

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

# weekly worker



**Tim Nelson of International  
Socialist Network: for a broad  
party, not 'Leninist' trap**

- Woolwich and left
- PCS conference
- Guglielmo Carchedi
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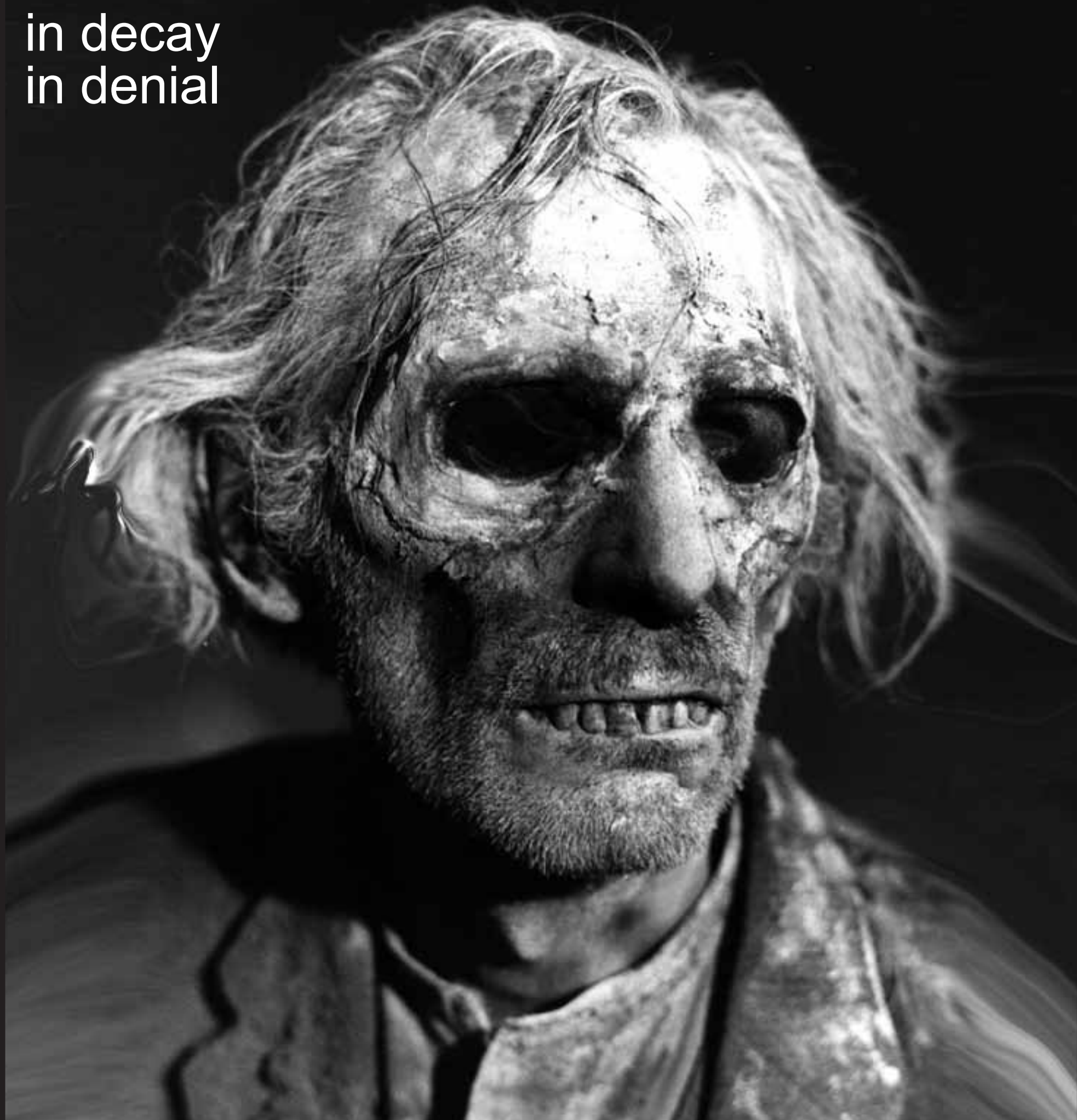
No 964 Thursday May 30 2013

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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SWP:  
in decay  
in denial





# LETTERS



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

## Platypus fuss

We in Platypus have been called out for taking an alleged, at least tacit, 'pro-imperialist' political position. The CPGB's Mike Macnair and others have characterised our expressed opinion, that we 'did not support' the US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq (and Libya), as implying that we also 'did not oppose' them. This is untrue.

The Spartacists, for example, take the position of 'no political support' for rightwing military forces against the US and its allies. But what they really wanted in Iraq was not the military and political victory of the insurgency against the occupation, but rather a meteorite to hit the green zone. However, this was not a political position. For what the Spartacists, among others, wanted was a military defeat for the US government *et al* without this being a concomitant political victory for the Iraqi right - former Ba'athists and Sunni and Shia Islamists. Let's not mince words: such forces are the right, at least as much as the US government and its allies are. It is not the case that somehow the action of Ba'athists and Sunni and Shia Islamists increased democratic possibilities in Iraq against the US government and allied occupation.

The actual Iraqi left - the Iraqi Communist Party and Worker-Communist Party of Iraq - chose not to mount its own military resistance, let alone join with the existing forces occasionally opposing the US government and allied occupation, but rather to oppose the latter, as well as the former, in other ways, through working class organising and strike action, to some limited success - for instance, in preventing the privatisation of the Iraqi oil industry. The international left largely scorned them in favour of an imagined 'anti-imperialist' insurgency, which was not that, but rather an ethno-religious, sectarian-communal civil war among forces targeting each other far more than they targeted the US government and its allies, jockeying for a position within the occupation and its political settlement, not against it.

The question is one's attitude towards the state. One can oppose the police politically without thinking that withdrawing them from poor neighbourhoods immediately is a good idea. Should street gangs take over in their place? The gangs are part of the capitalist system - they are merely less politically successful capitalists.

The same is true regarding supposed 'anti-imperialist' politics. In Iraq, the former Ba'athists, Sunni and Shia traditionalists and Islamists, may have opposed the US government and its allies on occasion and over specific issues, but they were not in any way anti-imperialist. They were at best petty bourgeois democrats, at worst sectarian communalists and (at least quasi-) fascists. They have in fact provided local political leadership and power structures that serve global capitalism and oppose the interests of workers both locally and internationally. Just because they and the US government and its allies might oppose each other occasionally does not mean that they express fundamentally different social forces. They are all pro-capitalist, and all anti-democratic.

Moreover, the phenomenon of geographical regions relatively lacking in the stable rule of bourgeois law and order is not only not particularly good for the workers and other democratic interests locally, but also not elsewhere, since it contributes to the potential political degradation everywhere - for

instance, by justifying greater police repression elsewhere to contain the zones of disorder. Those who think that local disorder is good are giving in to at best nationalist politics (whether or not dressed up as ideologically different from this), not promoting the global liberation of the working class or the increased democratic self-determination of society.

So the question is not whether Platypus opposed US *et al* imperialism, but rather why we thought that the left suffered from a glaring lack of adequate perspectives on how to actually politically oppose imperialist aggression. Platypus was founded in response to the failure of the anti-war movement, and we were motivated to host the conversation on the potential political reasons for this. This was slandered by the existing, failing left as somehow opposing the anti-war movement, where what we opposed was its fatal misleadership. And we wanted to open the broadest possible discussion of the problem of such misleadership. It is not an accident that we hosted our first public forum as a conversation between various different anti-imperialist perspectives. Only a deliberate distortion of the facts can characterise our project otherwise.

