen at all. We have an extremely strong track record of events, providing a space in which intellectuals are able to sound stronger than they would otherwise have the opportunity to.²

‘Destroy the left’

Thus, Platypus does not appear to desire a makeover for the left. In truth, the suggestion that the group seeks to “destroy the left” made by Campbell is ironic – Cutrone and his students cannot



Strange on the outside, stranger on the inside

seek to destroy that which they do not believe exists. The piece continues with a description of the desire to “drain the swamp”, saying: “We believe we can impact and prevent the recruitment to sectarian ‘left’ groups on campuses and thus stop the demoralisation and depoliticisation that results from their activities. We have already begun to do so, and we need to continue this.”

But so what? The pseudo-Marxist left is responsible not just for recent crises such as the rape scandal in the Socialist Workers Party in Britain or the fetishisation by the Party for Socialism and Liberation in the United States of reactionary and murderous regimes, but also for the stupefaction of entire generations of potential revolutionaries. Thus, we should have no desire to kill the reformist left out of kindness.

Therein lies one of the deepest flaws in the recent ‘left unity’ initiatives, whether it is the project going by the same title, Left Unity, in Britain, Bhaskar Sunkara’s centre-left *Jacobin* magazine or *The North Star* that so vehemently promotes the regroupment of forces amongst the left. This perspective of Marxism as some kind of umbrella that encompasses not only alleged socialists, but also progressive-minded liberals and lifestyleists is an impediment to the radical redefining of Marxist theory as thoroughly revolutionary and for the violent overthrow of existing social, economic and political conditions. Just because we all hold hands does not mean that no-one has their fingers crossed.

This criticism does not necessarily make Platypus programmatically sound, however. The reaction to Cutrone’s comments “for internal consumption

only” on the Israel-Palestine conflict at the organisation’s fourth international convention, when he claimed that there is a rational kernel in the racist depiction of Palestinians, and “the only hope that the Palestinians have is in and through Israel”, is not the first time the Platypus president has seen intense flak launched in his direction. Cutrone came under attack for his statement in one of the online Platypus discussion groups when he stated, “I take no comfort whatsoever in the fact that the US and the political process it is fostering is being ‘resisted’ in Iraq. In this sense, I would be happy to see the US be ‘successful’ in Iraq (according to what it claims to be doing there).”³ Furthermore, he proclaims in an exchange with *Workers Vanguard* on the Iraq occupation: “What is ‘bad’ for the US is not necessarily good for ‘us’ – meaning socialist revolutionaries internationally – and might even be worse.”⁴

Beginning with the least startling point in Cutrone’s arguments, it is indeed necessary to clarify what political and even non-political resistance means for Marxists. It could be argued that the reactionary Tea Party in the United States is ‘resisting’ what it condemns as government encroachment into every day life. Golden Dawn in Greece is finding its own means of ‘resisting’ political austerity. Thus, the term ‘resistance’ does not inherently hold a revolutionary connotation. Cutrone is correct in this regard.

However, his own role does raise questions about the group that claims to have ‘no political line’. Platypus is notorious for its slogan, “The left is dead! Long live the left!” However, the fact

that the left may or may not be “dead” does not mean turning the clock back to 1848. In fact, it is Platypus’s thesis on historical regression that actually serves as a potentially ground-breaking theory on how the left has maintained itself within the sphere of the bourgeois right.

The problem with Cutrone’s argument is twofold. In his claim that a defeat of imperialism does not necessarily entail a positive outcome in regards to revolutionaries internationally, the Spartacist League had this to say:

No! The main enemy of the peoples of the world is the bellicose, demented, racist and rapacious US ruling class! That must be the starting point of any would-be revolutionary working within the belly of the imperialist beast. Whole regions of the world, not least the near east, are composed of artificial states created by the former colonial empires and their present imperialist heirs. The masses living in these artificial creations, overseen by the imperialists’ local lackeys, are now on the murderous receiving end of the imperialists’ bloodthirsty depredations.

To downplay the role of ‘one’s own’ imperialism is nothing short of a travesty. In order to reconstitute the left we should not seek to reinvent the wheel, for lack of a more appropriate cliché. If history has taught us anything, we can recall how quickly the world’s first workers’ state came under the gun of over a dozen imperialist countries during its infant stages. As if revolutionary socialists should not aim to combat bourgeois nationalist governments as opposed to the imperialist behemoths?

Learning lessons

The suggestion that the left is dead is in many ways contestable, but in the interest of going along with the logic of Platypus, we must understand what historical experience means. The left being “dead” in the 60s and 70s did not stop the wheels of history from turning, whether they were regressing or not. Merely the left has taken on the character of a near-Shakespearean tragedy does not mean that we cease to learn in our mourning. It was with good reason that VI Lenin said in his piece, ‘The defeat of one’s own government in the imperialist war’: “During a reactionary war a revolutionary class cannot but desire the defeat of its government.”⁵

Lenin continues:

Those who stand for the ‘neither victory nor defeat’ slogan are in fact on the side of the bourgeoisie and the opportunists, for they do not believe in the possibility of international revolutionary action by the working class against their own governments, and do not wish to help develop such action, which, though undoubtedly difficult, is the only task worthy of a proletarian, the only socialist task.

It is unlikely that Cutrone has selective memory loss. There were revolutionary organisations, despite all their flinches and falters, which attempted to uphold the programme of Leninism to the death. There are basic tenets of Marxist theory that have seen dirt shovelled over their heads. If the Platypus Affiliated Society seeks to continue to host a conversation on the death of the left, they must not allow themselves to start from scratch. Setting themselves to *the right* of even the reformist left has nothing in common with the clarification of Marxist theory.