We in Platypus opposed the US invasions and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq and, more recently, Libya. We only questioned how they could be opposed in a way that would not further degrade the workers' and other democratic interests politically. We felt that the anti-war movement's misleadership opened it to criticisms by liberals and social democrats, who indeed supported the war, that the anti-war movement couldn't adequately answer, let alone win over. And it is indeed the task of a true left to win over or at least neutralise such ostensibly democratic politics - not to provide 'left' rationalisations for some temporary and opportunistic oppositions that might occasionally come from the hard-bitten right of nationalists or worse. It is not for the left to make common cause with the right against the centre, for the right is even more consistently pro-imperialist - pro-capitalist - than the liberals and social democrats are.

That's the truth the current (mis) leading 'left' can't face, and so they attack Platypus instead for pointing this out. We say, "The left is dead!" because it has become a protest-demonstration organising gang for timeservers in a membership dues racket. Of course, it objects to the unmasking of its ideological adaptation to and political complicity, however minor, with the capitalist status quo. We say, "Long live the left!" because it is long past time to stop regarding the capitalist system's disreputable elements as some emancipatory force, substituting this for what does not yet but needs to exist politically.

**Chris Cutrone**  
Platypus Affiliated Society

## Boycott the host

As Corey Ansel indicates in 'Dissecting the Platypus' (May 25), I have been circulating a letter encouraging leftists to decline from participating in the activities of the Platypus Affiliated Society. After a brief period as a member of Platypus, it was my judgement that such a measure would be both necessary and effective in limiting the further growth of this organisation. This has led to criticism from a few, including Ansel. As we can surely all agree that the left is in a state of historic weakness, what could possibly be so objectionable about a group that merely seeks to "host the conversation" about the "death of the left"?

While there are numerous

tendencies on the left that can be criticised for holding reactionary positions, the key to understanding Platypus lies in its qualitative difference. In looking at the group through the lens of orthodox Trotskyism, Ansel overlooks this difference by lamenting that Platypus is not "programmatically sound". But Platypus is quick to point out that it has no explicit political positions. As such, there is intentionally no external standard by which Platypus might be judged. Its claims to belong on the Marxist left are presumably to be taken on faith - based on the assumption that an organisation that so fetishises Marxism could hardly be denied a position in left discourse.

Rather than offering explicit positions, Platypus defines itself as a needed radical break from the existing ("dead") left. It thus positions itself in opposition to all other left tendencies - and not on the basis of any principles, but as a foundational distinction, in which it posits the left as the fundamental obstacle to a renewed Marxist politics - *regardless* of what other leftists say.

Platypus is thus, by definition, an *anti-left* organisation. An organisation that defines itself in this manner is not one that can be productively engaged. Those who engage with the Platypus Society are at the very least squandering their time and energy at the hands of sophisticated contrarians who seek only to demoralise and depoliticise all involved in their "conversation". Yet, importantly, as Platypus's *anti-leftism* is distinguished by its unprincipled character, this makes it qualitatively and categorically different from the *ultra-leftism* of those tendencies that criticise the left on the basis of programme, positions or concrete analysis. This unprincipled character of Platypus's anti-leftism leads it to import reactionary ideologies into its "hosted conversation" to use in attacking the left - from the right.

The most egregious examples are Platypus's persistent defence of liberalism and Israeli imperialism. Against a left that posits a socialist break from liberalism, Platypus defends its conception of "bourgeois right" as the necessary foundation for socialism; against a left that stands in solidarity with the Palestinian people, Platypus insists on airing the 'anti-German' defence of the Israeli state. In this manner, Platypus's unprincipled opposition to the left leads directly to Chris Cutrone's "closeted position" in defence of the Israeli "settler colonial state" and the "rational kernel of such racism" (full text available at [www.irrationalkernel.wordpress.com](http://www.irrationalkernel.wordpress.com)). In the time since Cutrone's "closeted position" was made public, he has continued to stand by it, intervening only in an attempt to change the subject from his declared position on Palestine.

What are we to make of the fact that no present Platypus member has disavowed such vile remarks by their founder, president and "chief pedagogue"? Surely, it should belie any conception of Platypus as a bastion for open discourse and inquiry. Rather it is a testament to the hitherto success of the project in progressively instilling in young students an extreme devotion to Cutrone and his conception of Platypus as the only possible vehicle for the world-historic rebirth of the left. Yet, despite this grandiosity and the loyalty of his acolytes, Cutrone can provide no answers to basic questions of revolutionary strategy - beyond his trademark obfuscation and oracular sub-Hegelianism. This is not the description of a serious political project, but of a cult.

In partially defending Platypus, Ansel is correct to stress the need for a critical discourse interrogating a variety of perspectives on the

left. But surely we can find less objectionable hosts for these much-needed conversations.

**Ben Campbell**  
email

## No difference

According to Peter Manson: "In the USSR there was no real money, let alone anything resembling the law of value. Nevertheless, the development of this new theory [of state capitalism] 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" ("SWP opposition springs back to life", May 25).

We can debate the intricacies of whether Russia was state-capitalist or simply just a new form of slave-state, but there is no question of it being a workers' state or even a step closer towards socialism. Surely, there isn't anybody who would contend that the workers had any power in the so-called Soviet Union. If the state-capitalist theory is flawed, it nevertheless reflects a truer picture of the reality than Trotsky's analysis.

In Russia, the state owned the means of production, but who owned the state? Certainly not the workers! There was no 'dictatorship of the proletariat'; rather there was the dictatorship of the party. The 'union' of 'soviets' was a fiction within days and months of the Bolshevik October revolution. It is a false to assert that there was a qualitative difference in the Russia of Lenin and that of Stalin.

**Alan Johnstone**  
Socialist Party of Great Britain

## EU withdrawal?

Is there anything progressive or militant about labour movement calls to withdraw from the European Union?

Clearly, the institutions, rules, treaties and court judgements which govern the EU do so in the interests of international monopoly capitalism. But surely the correct labour-movement response is to call for the radical refashioning and fundamental redesign of all these institutions in much the same way as we call for the maximum democratisation and reform of the British capitalist state.

I fail to see what is remotely progressive or militant about calling for the working class to simply 'opt out' of the struggle against EU institutions by calling for a British withdrawal. Of course the EU is a 'bosses' club'. So is the British state and establishment. One may as well call for the British working class to withdraw from Britain. How does cutting and running from the struggle against the EU serve any working class interests?

There is no credible argument that an isolationist Britain will be governed by institutions or rules which are any less pro-capitalist or in any way more amenable to the needs of the working class. In fact, much more likely an isolationist and nationalistic Britain will be even more reactionary and anti-working class than the current EU.

No matter how valiantly they try, advocates of EU withdrawal simply cannot distinguish their arguments from those which are anti-immigrant and anti-'foreigner'. Disgracefully, some even ape these rightwing arguments in order to try and 'connect' with the working class.

In the old days, when Europe was divided into hostile cold war blocs, withdrawal from the then European Economic Community made some sort of sense as part of wider demands for the mutual dissolution of these blocs, and calls for peaceful coexistence in 'our common European home'. Now that the EU covers most of Europe, with those countries remaining outside

queuing up to join, it makes no sense to call for either withdrawal from or dissolution of the EU. Breaking up and refragmenting Europe again would hardly be progressive or in the long-term interests of the working class.