But what of those seeking to

capitalise on this fiasco? It is troubling to see Ben Campbell from *The North Star* attempting to spread a letter in the interest of obtaining signatories to disengage with Platypus and the conversation it seeks to host. In a period where supposedly socialist and communist organisations act like awkward strangers attempting to ignore each other in a crowded elevator, Platypus’s attempt to cohere a broader discussion amongst elements of the left is commendable. This does not mean that Campbell’s political arguments are unfounded. In truth, his brief membership in Platypus is a living display of the failure to properly approach those seeking to be a part of the discussion.

Campbell emphasised the question of guruism on the left and within Platypus. This clearly shows the left’s failure to transmit political lessons to younger generations, a failure we in the present have inherited. If the 1960s left failed to learn the lessons of 1917, how can we in the present attempt to even learn the lessons of the former? On a side note, the Stalin school of falsification is a telling sign of how easily even supposed revolutionaries can be moulded to serve the forces of reaction.

Any radically minded person who follows its public fora can find benefits in the events that Platypus hosts. It is rare in the present to see a supporter of the US Revolutionary Communist Party shouting at a representative of the Communist Party of Great Britain over their differing positions on Libya and imperialism. To see a panel of supposed Marxists and academics asked questions that make them shift uncomfortably in their seats is an enthralling sight – possibly in the interest of clarifying terms and moving towards the regroupment of our forces. To observe the complacent leaders of ostensibly revolutionary groups or ‘parties of one’ claiming to have *the* Marxist perspective being asked questions they would not normally be asked in an academic or political setting is something that those of us living under the chorus of the ‘death of communism’ have never previously experienced.

However, those of us in the tradition of Marx’s ruthless critique cannot allow the reactionary nature of the present period to blind us. While the assortment of left unity projects and new political networks all have their role to play in reconstituting the Marxist left and a party that we can call our own, that does not mean every role played is necessarily positive.

Revolutionaries in the present cannot allow themselves to fall into the trap of thinking that holding this or that position in print or in argument at a protest attended by only a couple dozen people is the litmus test for Marxist theory. Learning the lessons of history will be that test.

It cannot be held against Platypus even if it does seek to destroy the present state of conditions amongst the left. To do this, Trotsky must be kept in mind if we seek to be forward moving: “For a successful solution of all these tasks, three conditions are required: a party; once more a party; again a party”⁶ ●

Notes

1. <http://platypus1917.org/2012/09/01/anti-semitism-and-failure-of-left-on-iran>.
2. <http://platypus1917.org/2009/06/14/the-platypus-synthesis-what-is-to-be-done>.
3. www.icl-fi.org/print/english/vw/874/iraq-let.html.
4. www.icl-fi.org/english/vw/908/ysp-platypus.html.
5. www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1915/jul/26.htm.
6. www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1931/spain/spain04.htm.

INTERVIEW

Anti-sectarianism, Polish style

As some of our British comrades in Left Unity contemplate sinking to unheard-of levels of blandness in the hope of attracting the tired, poor and huddled masses, such considerations do not seem to cross the minds of the Polish **Wladza Rad** group. “We are communists,” proclaims the ‘About’ section of its internet portal proudly, and the header features a lineage of thinkers programmatically ending with Leon Trotsky’s portrait.

In a country whose collective memory is still informed by the sordid atrocities of the Stalin era, the Gomulka government’s thinly veiled anti-Semitic witch-hunts and the police massacres of protesting workers, one has some explaining to do when publicly associating oneself with the hammer and the sickle. We commend *Wladza Rad* for taking on this difficult, but ultimately inevitable, task.

Perhaps it is for this reason that the comrades, who are organised in the Polish Party of Labour (PPP), feel a certain kinship to the *Weekly Worker* and its uncompromisingly communist polemicising against all odds. They certainly felt sympathetic enough to link to our website - their only one to a non-Polish political organisation - as well as publishing translations of some of our articles. With this in mind, we presume they are sufficiently steeled to take criticism.

Frankly, this author was surprised how much *Wladza Rad* comrades’ answers to our interview replicated the ‘anti-sectarian sectarianism’ that we have come to know in the UK. We understand that the PPP is a halfway house formation of a few hundred active members and home to social democrats, Marxists and so-called ‘national lefts’. The idea that such an organisation has real influence among the masses and that other Marxist groups (‘the sects’) can therefore be ignored sounds all too familiar to our ears.

Given history, we are sceptical whether an organisation which uses the Polish national colours to evoke the imagery of the Solidarność trade union - and, yes, this author is aware of the progressive elements that organisation initially contained - can be praised as uncritically as the *Wladza Rad* comrades are doing in our interview. Will such a formation equip the working class with internationalist consciousness? Will its demands for the nationalisation of certain industries perhaps lead the masses, step by step, towards a genuinely new, communist society? Would that not require an altogether different political programme?

I am not suggesting that Marxists should not participate in the PPP, but as is the case with all such formations, the struggle for communism needs to be carried into its ranks - by means of ruthless, open criticism of the right instead of subservient party patriotism.

Maciej Zurowski

What happened to you at the May Day demonstration in Warsaw?

On May Day, we joined a demonstration organised by the All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions - a social democratic trade union centre, originally formed in the 1980s by the then government as a counterweight to Solidarność - and the Alliance of the Democratic Left, the social democratic party that came into existence through the transformation of the former ‘communist’ party.

Last year we participated in a rally

and march organised by the APATU/ADL, and met with a positive reception and interest from ordinary participants. Photos of our banners appeared in the media, and a certain MP belonging to the Christian democratic Law and Justice Party reported this to the public prosecutor’s office, alleging that a crime had been committed by us and the organisers of the demonstration, who had “not reacted to the law being broken” - even though the hammer and sickle is not actually outlawed in Poland. The prosecutors declined to investigate the case.