What we should be doing is articulating a powerful, internationalist message of unity across the continent. Calling for complete democratisation of the institutions to express the will of the diverse peoples of Europe, and the wholesale replacement of current laws, rules and judgements, to promote levelling up of working class standards and rights across the continent, governmental policies which aim at 'better my neighbour' rather than 'beggar my neighbour', and for a sustainable, green and prosperous future.

Obviously, such demands cannot be fully realised under capitalism, but that is part of the point. We need to clearly articulate our vision of an internationalist, democratic and united future and thus demonstrate our case against capitalism and for socialism, and in a way which shows our common sisterhood and brotherhood with workers across Europe.

**John Keene**  
Oxford

## Unification?

I am a Polish communist who used to be a supporter of the Communist Party of Poland before I joined the Polish Party of Labour (PPP). I was one of the founders of Władza Rad, whom Maciej Zurowski interviewed ('Anti-sectarianism, Polish style', May 23). It was me who introduced these comrades to the *Weekly Worker*. In December 2012, they expelled me for "promoting Russian imperialism in the PPP", but I am still a member of the PPP and have been appointed leader of its youth wing in the Warsaw district.

I found Maciej Zurowski's commentary to be very subjective, seeing as it was based on one article in the Spartacist press, which is often full of slurs. The illustration accompanying the article is completely unrelated to the topic: where did the article mention the church? To be honest, I have no idea how the intro relates to the topic either; it looks like the author read *Spartacist* and published a picture to prove the points it had made.

Władza Rad's vision was and is childish. They present Leszek Miller, a leader of the post-communists, as a prophet because he 'uses Marx's words' and allows 'The Internationale' to be played on May 1, the International Day of Labour, which the post-communists renamed 'European Integration Day'. When Miller doesn't allow their banners, this exposes him as a vicious communist. Władza Rad tried to push the whole Warsaw PPP to join the official march, but we accepted the invitation of union members to go to Świdnik (120 km from Warsaw), to join a protest against a company connected to Silvio Berlusconi that had not paid salaries for three months. The demonstration was small - the day before around 70 of our union members had been told to go to work on May 1 instead of marching, and the comrades from Władza Rad preferred to march with the post-communists because they had a bigger audience there.

What I consider more significant than the incident at the Warsaw demo is what happened in Wrocław, where a group of anarchists, together with Polish Socialist Party members, shouted insults at two members of the Communist Party of Poland, threatened them with violence and forced them to take down their flags.

Contrary to what Władza Rad say in the interview, the PPP does not have any problems with anti-



Semitism. I organise many meetings around Warsaw, and attendees who are not party members often make anti-Semitic remarks because many of them live on estates that are to be returned to their pre-war owners, who are often of Jewish descent, resulting in rent increases or eviction. I always react to such remarks. We also work with children of our union members who are in danger of being influenced by rightwing extremists in football grounds. Registered candidates did not make anti-Semitic remarks during the campaign; they didn't publish leaflets filled with racial hatred. They were just normal people speaking of "social justice" and the "fight for a better Poland". Later it was discovered that those people publish racist stuff on the internet and they were asked to leave. If Władza Rad think there is a problem they should fight it, not mouth off internationally.

As for the Spartacists, they label all other groups in Poland nationalist or anti-Semitic. That doesn't stop them from asking the PPP, whom they call anti-Jewish, for help when encountering legal problems. Have they provided any examples of anti-Semitic remarks in the ranks of the PPP? No, their accusations are not serious.

Of course, Władza Rad comrades often show way too much 'pride' in our strong connections with workers - something that is not 100% true. But I do share their approach to the 'unification of the left'. You cannot apply British standards here. The Socialist Workers Party in Poland, called Workers Democracy, and Socialist Alternative, the Committee for a Workers' International affiliate, have less than 10 members each; the Spartacists have less than five and can be spotted in the street once or twice a year; the CPP partly consists of very old comrades that became communists in the 1950s, and partly of a small group of youngsters who are pushing radical Stalinism. Polish Alliance for Workers' Liberty fans publish a newspaper twice a year. The "activists of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International in the PPP" that Władza Rad are referring to amount to one person.

Would a unification of these forces bring anything new? No. It would result in a meeting of 20 people, who would have a not-very-nice debate about who defended the USSR and who is a Solidarność traitor. Two years ago, Władza Rad organised an October revolution anniversary meeting to which all groups were invited. Only the Spartacists showed up, called everybody fascists and left.

On the politics of Marxist unity, I am close to what you wrote in response to the AWL proposal ('Pull the other one', May 16), where you thought it right to cooperate "on matters where our views accord". But, to be honest, most left groups in Poland also just launch unity offensives as a "cover for ... shabby recruitment raids", to quote that article.

Parallels between British and Polish 'anti-sectarian sectarianism' are illusory because in the formerly socialist countries the left's knowledge of the west is very limited.

**Andrzej Brun**  
Warsaw

## Syria solidarity

I've been researching the Syria situation since spring 2012, and have been unconvinced by the presentation of the situation from mainstream, corporate media, as well as the obscene responses from sections of the left: horrific incidents were being ignored and apologised for by the majority of the organisations that claim to be left of centre.

I've been meaning to write a letter for a number of weeks, to show appreciation for the coverage of the *Weekly Worker* in comparison to the leftwing newspapers that have adopted pro-Assad regime positions. Yassamine

Mather's and Moshé Machover's discussion regarding Israel's role in the Syria situation ('Netanyahu attempts to provoke new confrontation', May 9) and Peter Manson's article regarding red lines, chemical weapons and the US role in Syria ('Toxic weapons and revolutionary illusions', May 2) were of interest to me, since they encouraged a discussion of the situation, rather than demanding a position that supports either the 'rebels' or the regime.

When I was in Lebanon recently, I went to Bekaa Valley, near the Syria border, and spoke with refugees and local people desperately affected by the crisis in Syria. There are thousands living under sheets, not receiving the aid you might expect, and children are being left to just deal with it. Four million people are reported to be displaced; hundreds of thousands of people are dead or missing. Refugees are in absolute crisis, since they are facing closed borders. When they get to a refugee camp, there is hardly any aid there for them. Many people still live in places like Aleppo, and continue to try and get on with their lives, amid the destruction and constant shelling, because they cannot go anywhere.

The majority of the British left is more concerned about being perceived as 'pro-imperialist' if it shows any solidarity with the revolution or any opposition to the oppressive and murderous Assad dictatorship. Groups such as the Stop the War Coalition show little concern for the Syrian people, and appear to suggest that Assad should remain in power.

On May 31 there will be an event in solidarity with the Syrian revolution at the University of London Union. It will host a live video-link with activists from Syria and the film, *Battle of Aleppo*, will also be shown. It is a controversial choice, since it was made by Pierre Piccinin da Prata, who has been quoted making sympathetic comments in relation to a Nato intervention. However, there's no doubt that the film will be worth watching - it does attempt to draw public attention to the anguish of the Syrian people, while an indifferent world looks on.

**Bonnie Newman**  
email

## Police agents

On May 25, as the racist English Defence League marched through Newcastle, police arrested 14 anti-fascists, detained them for up to 10 hours, and raided their homes, seizing computers and mobile phones. Seven *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* supporters were among the detainees. They were seized half an hour before the counterdemonstration organised by Newcastle Unites was due to assemble. In the weeks before the EDL march, Newcastle Unites, a coalition of Labour councillors, local trade union officials and the Socialist Workers Party, was determined to exclude *FRFI* and other militant anti-fascists from its march. Its planning meetings were held in secret and its

members physically assaulted *FRFI* supporters to exclude them. On the day of the march, Newcastle Unites stewards colluded openly with Northumbria police to identify our comrades for arrest.