When we arrived at this year’s demonstration, we noticed they were showing pictures from last year’s demonstration on a large outdoor screen, including some that featured our banners. So we unwrapped our banners and, once again, met with interest and sympathy from protesters. However, some 15 minutes later we were approached by stewards, who demanded take them down because “the organiser won’t have them here”. They also threatened to call the police if we did not comply. So we decided to pack them away. Since we could not march under our own banners, we left the demonstration.

About a mile away, the police stopped us and asked to see our papers. We wish to emphasise that none of the many police officers took any interest in us at the demonstration, nor did they do so as we were leaving.

Why did the organisers react so harshly?

We can only speculate why they reacted in this particular way. Conformism? Pressure from the right? Unfounded fear of prosecution? Wariness of being labelled Bolsheviks? A determination to prevent the party rank and file from fraternising with ‘subversives’? We do not know.

A couple of years ago, I read that the public display of communist symbols had been outlawed in Poland. Can you sell your literature openly?

In 2011, the constitutional tribunal accepted that a prior regulation which prohibited the display of materials “carrying fascist, communist or other totalitarian imagery” was, in fact, unconstitutional - partly because it was imprecise. Contrary to what the right might claim, communism is not banned in Poland. According to article 13 of the constitution, it is forbidden to invoke the “totalitarian *methods and operational practices* of Nazism, fascism and communism”, but not their respective ideologies.

Article 265 of the penal code bans the promotion of “fascist or other totalitarian systems”, but there is no definition anywhere as to what “other

systems” are considered “totalitarian”. **To what extent is this enforced against groups such as yours?** Every now and again, we receive a ranting email full of insults and swearing, saying we are all going to jail - but we continue to operate regardless. We do not distribute any physical literature because we think that internet propaganda is far more efficient, seeing as it has a wider reach and expenses are lower. But groups that do are not getting any trouble.

After 1989, no-one in Poland has ever been convicted for advocating communism. The post-Stalinist Communist Party of Poland continues to operate legally, the hammer and sickle being its officially registered symbol. It is true that the owner of the now defunct *Uncensored Left* internet portal, Michał Nowicki, was fined for “calling for the demolition of memorial sites”. He was prosecuted for agitating for the destruction of monuments to the anti-communist underground movement, the National Armed Forces - not for propagating communist views.

Surveys in former eastern bloc countries often reveal that considerable sections of the population share a certain nostalgia for the certainties of life under the old regime. Are positive reactions to your hammer and sickle imagery partly motivated by such sentiments?

It is possible that this is partly the case with older people. But we also receive positive reactions from people too young to remember the days of full employment and so on. In view of the crisis of capitalism, the impoverishment of working people and unemployment approaching 15%, sentiments for an anti-capitalist, anti-system character are increasingly common.

Polish Spartacists have a negative attitude towards the PPP, claiming instances of anti-Semitism and such. Could you comment on that?

Many organisations - for example, those financed by the German Rosa Luxemburg Foundation - have a negative attitude towards the Polish Party of Labour. These slurs are normally dishonest, or they give a warped account of the truth.

To give you a perfect example, the PPP was slandered for supposedly supporting Adolf Hitler’s state, because an image of him, titled ‘His state’, appeared on the front page of the *Union Herald* (*Kurier Związkowy*). Yet it would have been perfectly possible to find out what the title page was referring to by reading the article: our chairman was comparing prime minister Donald Tusk to Hitler on the grounds of his neoliberal, anti-

union politics. The extreme fiscalism that this prime minister’s rule has led to has also greatly contributed to incredible pressure upon ordinary people. The article cites a case where a mother of two was sent to prison for failing to pay a tax bill of €500, which she did not even know about because she had not been receiving official letters. This, however, did not prevent some organisations from accusing the PPP of anti-Semitism and even neo-Nazism.

The PPP does have problems with anti-Semitic gaffes in election campaigns. This is because the party, which has a formal membership of around 2,000 people - but far fewer active members - therefore for the 2011 parliamentary elections and hence entered an electoral alliance with Self-Defence, a peasant party. In Warsaw, a circle called Wspólnota Samorządowa (Self-Rule Society) came forward, whose candidates began to express rightwing and anti-Semitic views during the election campaign.

Polish law makes it impossible to withdraw candidates once the electoral register has been submitted. That is why the PPP publicly disassociated itself from some candidates in a special statement, which is available on the party’s website. The PPP is too small and not well enough organised to thoroughly screen all candidates in such an enormous venture, especially as there are generally significantly fewer applicants than there are places to fill on the electoral list.

As for the Spartacists, there exists no organisation in Poland they do not accuse of being right-deviationists and flunkies of the bourgeoisie, as a result of which their membership has never exceeded three people. Nobody takes their reflections seriously.

What are the reasons why you are working inside the PPP?

The reason why we support the PPP is because it is the only workers’ party in Poland. It is also the biggest extraparlimentary party that regularly participates in elections. It has a radical leftwing character, and there is nothing in its programme which would suggest that it is anti-Semitic, bourgeois and the like. We would never work in an anti-Semitic party because it would be a disgrace for us to participate in anything of that sort.

The PPP is the only party that fights the neoliberal politics of the state and the bourgeoisie. It was formed out of the most radical Polish trade union, WWZ August 80, which is known to organise the most militant and radical strikes. Not even the neoliberal media denies the socialist character of the party and trade union.

Aside from us, activists of the United Secretariat of the Fourth

International operate in the PPP. The Polish section of the Committee for a Workers’ International was also involved for a long time, while the Polish section of the International Socialist Tendency has often given it electoral support.

How strong is the Polish left?

If we’re talking about the extraparlimentary left, there exist mostly small groups that are affiliated to various bureaucratised ‘internationals’. They are more interested in directives and instructions from the ‘HQ’ than in Polish current affairs. They also introduce to Poland ‘from the top down’ a hostility and mutual aversion between Marxists. In addition, they lack any kind of base in the working class. As the only group that has any influence in the working class, the PPP is an exception. WZZ August 80 initiated, among other things, the general strike in Silesia on March 26.

Where do you see the Polish left heading with regard to Marxist unity and gaining influence in society?

Gaining influence in society is more important than Marxist unity, and the former does not necessarily result from the latter. The aim of uniting all sectarian groups is an undertaking that requires a lot of effort, but is not necessarily politically fruitful, nor does it automatically guarantee influence in society - no matter how many zeros you add up, the result is still zero. This does not mean that we reject potential initiatives towards cooperation and unity, but our experience does not fill us with optimism.

Our experience also suggests that, given scarce industrial action, it is necessary for the workers’ movement and social movements to win new layers.

The only way out is activism among workers, which is the reason why we operate in the PPP. Out of many organisations of the extraparlimentary left, only three are registered. Of those three, only the PPP conducts regular political activity among the masses. Most recently, we had campaigns against the new ‘garbage collection agreements’ and for free public transport.

Considering the history of the Polish working class and trade union movement, is it particularly difficult to win people to non-nationalist perspectives?

As for the influence of the history of the workers’ movement on attitudes in the working class, it is worth citing a public opinion survey that was conducted in March. About 80% of respondents support the nationalisation of the railways, mines, power stations and forests and want the state to guarantee full employment. At the same time, when asked whether capitalism or socialism was preferable, a third chose capitalism and the rest decided they had “no opinion”. The fact that people still associate socialism with empty shelves and a government that shoots at workers negatively impacts on any potential successes of socialist agitation.

In protest against the neoliberal politics of the ruling party, the Citizens’ Platform, a section of working people supports the Christian-democratic PiS as a “more social” party - but in most cases, this is a matter of opting for the lesser evil rather than strongly supporting conservative or nationalist ideology. From our experience as PPP activists, we can also conclude that it is not as difficult to convince somebody of our programme as it is to convince people to vote for an extraparlimentary party - or, indeed, to vote at all ●



Church, nation and class: interwoven

DRUGS

Latin America rebels against war on drugs

Communists fight for the real 'game-changer', writes Eddie Ford - the legalisation of *all* drugs

Representing a partial rebellion against the United States-led 'war on drugs', May 18 saw the publication of a \$2.2 million, 400-page drugs review from the 35-member Organisation of American States. Initiated by Colombian president Juan Manuel Santos, the study had been formally commissioned at last year's Summit of the Americas attended by Barack Obama. It came just two weeks before an OAS meeting in Guatemala, where the central topic will be drugs.

Otto Pérez Molina, Guatemala's president, has openly said that it is time to end the "taboo" on discussing the decriminalisation of drugs and his Uruguayan equivalent, José Mujica - a former Tupamaros guerrilla - has put forward plans to fully legalise the production and sale of marijuana under a state monopoly. Bolivian president Evo Morales has long called for the decriminalisation of the coca leaf, cocaine's raw material, advocating a "zero cocaine but not zero coca policy". They and many others will be pushing for major changes in international drugs policy at a special UN general assembly meeting in 2016.

The need for radical and immediate change is obvious. Over the past decade, Washington has spent more than \$20 billion on 'counterdrug' efforts in Latin America - resulting in carnage. On the supply side, no fewer than 70,000 people have died in Mexico since it launched its US-backed offensive on drug-traffickers and organised crime six years ago - an appalling toll. In the US itself, there are now 15 times more drug dealers incarcerated in prisons than 40 years ago, but with little corresponding reduction in drug use. The United Nations estimates that from 1998 to 2008 the worldwide use of opiates increased by 35%, whilst for cocaine the rise was 27% and cannabis 8.5%. Clearly, far more social destruction has been caused by the west's 'war on drugs' than by the actual misuse of narcotics.

True, the OAS report mainly summarises and distils previous research on the subject. However, it has been billed by some as a 'game-changing' study due to the fact that it emphasises the importance of "exploring" the legalisation or decriminalisation of marijuana - meaning that it could potentially mark the beginning of the end for the utterly disastrous policy of *blanket* drug prohibition. Of course, there have been many supposedly 'game-changing' reviews and studies. Most notably, in 2011 there was the 24-page report, which now sounds positively paltry, published by the great and the good on the Global Commission on Drug Policy - such as George P Shultz, a previous US secretary of state; Paul Volcker, ex-chairman of the US federal reserve; the former presidents of Mexico, Chile and Colombia; acclaimed authors Carlos Fuentes and Mario Vargas Llosa; Richard Branson; and Kofi Anan, former UN secretary-general. Not exactly a bunch of hippy slackers.

The Global Commission report represented a scathing attack on current drugs policy - and particularly the criminal role, in every sense, played by the US. Far from reducing the supply and use of drugs or curbing the power of organised crime, the Global Commission report concluded the strategy pursued by the US government and others has - with absolute predictability - had exactly the opposite effect: actually *creating* the conditions for "rampant



Seemingly an insatiable demand in the west

lawlessness" and in turn acting to "fuel" organised crime, which now rakes in fabulous profits to the tune of some \$300 billion or more a year. Al Capone was small fry compared to modern-day drugs gangsters.

The commission declared - quite correctly - that the policy of drugs prohibition has "failed, with devastating consequences for individuals and societies around the world". Instead of punishing users who "do no harm to others", the worthy panel argued that governments should end criminalisation of drug use; they should experiment with "legal models" that would "undermine" organised crime syndicates; and offer health and treatment services for drug-users in need.