The EDL demonstration, against the creation of an Islamic faith school, had been planned for some months. *FRFI* was told that we were being excluded from Newcastle Unites because we had heckled Labour MP Grahame Morris at a May Day rally in 2012. Morris had voted for the bombing of Libya. The sensitivity of the SWP to the heckling of a Labour MP is in keeping with their determination to protect Labour councillor Dipu Ahad, the figurehead for Newcastle Unites, who voted for £100 million cuts to Newcastle services and jobs earlier this year.

On May 15, Newcastle Unites wrote to *FRFI* saying that if *FRFI* supporters tried to join the march, "you will not be welcome and we shall take all necessary steps to ensure that you play no part." This was followed by a Facebook post in which Ahad warned those he considers "disruptive": "I assure you that you will be thrown out of the demo and the public meeting by our stewards, who will be many. You will also be reported to the police for causing disorder!" On May 23, *FRFI* received an email from Northumbria police which stated that Newcastle Unites had informed them *FRFI* would not be welcome on the protest. The next day, police stood outside a Newcastle Unites public meeting with a list of names of those who would be barred from the meeting.

Newcastle Unites acted as police agents. They deliberately exposed our comrades and others to very serious charges: the police detained the comrades on the grounds of 'conspiracy to cause violent disorder'. As a result of their actions, the police will feel they have a free hand to disrupt the work of left organisations, arrest their members and raid their homes.

We can expect the killing of Lee Rigby in Woolwich on May 22 to be used as an excuse for further criminalisation of Muslims by the state and racist attacks by the EDL. An anti-fascist movement needs to be built on the basis of real unity, which requires open and democratic debate. *FRFI* argues the EDL can only be opposed effectively as part of a wider struggle against racism, which is inseparable from the fight against imperialism. No amount of threats from the Labour Party and its SWP defenders will convince us to abandon this struggle. To stop the EDL, we need to fight state racism.

All comrades were released without charge and bailed to report to the police on August 7. The 'Newcastle 14 Defence Campaign' ([www.defencecampaign.wordpress.com](http://www.defencecampaign.wordpress.com)) has been set up to fight any possible charges and readers of the *Weekly Worker* would be very welcome to get involved.

**FRFI North East**  
[www.revolutionarycommunist.org](http://www.revolutionarycommunist.org)

# Appeal from the editor

Following the publication of an inaccurate article last year, the *Weekly Worker* is calling for donations to our legal appeal (see 'Unreserved apology' *Weekly Worker* February 7). We were obliged to pay £1,000 damages plus substantial expenses yet to be agreed, and the total raised already stands at £3,530.

● Send a cheque or postal order, payable to 'Weekly Worker', to BCM Box 928, London WC1N 3XX

● Use the PayPal facility on our website and leave a message specifying 'Appeal'  
● Transfer your donation directly from your online bank account - our account number is 00744310 (sort code: 30-99-64).  
● 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**

# 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 June 2, 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 6: 'The theory of compensation as regards workpeople displaced by machinery'. Organised by CPGB: [www.cpgb.org.uk](http://www.cpgb.org.uk).

## Radical Anthropology Group

Introduction to anthropology  
**Tuesday June 4, 6.15pm:** 'The secrets of Stonehenge: a critique of Mike Parker Pearson'. Speaker: Lionel Sims. St Martin's Community Centre, 43 Carol Street, London NW1 (Camden Town tube). £10 waged, £5 low waged, £3 unwaged. Discounts for whole term. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: [www.radicalanthropologygroup.org](http://www.radicalanthropologygroup.org).

## Left Unity Glasgow

**Thursday May 30, 7.30pm:** Launch, Kinning Park Centre, 40 Cornwall Street, Glasgow G41. Organised by Left Unity: [www.leftunity.org](http://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](http://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](http://www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk).

## Unity against EDL

**Saturday June 1, 12 noon:** Anti-fascism demonstration, General Gordon Square, Woolwich, London SE18 (Next to Woolwich Arsenal DLR/rail station). Organised by Unite Against Fascism: [www.uaf.org.uk](http://www.uaf.org.uk).

## After Woolwich

**Monday June 3, 7pm:** Public meeting, University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1. The EDL and post-Woolich political fallout. Speakers include Owen Jones, Jeremy Corbyn. Organised by Unite Against Fascism: [www.uaf.org.uk](http://www.uaf.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](http://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](http://www.uniteresist.org).

## Picket line party

**Wednesday June 5, 8am:** Picket, Euston Tower, 286 Euston Road, London NW1. Organised by PCS Euston: [www.pcseuston.org.uk](http://www.pcseuston.org.uk).

## End asylum abuse

**Thursday June 6, 1pm:** Picket, G4S AGM, Salters Hall, 4 Fore Street, London EC2. Organised by Stop G4S: [stop-g4s@riseup.net](mailto:stop-g4s@riseup.net).

## No to G4S

**Thursday June 6, 1pm:** Protest at shareholders AGM, Salters Hall, 4 Fore Street, London EC2. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: [www.palestinecampaign.org](http://www.palestinecampaign.org).

## Taking on the arms industry

**Tuesday June 11, 7pm:** Public meeting, the Spark Space, Blackfriars Hub, 58 Victoria Embankment, London EC4. Organised by War on Want: [www.waronwant.org](http://www.waronwant.org).

## No One Is Illegal

**Thursday June 16, 7.30pm:** Public meeting, Oxford town hall, Saint Aldate's, Oxford. Speakers: Victoria Brittain, Rahila Gupta, Tracy Smith. Organised by No One Is Illegal: [www.noii.org.uk](http://www.noii.org.uk).

## Cuba, Greece and LGBT rights

**Wednesday June 19, 6.30pm:** Public meeting, Unite House, 128 Theobalds Road, London WC1. Organised by Unite London and Eastern region LGBT committee: [www.unitetheunion.org/unite-at-work/equalities/equalitiessectors/lesbiangaybisexualandtrans](http://www.unitetheunion.org/unite-at-work/equalities/equalitiessectors/lesbiangaybisexualandtrans).

## National Shop Stewards Network

**Saturday June 29, 11am to 5pm:** Annual conference, Camden Centre, Judd Street, London WC1. Registration: £6. Organised by National Shop Stewards Network: [www.shopstewards.net](http://www.shopstewards.net).

## 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.



## WOOLWICH

# A pretext for state repression

The murder of a soldier highlights the irrationality of bourgeois politics - but also the failure of the left, argues **Paul Demarty**

There is a famous scene in Mike Myers's spy spoof, *Austin Powers: international man of mystery*, in which the eponymous hero is driving a steamroller at a glacial pace towards a terrified henchman of the main antagonist, Dr Evil. Instead of evading his grisly fate by calmly stepping five paces to the side, the henchman stands stock still, screaming, as the steamroller inches towards him.

So it has been in the days after the murder of Drummer Lee Rigby in Woolwich. The whole narrative has been playing out exactly according to the script: a prurient obsession with the grisly details of the murder; the attempts of ordinary, plucky Brits to intervene; government calls for more intense repression; desperate and undignified hand-wringing from the left; and chauvinist backlash from the right.