Unsurprisingly, the Global Commission on Drug Policy issued an open letter welcoming the OAS review and called for a "more humane and efficient" drugs policy - it was about time, the authors stressed, that governments around the world are allowed to "responsibly experiment with regulation models that are tailored to their realities and local need". The commissioners also note that Colorado and Washington have recently approved new laws to effectively decriminalise cannabis - anyone aged over 21 in Colorado will soon be able to buy in special retail stores up to an ounce of marijuana (they must be sold in child-resistant packages with labels that specify potency).

Discussion

In some respects, the OAS study is a lengthier follow-up to the Global Commission's review - which so far has had no impact at all on policy-makers in the US and Europe. The mad war continues, even if we have seen partial ceasefires in Colorado and Washington. Unlike the former big wigs on the commission though, when it comes to the OAS you are dealing with *existing* heads of governments - so at the very least it will be harder to ignore their findings.

Another obvious significance lies in the fact that OAS countries are where the majority of illicit drugs are either produced - most of the world's cocaine originates in Colombia, Peru and Bolivia - or pass through. Thus Colombian-made drugs go through Mexico on their way to their main destination - the US, of course, which

seems to have an insatiable appetite for cocaine. Therefore, in essence, a *North American* problem has become a Latin America problem - on an enormous and catastrophic scale, as ruthless gangsters fight for control of vital trafficking routes.

With such vast profits to be made, these gangs do not pussyfoot around - if someone gets in your way, then you rub them out. For example, in May 2011, as part of the longstanding turf war between the Mexican drugs cartel, the Zetas, and the Guatemalan syndicate, the Leones, 27 ordinary farm labourers on a north Guatemalan farm were slaughtered - mainly beheaded with machetes - merely because they were employed by someone believed to have stolen a 2,000-kilo shipment of cocaine from the Zetas.

In his foreword to the review, José Miguel Insulza, secretary general of the OAS, claims that "growing media attention" regarding the effects of the drugs war, including social media, "reflects a world in which there is far greater awareness" of the violence and suffering associated with the drugs war; we now have, he continues, a "much better grasp" of the human and social costs not only of drug use, but also of the production and transit of controlled substances. According to Insulza, the OAS review is the start of a "long-awaited discussion".

Purposely designed not to step on too many toes, the report walks a very careful - and painful - line by not explicitly recommending *any* single approach or solution to the drug problem. No-one in the OAS is "defending any position - neither legalisation, nor regulation, nor war at any cost", to use the words of president Santos in a statement greeting the review. Rather, as we are told repeatedly, the drugs problem requires a "flexible approach" - one that at some stage could "lead to the possibility of amending domestic legislation" or "promoting changes to international law". Having said that, we read that it "would be worthwhile to assess existing signals and trends" that "lean toward" the decriminalisation or legalisation of the production, sale and use of marijuana. "Sooner or later," says the report, "decisions in this area will need to be taken". On the other hand, the report finds "no significant support" among OAS leaders for the decriminalisation/legalisation of

cocaine - the very drug which, through the laws prohibiting it, is having the greatest and most destructive impact upon Latin America.

The study goes on to examine four different scenarios for confronting the illegal drugs trade. The first three are ones that shift from the "repressive" status quo to situations that "privilege citizen security" (or "institution building"), involve "experimentation" with legal changes to drugs and the overall strengthening of "community resilience". All scenarios offer a chance for leaders to replace "indiscriminate detention and rights abuses" with approaches that distinguish between users and traffickers, and offer "community-based health services." The last approach - labelled "disruption" - is what could happen if the OAS countries are "incapable in the short run of reaching a shared vision" that allows them to "join forces to address the problem". If they cannot get their act together, in other words. Under this doomsday scenario - or warning to the US administration - one or more Latin American state unilaterally abandons the drugs war on the grounds that the human and economic costs are just too high, leading to the creation of "narco-states", as the report puts it.

In other words, the OAS report - albeit shrouded in diplomatic and stupendously cautious language - is telling North America and Europe that the current situation *will* change, with or without them. It is inevitable. Ultimately, drug use should be viewed primarily as a public health issue and not a criminal matter.

The response of the US administration to the OAS review has been typically reckless and irresponsible - no change in policy. Rafael Lemaitre, a spokesman for the White House's 'drug tsar', rejected "any suggestion" that the US or any other American country should legalise drugs like heroin, cocaine, marijuana, methamphetamine, etc. According to Lemaitre, presumably speaking for the US government as a whole, legalisation runs "counter" to an "evidence-based, public-health" approach to drugs policy and "are not viable alternatives". The 'war on drugs' must continue, no matter what the cost. What are they going to do next - fly squadrons of drones non-stop over Colombia and Mexico?

Dangers

Communists, however, unambiguously call for the full legalisation of *all* drugs - not just marijuana. For us that is the only real 'game-changer.' Not because we naively believe that legalisation is some sort of magic wand that will instantly usher in a Nirvana of perfectly adjusted, non-alienated individuals. We fully recognise the danger of drugs, both legal and illegal. Why do some people drink so much alcohol that it endangers their health? It has something to do with the society we live in - an alienated and grossly unequal one.

No, our call for legalisation is principally motivated by the desire not to make a bad situation worse. Huge swathes of the population are criminalised by the current prohibitive drugs laws and for communists that is unacceptable, morally and rationally. All serious evidence and research, plus plain empirical observation, informs us that the legalisation of drugs would be far less harmful than the present regime. Portugal, where drugs have been decriminalised, has not seen an increase in use - rather, the opposite.

It is utterly absurd that one drug (ie, alcohol) is tolerated, even promoted, whilst another (ie, cannabis) - which by any scientific or objective analysis is a far less dangerous substance - is criminalised. We should sweep aside the policy of drug bans - it failed in relation to alcohol during the dark days of prohibition in the US (1920-33) and it is failing now. Highly beneficially, at a single stroke the gangsters' lucrative businesses would be wiped out - no more get-rich-quick profits to be made. No more gang murders.

For communists the crucial struggle is for the *socialisation* of drug-taking, whether it be alcohol, cannabis, ecstasy, magic mushrooms - whatever your drug of choice. Without legalisation that is not possible: for example, if only certain drugs are grudgingly tolerated in 'officially' designated zones, a stigma will still be attached. At the end of the day, smoking a joint or drinking a pint of beer presents no inherent dangers, either to yourself or society as a whole. Any more than kite-flying, cricket, hill climbing or driving a bike. Civilisation will not collapse as a consequence, whatever the *Daily Mail* may say.

Legalisation would also have the instant practical advantage of allowing for *quality control*, such as we now have with regards to drink - unless you are daft enough to buy bootleg spirits. Your local pub tells you exactly what the strength and potency of each beer is, so you can gauge or plan - more or less - what and how much you drink. How the hell can you do that with illegal drugs? Yes, normally speaking, it is not in the self-interest of 'dealers' to kill off their customers - especially if they happen to be workmates, friends and family, as they often are. But, when all is said and done, a profit-hungry seller higher up in the food chain - perhaps feeling pressed by the arrival of a new rival in the area - might well resort to adulterating the drugs he sells to recoup his losses, potentially causing damage and death. Just as you can 'drink responsibly', so you can smoke marijuana or ingest Ecstasy responsibly - if you know what you are taking and feel comfortable with the environment and company.

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TORIES

Return of the repressed

For the first time, this coalition government looks structurally unsound - but its collapse would shift politics to the right, argues **Paul Demarty**

It is futile to make predictions in this game, but equally hard to resist. So let me suggest that there is a possibility - still small, but real - that one day, historians will look back on May 14 2013 as the day that David Cameron truly cooked his own goose.

Amid fratricidal chaos in the Conservative Party ranks, Cameron faced the embarrassment of over 100 of his own MPs voting for an amendment to their own government's queen's speech - *the queen's speech!* - leaving Cameron reliant not only on his Liberal Democrat coalition partners, but Labour as well, to get his basic programme for government through. More ageing Thatcherites crawled out of the woodwork every day to lambaste the PM. The media had started to whisper the words no Tory leader ever wants to hear - "John Major".

And how did Cameron describe his mood in this situation? "Profoundly relaxed."¹ Clearly he was aiming for the Rudyard Kipling school of steely determination: "If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs and blaming it on you ..." The trouble is that nobody believes it for a second. It *might* wash if it looked like Cameron has an exit strategy from this bloodbath. Perhaps he does. But his government currently betrays no indication of keeping its head. Cameron's relaxation runs the risk of being remembered in the same mocking register as Norman Lamont, singing in his bath.

Old divisions

The Tories can be a fractious bunch, but only one issue has a big enough payload to cause a calamity of this kind. That issue is Europe. Cameron tried so very, very hard to project an image of a very modern Conservatism - an outward-looking, inclusive rightism that included support for gay marriage, the other issue to bedevil the Tory front benches this week, along with other right-on stances on the environment. Yet the hard-right contingent on the Tory back benches will only take so much. Consequently, Cameron has come to grief on the European question, and ended up desperately fighting the same fire that immolated John Major.

He probably thought he was playing a pretty smart game on this too. He clearly intended to use the EU as a way to placate those of his MPs and supporters nonplussed, or even horrified, by the creeping liberalism on the Tory front benches. Eighty percent of the population, by some counts, are "profoundly relaxed" about gay marriage, but the other 20% are true-blue Tory voters and activists, who can cause Cameron pain come polling day. Moreover, the rise of UK Independence Party added to the pressures on Cameron. The Eastleigh by-election in February saw Ukip gain nearly 28% of the vote.

Hence early this year, Cameron announced his support plans for an in-out referendum on European Union membership, to take place midway through the next parliament, after the PM has had a chance to 'renegotiate' Britain's position in the union. This seemed like a good short-term ploy - it would neutralise the Europe issue, by promising the Tory right the one thing it desired above all others. The latter had already waited nigh on 40 years for a chance to cast their votes against EU membership; they could keep their powder dry until 2017, surely?

Not so. Ukip left Cameron's smart calculation in tatters after its strong showing in the May 2 local elections,



David Cameron: no direction

polling a quarter of the vote where it stood. Yes, it was a mid-term local election, traditionally a way to make the government into a punching bag. Yes, it was in part a protest vote. Yet the stark fact remains that, at present, the Tories are haemorrhaging votes to Nigel Farage and his party. It is hardly a tall order for Eurosceptic Tories to argue that the EU is the big problem here.

Since then, Cameron's right wing has been on the warpath. The ghosts of Thatcherism's past - Nigel Lawson, Norman Tebbit, Michael Portillo and others - have trooped out to stick the Eurosceptic knife in. A backbench rebellion sought to amend the aforementioned queen's speech to include the referendum - now was not the time, apparently, to be brushing it under the carpet.

Cameron's cabinet was hardly solidly behind him. Defence minister Philip Hammond has indicated he would vote 'out' in an EU referendum. More cryptically, education minister Michael Gove told the BBC that, were such a referendum held tomorrow, he would vote to leave - but the best result would be a forthright 'renegotiation'.