We have been here before. As it happens, I was on the east coast of the United States for the week following the Boston marathon bombing, which saw more or less the same reaction play out in more or less the same way. Yet somehow this latest British iteration of the pattern is even more ridiculous. In Boston, after all, three people were killed and over a hundred injured, some permanently maimed. There was then a day of bizarre action-movie drama, with car-jackings, shootouts and a police manhunt.

Think about it for more than one second, however, and the murder of one man in a deprived area of south London is definitely - all things being equal - on the 'dog bites man' end of the newsworthiness scale. There has been much hoo-ha over whether it is acceptable to call the murder 'terrorism', which we will get to below. But it is clear that we are not dealing with an international network of battle-hardened urban guerrillas here. It is a grisly and shocking crime, in which the perpetrators hung around waiting for the police to arrive, covered in the victim's blood. Calling this a 'police matter' is almost insulting to the police.

### 'Terrorism'

The idea that David Cameron needs to convene a Cobra committee meeting to deal with a crime of this kind is ridiculous. Yet the political grandstanding was rendered sadly inevitable the moment the word 'terrorism' started being thrown around.

So was this an act of terrorism? There have recently been signs of unease - particularly among liberals in the United States - at the way the term is used. If that unease is justified in the wake of the Boston marathon bombing, it is all the more so in the midst of this farce.

The murder can be called a terrorist act in a particular, strict sense. When one of the suspects declared that "This soldier is an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth", he was not entirely accurate. If your concern is to kill a soldier for every butchered civilian in the Muslim world, then hacking them to death, one by one, in crowded high streets is not a particularly efficient manner in terms of time and effort in which to do so. The point, rather, was to make an enormous spectacle out of the violence in order to shake up the civilian population. On that fairly classical definition, you can call it terrorism.

Words do not only *mean* things, however - they *do* things as well. Journalists such as Glenn Greenwald



**Prurient obsession**

- an American radical liberal and trenchant critic of the US security state - have pointed out repeatedly that the US media are far quicker to label as 'terrorist' political crimes perpetrated by Muslims than those, for example, carried out by Tea Party types. The fact that US drone strikes, for example, amount to a terroristic form of collective punishment equally escapes analysis.

So let us imagine a character like Michael Adebolajo, principal suspect in the Woolwich attack, handing out (as he did) fire-breathing religious-reactionary propaganda outside Woolwich Arsenal DLR station every Saturday afternoon - but Christian, rather than Muslim literature. One day, he and an accomplice butcher a gay man on the high street, declaring that the horrified civilians had better change their government or the murders will continue.

Would David Cameron fly back from Germany on the next plane and convene an executive security committee to respond? Would the press be laden with calls for Christians to root out the 'extremists' in their ranks? Would anyone call it terrorism? The question answers itself - of course not. It would be dismissed as the act of a lone lunatic, and treated as a matter for police, and perhaps mental health professionals.

Making this crime into an 'act of terror' is a *political decision* on the part of, most especially, the government, and also the reactionary press. What is more, Adebolajo, and his fellow suspect, Michael Adebowale, could not have timed their attack better, so far as the imperialist establishment is concerned.

The Middle East is dangerously close to boiling point. It is clear that Washington and its allies are by no means finished militarily meddling in the region's affairs. The US Senate recently voted unanimously to take the side of Israel in any conflict with Iran over the latter's nuclear programme - the unanimity on display is a clear indication that the American state apparatus is happy to give the go-ahead to its increasingly tetchy regional attack dog.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, direct and indirect support to the Syrian opposition - which includes people with the same general world outlook as the Woolwich killers - continues, with the lifting of a European Union arms embargo, as that country slides

further into bloody chaos.

There are further indications that the 'war on terror', so far as the core of the US state apparatus is concerned, is going to continue for a long time yet. Michael Sheehan, assistant secretary of defence, told a Senate hearing that this ill-defined pseudo-war is to continue for "at least 10 to 20 years".<sup>2</sup> A widely heralded speech by Barack Obama *seems* to point in the other direction; but like all Obama speeches, it is so utterly vague as to be meaningless.

### Authoritarianism

Apart from the grand geopolitical considerations, there is the inevitable ratcheting up of the security state.

Theresa May, never one to miss an opportunity of this kind, announced a whole raft of plans to combat those pesky 'extremists' and 'preachers of hate', who are - of course - *entirely* responsible for the ideology of these two disturbed individuals. She wants pre-emptive bans on jihadist websites; she wants an 1980s Sinn Féin-style ban on broadcasting the messages of radical Islamists; above all else, she is using Rigby's murder to push for the passage of the Communications Bill in full, which will allow state monitoring of all electronic communications.

The Woolwich attack, let us be honest, is a pretty threadbare excuse for all this. In the first place, it is clear that Adebolajo, at least, was known to MI5; allegations have surfaced that he was approached by the spooks to become an informer, while attempting to mobilise jihadi fighters in Kenya to travel with him to war-ravaged Somalia (he was also allegedly tortured by Kenyan authorities at this time). It is difficult to see how a 'snooper's charter' is going to be any aid whatsoever in preventing low-level, politically motivated crimes by individuals who are already known to state intelligence services in any case ...

Banning 'extremist' websites, meanwhile, is something that has to be done properly or not at all. The Chinese state has had some success in this area by addressing itself to the problem with the full force of a Stalinist bureaucracy, but even in this case success is limited. Quite apart from al Qa'eda types, there is the small matter of politically engaged hackers, whose politics tend towards extreme libertarianism; blocked websites will be mirrored and

proxied, simply to anger the powers that be. (This has become known as the Streisand Effect, after Barbra Streisand's incompetent attempts to have a picture of her repulsive cliff-top California mansion suppressed.)

Underlying this is a certain decline in the ability of the bourgeois state to conduct its affairs in a properly cynical, rational way. Establishment voices increasingly grumble about the decline of the Sir Humphrey character - the civil servant who will quietly obstruct and destroy all the 'bright ideas' of the government of the day likely to interfere with the smooth administration of the state machine. They point to the US equivalent of the snooper's charter, which has generated an incomprehensibly vast amount of material that a million-strong CIA task force could not adequately monitor. It certainly did not stop the Boston bombing, the prime suspect for which was likewise already known to the authorities.

The centralisation of executive power, in the US and Britain alike, has undermined such obstructive middlemen, and smoothed the transition of any given hare-brained notion from the *Daily Mail* op-ed pages to the statute book. The result is a creeping authoritarian dystopia, but half-cocked and dysfunctional - more *Brazil* than 1984.

### Right and left

Similar establishment voices complain that the absurd over-reaction of the government to this crime has implicitly endorsed the narrative proposed by the killers: that it is an act of war in retaliation for attacks on Muslims. "In taking mundane acts of violence and setting them on a global stage, we not only politicise them: we risk validating the furies that drive them," writes Simon Jenkins. "When Cameron yesterday said we should defy terror by going about our normal business, he was right. Why did he not do so?"<sup>3</sup>

By the same token, it validates the furies of other undesirables. Equally inevitably, we have seen a repugnant far-right backlash. The English Defence League, which for a brief time appeared moribund (its recent marches have generally turned out a couple of hundred at best), has been given a shot in the arm. Fairly substantial EDL demos - one or two thousand strong - have been taking place in various cities.

They have invariably outnumbered the anti-fascist counter-demonstrations, which stand exposed as utterly reliant on total over-mobilisation of people up and down the country to converge on the one town the EDL happen to be showing up in. The EDL, however, does not feed primarily off its own organisational fibre, but the general ideological atmosphere; in the last week, it has thrived. Its revival is probably temporary; but that hatred will go *somewhere* - probably to the UK Independence Party - and haunt British politics in the years to come.