Equally, however, pro-Europe Tories have expressed their exasperation at the total lack of leadership on display. Geoffrey Howe, Margaret Thatcher's longest serving cabinet minister and the man whose resignation supposedly triggered her fall from power, contributed a stinging op-ed to *The Observer*, saying that the idea that Britain might want to leave the EU was simply incomprehensible to right-thinking people from Washington to Tokyo, and that "the debate on Europe within the Conservative Party [has reached] a new, almost farcical, low".²

Swivel-eyed loons

Gove's statement is exemplary of the present tactical confusion on the government's part. Were there not this maelstrom around Number 10, it would be a canny move - a signal to the Eurosceptic right that they have friends in high places, who will not allow Cameron to return from Brussels and Berlin with a few empty sops; and a signal to the Europeans that Tory support for continued membership is far from unconditional, so they had better put something meaningful on the table. In this context, however, it merely makes the Tories look divided at the very top level - especially as there are long-running media campaigns to set Gove against

Cameron anyway.

Further fuel has been thrown onto the fire, after an unknown individual "close to the prime minister" found a moment, apparently in a state of advanced refreshment, to refer to rank-and-file Tory activists as "swivel-eyed loons". Andrew Feldman, chairman of the Conservative Party, has been fingered for the crime, but vigorously denies it.

The damage, in any case, is done. If Feldman is innocent, then he will still be presumed guilty among the loons - his face fits the picture too closely. He is widely considered to have gotten his post as party chair thanks to his chumminess with Cameron. He is part of the clique with which the Tory rank and file are so disaffected - it is simply too plausible that he would hold such a view.

This provided David Mellor, whose time in front-line politics was curtailed in the old-fashioned Tory manner by a thoroughly amusing sex scandal, with a platform for the quote of the week. "I am old enough to remember the days when the Tory Party chairman was a serious political figure and chosen because they were a serious political figure ... If it was him - as newspapers suggest - then this has been a disaster waiting to happen because you cannot elevate tennis-playing friends to be chairman of the Conservative Party without there being a political price to pay."³

Indeed, you cannot - but whatever drunk Cameron crony let loose with the insult, it is equally an uncomfortable truth. Let us be frank - there is a reason Ukip took six votes from the Tories to every one from Labour. It is because the rank and file of the Conservative Party is overwhelmingly to the right of the leadership clique.

The hard core of the Conservative associations will have cheered when Tebbit argued that legalising gay marriage would allow him to marry his own son to avoid inheritance tax, and raise the terrifying possibility of a lesbian queen with an artificially inseminated heir to the throne. They will collect among them all manner of irrational terrors of the EU. Inasmuch as the Tory Party still contains those who consider Enoch Powell to be a misunderstood prophet (and it does), such people will be far better represented in the associations than 'modern', 'moderate' Cameron-type Tories.

Rightwing Tory foot soldiers feel increasingly bitter and disaffected with their party. They feel it has been

hijacked by a liberal, metropolitan elite who are completely out of touch with voters' (ie, their) concerns. As such, the great beneficiary of all this hoo-ha is undoubtedly Nigel Farage, who will stand up for 'traditional British values' dear to the hearts of the swivel-eyed loons - national chauvinism, xenophobia, homophobia, religious bigotry and the rest. Nobody can argue that he is not doing a convincing job of it these days.

Signs of weakness

On the whole, there have been rough times for this government - the Lib Dems' U-turn on tuition fees, the Murdoch scandal, even 'Pastygate'. Never has it appeared so weak as it does now, primarily because for two weeks the core Conservative leadership has not once looked like regaining control in good order. The Tory press, never fond of Cameron, has spotted an opportunity to put the boot in with serious vigour.

Sections of the left - not least the Socialist Workers Party, though it ultimately went quiet on this point - have always been fond of arguing that this was a weak government, which could be blown away with a big enough wave of protests. This has turned out to be nonsense; and in particular, it was nonsense to imagine that the Lib Dems were the weak link in the chain. Cameron has always looked to be under greater threat from his right.

A more dangerous illusion suggests itself now, however - the moment we have all been waiting for might finally be here! This government might be fatally compromised (the odds, I stress, are still against it). But if it falls now, it will not be our side, but a motley crew of Eurosceptic chauvinists, homophobes and - yes - swivel-eyed loons who have delivered the death-blow. This political trend includes all of Ukip and the vast majority, in membership terms, of the Conservative Party. The result will be a wild shift to the *right* in British politics, not a gilded opportunity for the left.

The ruling class, it is quite obvious, has no clue how to get out of this crisis; the rise of Ukip and the resurgence of the Tory hard right ought to remind us that it is perfectly capable of making things worse ●

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Notes

1. www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-22520888.
2. *The Observer* May 20.
3. *Ibid*.

What we fight for

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

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

■ Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members should have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.

■ Communists oppose all imperialist wars and occupations but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question - ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.

■ Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, 'One state, one party'.

■ The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.

■ Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.

■ Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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A travesty that demands a boycott

Election farce exposes regime's crisis

Supporters and apologists of Iran's Islamic Republic in Respect,¹ Counterfire² and the Socialist Workers Party³ have in the past told us that Iran is not a dictatorship. It has democratic elections to determine the president and the composition of its parliament ...

The regime's 11th presidential elections have demonstrated how far removed this is from reality. Having arrested and imprisoned all serious opposition, including the regime's own 'reformists', the remaining factions, despite being at each other's throats, are all agreed that only those candidates for president who completely uphold the line of the supreme leader may be permitted to stand. So not only has the favourite of outgoing president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei, been barred. So too has the moderate centrist and former president, ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani.

The omens were not good from the beginning. The supreme leader, ayatollah Ali Khamenei, had disowned his chosen candidate of 2009. Ahmadinejad, who came to power following a controversial vote in elections many Iranians believed to be rigged, is now considered an enemy. In fact, despite the careful vetting of candidates for this and other elected posts on religious grounds, as determined by the constitution, Iran's clerical dictators, in the form of two supreme leaders, have ended up falling out with almost everyone who has occupied the presidency, beginning with ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who famously turned his back on the regime's first president, Abulhassan Banisadr.

Rafsanjani, who was Khamenei's first president, fell out with the supreme leader. So did Mohammad Khatami, a vetted, obedient servant of the regime - he was out of favour by the end of his first term and definitely an enemy by the end of his second. Last but not least, for all his earlier support for Ahmadinejad against leaders of the green 'reformist' movement, the supreme leader fell out with his chosen president in the first months of his second term and in the end it could hardly be any worse.

What is different this year is that the entire electoral process has become a joke even before the election campaign has started. Because Khamenei was determined to reduce electioneering from months to only three weeks, it was not until May 21, just 24 days before the polls, that Iranians got to know the final list of candidates. However, Khamenei had apparently been concerned that the absence of any known figure, never mind a controversial one, might lead to a lacklustre campaign and no doubt this played a part in the supreme leader's quiet encouragement of Rafsanjani to enter the foray.

His candidacy was hailed by both 'reformists' and opponents of the regime as a sign of 'hope' - the 'saviour' had come out of retirement. Even sections of the left believed he was therefore worthy of critical support. No-one was clear about how exactly Rafsanjani would save the nation - except by lengthening the rule of the religious dictatorship, that is - but in the euphoria that followed



Rafsanjani registers as a presidential candidate

his registration as a candidate, none of this mattered. In fact it could well be that the unprecedented support for Rafsanjani by sections of the 'reformist' opposition convinced the Guardian Council to rule him out of the electoral process.

Clerical cars

The Guardian Council is supposed to make its deliberations in private. However, while the vetting process was going on, one of its leading figures, ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, commented: "Iranians do not want to elect a president whose car is a Mercedes Benz" - the model Rafsanjani arrived in to register his candidacy.

Rafsanjani's supporters hit back by arguing that Jannati's own modern Peugeot is far more expensive than Rafsanjani's old Mercedes. BBC Persian service produced a short video of the cars used by several of Iran's Islamic rulers, which shows Khamenei himself getting out of a bullet-proof BMW. It should be pointed out that Iran's supreme leader and his family are embroiled in a scandal regarding the BMW dealership in Iran.

The issue of luxury cars is a touchy subject for Shia rulers. When young Iranians were asked in a telephone

and internet poll what they associated with the phrase, 'Islamic clerics', a considerable number said "Mercedes Benz" or "BMW" (although the sons of the ayatollahs have long since preferred Maseratis and Porsches).

Once the car issue became just too embarrassing, the Guardian Council changed its tactics and focussed instead on the question of age. A candidate over 75 was apparently too old to occupy the presidency and, had the council been aware that a 78-year-old would put himself forward, they would have introduced an age bar.

However, this too was easy to counter by Rafsanjani supporters and others. A TV station listed the age of the Islamic regime's current and previous leaders, starting with Khomeini, who became head of state aged 81, and the current supreme leader, who is 73. Jannati is 87 - the same age as one of his senior colleagues on the Guardian Council, ayatollah Mahdavi Kani ...

Rafsanjani's daughter has informed the world's press and media that on May 21 senior figures of the regime had been trying to persuade her father to withdraw his nomination. But he had refused, saying he could not "betray the people's trust". However, earlier that day, as the Guardian

Council was preparing to make its final announcement, security forces moved into action. Supporters of Mashaei and Ahmadinejad were arrested as a "precautionary measure", and the offices of a 'reformist' youth organisation were ransacked and closed down.

Then the daughter of the founder of the Islamic Republic, ayatollah Khomeini, issued an open letter to Khamenei, declaring that her father had considered Hashemi Rafsanjani to possess all the qualities necessary to be not just president, but supreme leader. This was the first time anyone had quoted Khomeini's thoughts concerning a possible successor to himself and obviously implied a serious criticism of the current supreme leader.

Once it became clear that Mashaei had been barred, Ahmadinejad absurdly announced he would contest the decision by asking the supreme leader to intervene. Apparently Ahmadinejad was the only person who did not know that it was Khamenei's decision to bar both Mashaei and Rafsanjani.

There is a big difference between electoral cheating, such as ballot-rigging (as happened in 2009) and barring a very senior cleric like

Rafsanjani, the man who is considered alongside Khomeini as a founder of the Islamic regime, the man who played a crucial part in writing the constitution of the clerical state, who has been one of the regime's most powerful figures. As many have commented in Tweets and on Facebook, the ayatollah who chairs the expediency convention - a body answerable to the supreme leader with supervisory powers over all branches of government - is not considered fit to run for president!

This whole farce says everything about the crisis gripping the Islamic regime. It is true that some of Rafsanjani's supporters might now switch support to a lesser known 'reformist', Mohammad Aref, or the centrist, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, but this is now a doomed electoral process. In many ways the events of the last few days have shown how pinning one's hopes on the pseudo-dictatorial electoral process in Iran was a disaster.

The US might have considered negotiations with Iran under a Rafsanjani presidency, but the Obama administration is unlikely to take seriously whoever wins from the remaining, vetted candidates, however conciliatory the tone of those candidates may be. Ayatollah Khamenei and his Guardian Council might end up regretting the path they have taken.

As for the Iranian working class, it has two enemies: imperialism and its own rulers. The latter are not only remote from ordinary people, but so very clearly engulfed in personal struggles for wealth and power. When it comes to the presidential elections, any tactic other than a boycott is tantamount to offering support to this retrograde, reactionary regime ●

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Notes

1. George Galloway commends the 2009 Iran elections 2009: www.youtube.com/watch?v=qL3yhzV2wWU.
2. Press TV interview with John Rees: www.counterfire.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4198&Itemid=81.
3. See report of 2007 Stop the War Coalition conference: 'Lies cannot stop imperialists' *Weekly Worker* November 8 2007.

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