The left, engaged as it is desperately chasing the EDL around, stands exposed as generally having nothing of substance to say on the matter. *Socialist Worker* editor Judith Orr just about manages to mention the snooper's charter, but frames the whole issue in terms of race.<sup>4</sup> It is enough not to "let the racists divide us" - as if the Socialist Workers Party needs any help 'dividing' its pathetic anti-fascist mobilisations, or indeed itself.

Compared to a statement from the Stop the War Coalition and Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, however, *Socialist Worker* is an object lesson in penetrating and principled analysis. The Woolwich attack "appears to represent a phenomenon that was pointed out nearly a decade ago by the security services in Britain: that the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq would lead to a growing threat of terrorism in Britain."<sup>5</sup> I suppose Tony Blair should have listened to those most consistent friends of peace, MI6, before taking us into Iraq.

But what is more dubious still is the *implication* here - that extremely low-level terrorist outrages are *in themselves* reasons to pull out of a war. This is pacifist nonsense. People resist just violence quite as vigorously as unjust violence. Should the Bolsheviks have given up on fighting the white armies because of internal sabotage and subversion operations? *Mutatis mutandis*, should the anti-Mubarak protesters have given up on Tahrir Square because the state was likely to respond with full force?

This, in a sense, brings us back to the beginning. The STWC/CND statement also implicitly accepts the momentous significance of this event. For Theresa May, it 'proves' that all communications need to be monitored; for the EDL, it 'proves' that Muslims are involved in a war of extermination against the west; for our pacifist imbeciles, it 'proves' that Afghanistan and Iraq were dreadful mistakes.

In fact, it proves none of these things. What is telling is the *ease* with which the Woolwich attack became an existential threat to the British nation, the speed with which total hysteria took hold.

In the first place, it displays the decline of US hegemony (of which Britain is a well-integrated, core client state). The US and its allies are decreasingly able to secure stable political regimes compliant with their needs; instead, military adventures end in perpetual bloodshed and chaos. It is serendipitous that Michael Adebolajo should have been trying to fight a holy war in Somalia, of all places - perhaps the first country in the modern era where a US police operation could only create a failed state. Iraq and Afghanistan are very much after the same pattern. The perpetual 'war on terrorism' is a very acute symptom of this decline, as is the inevitable backlash, in Boston or in Woolwich.

Secondly, it is clear that the anti-war movement, and the left that drove it, has withered away almost to nothing. In 2004, Islamists conducted a far more bloody attack on Madrid; the immediate political response on the part of the Spanish people was to boot out a pro-war government in favour of an ostensibly anti-war one. That the immediate political consequence of the Woolwich attack should be a boost for a lumpen gang of fascists tells you everything about the utter demobilisation of anti-war sentiment in this country. That is our fault and nobody else's ●

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### Notes

1. www.algemeiner.com/2013/05/23/in-unanimous-vote-senate-urges-obama-to-enforce-iran-sanctions-support-israeli-self-defense.
2. www.wired.com/dangerroom/2013/05/decades-of-war.
3. *The Guardian* May 23.
4. *Socialist Worker* May 28.
5. http://stopwar.org.uk/index.php/usa-war-on-terror/2484-stop-the-war-statement-woolwich-killing-of-a-british-soldier.



# In decay and in denial

Peter Manson contrasts the speakers lists for Marxism 2013 and Counterfire



Living dead or dead living?

A month or so later than usual, the timetable for the Socialist Workers Party's annual school, Marxism, has finally been published. Titled 'Exploring the world in turmoil', Marxism 2013 will be held over what is virtually a long weekend - starting at 2pm on Thursday July 11, with the opening rally later that evening, and finishing at 1pm on Monday July 15.

The reason for the delay is obvious: the leadership - unable to persuade a good number of those you might expect to speak to do so this year - has been having difficulty filling the vacant spaces. There are, of course, a number of reasonably well known leftwingers - economist Alan Freeman, US author and International Socialist Organization member Paul Le Blanc, Egyptian economist Samir Amin (who "exceptionally" supported the imperialist intervention in Mali last year) and academic Gilbert Achcar (who thought about withdrawing, but then decided against doing so, as explained in his widely circulated comment, 'Why I decided to maintain my participation in the SWP's Marxism 2013').<sup>1</sup>

Also speaking are authors Sally Campbell, Radhika Desai, Anne Alexander, Kevin Doogan and Fred Pearce; and a number of union leaders, the most prominent of whom is Communication Workers Union general secretary Billy Hayes. The

others are Liz Lawrence, president elect of the University and College Union, Jerry Hicks, defeated left candidate for Unite general secretary, Jane Aitchison, president of the Public and Commercial Services Union department for work and pensions section, and Ian Hodson, president of the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union. But none of the above are exactly challenging when it comes to strategic thinking.

Contrast this to the event this coming weekend organised by Counterfire, the organisation set up by former SWP leaders John Rees, Lindsey German and Chris Nineham. Counterfire's 'Dangerous ideas for dangerous times' lasts less than two days - 2pm on Friday May 31 until 7.30pm on Saturday June 1 - but it features Terry Eagleton (according to Wikipedia, "widely regarded as the United Kingdom's most influential living literary critic"<sup>2</sup>), Paul Gilroy, leading scholar on race, racism and culture, and Marxist historian Neil Faulkner, plus a whole number of familiar names you might normally expect to appear on a Marxism platform - Owen Jones, Clare Solomon, Tariq Ali, Tony Benn, David Harvey, Laurie Penny, Jeremy Corbyn, Andrew Murray, Lee Jasper, Seumas Milne ...

So why are the above *not* speaking at Marxism? Well, those absent friends - like John McDonnell MP, who stated

in a three-word Tweet, "I'm not attending" - are not exactly rushing to tell us the reason, but anyone on the left will tell you why: something called the 'comrade Delta' affair, when a leading SWP member was cleared of raping a young comrade by a 'committee of his mates', otherwise known as the Disputes Committee. The central committee completely botched the handling of this case, which the DC was totally unsuited to investigate - even if some of its members had *not* previously worked closely with comrade Delta and had *not* wanted him kept within the leadership circle.

As a result, all sorts of insults were hurled at the SWP by feminists and others, who claimed that the SWP as a whole was not a 'safe space' for women and that the comrade Delta affair proved that sexism was rife within the organisation. It did no such thing, of course. It proved (once again) that the SWP is a bureaucratically controlled sect with unaccountable leaders. But for a whole swathe of the left the SWP could no longer be touched.

So Charlie Kimber and Alex Callinicos have had to resort to calling upon far more of the SWP's own members to lead Marxism sessions - including oppositionists like Mike Gonzalez, Pat Stack.

To give you an idea of the extent to which the SWP has been forced

to scrape the barrel, this is from the latest SWP internal bulletin: "Speakers confirmed include Peter Hain MP, talking about his recent documentary on the Marikana massacre; Tommy Sheridan, chair of the All-Scotland Anti-Bedroom Tax Federation; Jerry Hicks; Petros Constantinou from the KEERFA movement against racism and fascism in Greece; and many others."<sup>3</sup>

Petros Constantinou? Is he a headline speaker? And a centre-left Labourite like the former minister Peter Hain? Perhaps he will rise above crude apologetics, but is he really an authoritative speaker on working class politics in South Africa? And what about Tommy Sheridan, who is speaking on 'How can we stop the Tories' assault on welfare'?

Comrade Sheridan, as I am sure every *Weekly Worker* will know, is not most well known for his prominence in the campaign against the bedroom tax. This former member of the Scottish Parliament, convener of the Scottish Socialist Party and dynamic working class leader is notorious for splitting the SSP over his insistence on denying details of his private sex life published in the *News of the World*. Although comrade Sheridan won his defamation case in 2006, he was subsequently convicted of perjury and sentenced to three years in prison in 2011, before being released a year later.

I am not suggesting that his disgraceful behaviour in putting his own claim to be a 'respectable family man' before the interest of the working class movement ought to disbar him from speaking at working class events - although it has to be said that he has none of the standing he had before the disastrous defamation case. But the SWP leadership seems oblivious to the fact that, for the same feminist-inspired milieu that wants Marxism boycotted, comrade Sheridan is almost as bad as comrade Delta. Unlike Delta, comrade Sheridan has never been accused of a serious sexual offence, but he has actually been revealed as a serial womaniser who frequented sex clubs and so, in the eyes of that same feminist milieu, he must have regarded young women as 'sex objects'.

I suspect that the Sheridan session at Marxism might be popular for (from the CC point of view) all the wrong reasons. If you were going to stage some sort of protest against 'SWP sexism', then this would be

the perfect occasion.

Has the leadership considered this? It is quite possible that it has not. Almost alone in the world, the CC pretends that a "line has been drawn" under the Delta affair and everything has 'returned to normal'. Even though the affair sparked a huge rebellion, with at least half the active membership aligning themselves with the opposition, the CC claims that its rigged victory at the March 10 special conference has signalled the end of all 'inward-looking' controversy. It did not even report to the membership the resignation of well over 100 comrades following the special conference, let alone try to explain it or justify its own behaviour. According to 'Hebe', a contributor to the new *The Fault Lines* opposition blog, at a recent meeting of the 50-strong SWP national committee, the leadership admitted that "350 people had left the party"<sup>4</sup> (Hebe thinks the true figure is considerably higher).

SWP leaders want the remaining membership to believe that the raging controversy of the last year is now a thing of the past. Perhaps they actually believe this themselves. Of course, as has been shown by, for example, the formation of *The Fault Lines* and the continued publication of critical articles, such as Mike Gonzalez's 'Who will teach the teachers?',<sup>5</sup> the opposition is far from dead and a huge number of questions about the nature of the SWP are still to be resolved.

In other words, the SWP itself ought to be a topic for discussion at Marxism. A democratic, open and above all *serious* working class organisation would host an honest debate about how the SWP matches up to the revolutionary party in embryo it claims to be. Imagine Neil Davidson debating Joseph Choonara not on 'Has neoliberalism changed the working class?' (July 13, 3.45pm), but on the internal SWP regime. Now that would really be worth listening to ●

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## Notes

1. www.marxsite.org/2013/05/gilbernt-achcar-why-i-decided-to.html.
2. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terry\_Eagleton.
3. *Party Notes* May 27.
4. http://the-faultlines.blogspot.co.uk/2013/05/a-response-from-passionate.html.
5. www.scribd.com/doc/141977026/Who-Will-Teach-the-Teachers-2?secret\_password=2ecnhcy9zk0z2fgp8x8s.

## Fighting fund

## Howler

I made an obvious howler last week when I called the £36 donation from comrade OG an "eccentric sum". £36 is the amount of the shortfall I have been urging readers to make up since March, and she had actually said so! Anyway, my apologies.

The bad news is, with one day to go in our May fighting fund, we still have not reached our normal £1,500 target, let alone the remaining deficit from March. Thanks to standing orders from DO, SP, DS, PM, JT, RC and CC, two £20 cheques from HT and FP, plus £7 added to AN's book order, we raised £244 over the last seven days. We had 9,992 online readers,

but there are no other PayPal donations to report.

With £1,348 in hand, we need another £188 by 6pm on Friday May 31. Please use PayPal or make a transfer from your online bank account to 00744310 (sort code: 30-99-64).

Talking of PayPal, internet readers will have noticed that our website has been crash-free for the last couple of weeks, thanks to the sterling work of our web techies. Your donations can help to ensure we can continue to repair faults quickly ●

**Robbie Rix**

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



## REVIEW

# Method and the dialectic

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

In the first part of this review, last week, I said that Carchedi's book is an important one which should be widely read, though not uncritically; but that part of the review, which addressed issues of the theory of capitalist crisis and of the social construction of knowledge, was fairly extensively critical.<sup>1</sup> This part of the review - on the foundations of Marx's critique of political economy and on the dialectic - has more of the "important book which should be widely read" side of the story.

Chapter 1 of the book concerns method and the dialectic; chapter 2, 'Debates' - issues in the foundation of Marx's critique of political economy - and (in section 6) the alien 'rationality' of the marginalists' *homo economicus*. I will address chapter 2 first.

Carchedi begins chapter 2 with the assertion that Marx's theory "has been the object of sustained attacks aimed at showing its logical inconsistency. The critique has centred upon four issues: abstract labour as the only source of value, the materiality of abstract labour, the law of the falling rate of profit, and the so-called 'transformation-problem' ... If the critiques are proven to be correct, there would be no sound platform on which to build a radically alternative view of capitalism and thus of its tendency towards crises and towards its own supersession" (p53).

## Historical materialism

We should pause for a moment here. Marx's critique of political economy is addressed to the *specific features* of capitalism. A substantial element of Marx's critique is the claim that political economy fails to grasp the specificity of capitalism, instead treating features of capitalism, like generalised commodity exchange, as existing from the time of the first human social interactions.

As such, the critique logically entails not only the possibility of a non-capitalist future, but also the actual existence of a non-capitalist past, out of which capitalism has emerged. This issue is by no means absent from *Capital* - for example, in the elaborate account of the creation of the proletariat through enclosures, etc, in part 8 of volume 1. It is not absent from the *Grundrisse* or the *Contribution to the critique of political economy*. A substantial part of Marx's work after the publication of volume 1 of *Capital* consisted in studies in pre-capitalist social and land relations.<sup>2</sup> *Anti-Dühring* went out formally in the name of Engels, but, contrary to a very widespread belief on the left, was effectively a joint work, with Marx seeing the drafts before publication and contributing at least one chapter.<sup>3</sup> It, too, pays substantial attention to the pre-capitalist past.

Having regard to this, it is, in fact, perfectly possible to infer from 'historical materialism' - the claims of Marx and Engels about capitalism as one among a series of different historical social forms - that all social forms come into existence and will in due course pass away: there is no reason to suppose that in capitalism history has come to an end. This argument is *independent* of the validity of the specific form of Marx's critique of political economy.

Of course, it does not follow that what will come after capitalism is working class rule/socialism or a path to communism. For that conclusion,



Potential for movement in time and space

in the first place more argument is needed, and the critique of political economy is *part of* that argument (a demonstration, among other things, that Proudhonist mutualism, which tries to attain equality, while preserving commodity production, would merely be at best a road back to a redeveloped capitalism). But this point is by no means dependent on any single interpretation of Marx's unfinished critique. Secondly, the upshot is not *determined*, but will be a matter of human choices, and it is quite possible that capitalism will end in human extinction through generalised nuclear war or through passing the tipping point at which global warming becomes runaway.

Why, then, should the critiques of logical inconsistency in *Capital* imply that "there would be no sound platform on which to build a radically alternative view of capitalism and thus of its tendency towards crises and towards its own supersession"?

The answer is that the US state and its satellites during the cold war brought up a lot of academic heavy artillery against the theoretical claims of Marxism. The academic gunners took aims according to their fields. The economists argued the superiority of marginalism either in its Keynesian form, or Sraffa's 'neo-Ricardian' version of Keynes, or in ever more esoteric mathematical micro-economics (Arrow-Debreu equilibrium, etc). Carchedi polemicalises mainly against self-identified Marxist students of political economy who accepted part of these critiques.

The philosophers took aim principally at dialectic; and especially at the 'transition from quantity to quality', which, they argued, denied the 'reality' that all change is actually gradual. Hence, though few were crude enough to make the point directly, the only legitimate socialist politics is Fabian gradualism. Though the arguments have not disappeared, since 1989 pro-capitalist ideologues have themselves become revolutionists ('colour revolutions', etc), and the arguments for the necessary gradualness of change are an embarrassment to them.

The historians and political scientists took aim mainly at 'historical materialism'. Being more politically sophisticated than their counterparts

in economics departments, they set out to lever apart Marxism using Marx and Marxists. To support Bernstein's coalitionism, they call in aid Luxemburg's critiques of Kautsky and the German Social Democratic Party centre, adding post-1918 communist critiques of 'Kautskyan automatism'. To oppose the claims of Marx and Engels for the leading role of the proletariat as a class, and the idea that historical materialism implied that capitalism would naturally come to an end, they emphasised Marx's (unpublished) draft letters to Vera Zasulich on Russia; and urged the significance of the 'Asiatic mode of production' in Marx and Engels' early writings as showing the absence of any inherent directionality in history: this idea was, it was argued, 'Eurocentric'. In all except the last of these, the academic cold warriors were *indirectly supported* by 'official communist' ideology aimed at backing up the ideas of the people's front and national roads to socialism.

A part of the 'new left' of the 1950s-70s in effect fought back against cold war criticisms of the critique of political economy and of dialectics, but swallowed cold war criticisms of historical materialism. Hence, it was necessary to take radical distance from Engels (who was supposedly a 'vulgariser' of Marx, and the originator of Kautsky's 'mechanical Marxism'); and equally, hence, the idea that there could be an alternative to capitalism could *only* be drawn from Marx's critique of political economy itself. Carchedi's argument here seems to be (implicitly) within this framework.

The irony is that within the academy, it is 'historical materialism' which remains, to use Imre Lakatos's phrase, a "progressive research programme" with profound, albeit usually dilute, influence on the profession of the study of history, and producing real results; while academic 'Marxist economics' has come to display the symptoms of a 'degenerating research programme', a marginal niche activity mainly concerned with arcane internal polemics.

To some extent, this results from the fall of the USSR, widely seen as a disproof of Marx's *economic* claims; to some extent from the ferocious offensive of the US and other capitalist states and of direct capitalist donors to economics departments in favour of

'neoliberal' versions of marginalism. This is particularly problematic because to actually *test* Marxist predictive claims about the economy would require major research resources for number-crunching which are, in the current climate, not available to Marxist academics.<sup>4</sup>

It remains true, however, that it is not the right option to accept the pro-capitalist ideologues' critiques of historical materialism and attempt to build the critique of capitalism and the idea of an alternative on the critique of political economy *alone*.

## Homo economicus

In chapter 2 Carchedi's approach is to defend Marx's logical consistency, partly by using a temporal dialectic. There is, in a sense, a prior question: why not just accept the dominant marginalism? In the concluding section of the chapter, Carchedi interrogates the logical consistency of 'orthodox economics' through the figure of *homo economicus*. This section is extremely strong.

The point is that, in order to make its basic claims about supply and demand, marginalism presupposes that an egoistic and exploitative 'utility-maximising' 'rationality' is sufficiently normal human behaviour to allow the calculation of supply and demand curves. Considered as an empirical claim, this appears to be simply false. The marginalists attempt to escape from this problem by treating altruistic behaviour as pleasurable for the actor, and therefore utility-maximising.

But on this assumption, it cannot possibly be the case that marginalism predicts *any* outcome, because it necessarily predicts *all* outcomes. Some additional examples beyond Carchedi's: early Chicago school economist Frank Knight argued that armed robbery is utility-maximising, since the robber's investment in weapons and risk shows he values the goods taken more highly than the victim; more recently Michele Piccione and Ariel Rubinstein have, with somewhat satirical intention, shown that a 'jungle economy' in which goods are allocated by the use of force displays the same equilibrium tendencies urged for the market by marginalists.<sup>5</sup>

This is, in a sense, not a new point: Geoff Hodgson makes it in *How*

*economics forgot history* (London 2001). Carchedi develops some of the implications: for example, in the case of status goods and financial products, demand rises if price rises. John Weeks develops others in *The irreconcilable inconsistencies of neoclassical macroeconomics* (New York 2012). Carchedi also makes the specific and very important point that the marginalist model can only be made to work at all if time is, in fact, expelled.

In substance, the 'predict all outcomes' problem of theories of utility-maximising makes them just an economic variant of Panglossianism or the strongest versions of the immediate determination of all events by divine providence ("Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father" - Matthew 10.29). The fact that this stuff is taught as 'economics' and absolutely dominant in schools and universities is as if flat-earthism was to be the basis of the prescribed syllabus in physics, astronomy and geography.

The upshot is that there are reasons to reject all subjective-utility theories of value (not just the orthodox marginalist/neoclassical versions), which are independent of the question whether Marx's interpretation of the labour theory of value can be made to work.

## Abstract labour

As I quoted above, Carchedi addresses four debated issues in the problem of making Marx's labour theory of value work: abstract labour, its materiality, the law of the falling rate of profit, and the 'transformation problem'.

In relation to the general point that only abstract labour creates value, Carchedi takes aim at a couple of relatively soft targets: the idea that it would be possible to have a capitalist economy in which *all* production was carried on by machines, humans having only the function of consumers; and the ideas that profits are a reward for risks or for the special skills of capitalists. Both are dismissed with suitable expedition. Not addressed are the somewhat harder targets of (a) the Austrian school argument that profit arises from time preference and the 'roundaboutness' of production: ie, the need to immobilise assets in the course of production (a standard example being that Austrians argue that value arises without labour in the ageing of wine and spirits); and (b) Keynes' argument that interest is an incentive not to hoard money. The answers to both these arguments depend at the end of the day on arguments from the *specificity* of capitalist production and, in particular, the role of money.

Carchedi offers a more elaborate, and a fundamentally important, argument on the *materiality* of abstract labour. In Marx, concrete labour creates use-values; abstract labour, "the expenditure of human labour in the abstract", creates exchange-value. He begins with a critique of Chris Arthur's argument in *The new dialectic and Marx's Capital* (Boston 2004) that abstract labour is immaterial and merely an aspect of the value-form. Against this view, Carchedi makes a fundamental point: the expenditure of human labour-power in the most general or abstract sense is a *physiological* fact. This argument can then be deployed against other value-form theorists, such as John Milios and Michael Heinrich.

The point can be looked at another way. For the marginalists,



unemployment arises because wages are ‘sticky downwards’: that is, if only workers would accept lower wages, more employment would be offered. Trade unions and state welfare are then the obstacles to full employment. But - to take only one example - Robert C Allen in his *Enclosure and the yeoman* (Oxford 1992), though arguing using marginalist methods, is unable to avoid the point that, in spite of growing unemployment in the region he studies, in some ‘privileged sectors’ (agriculture, weaving and building) the wages of the employed did not fall. The explanation he offers is that the wage was so close to subsistence level that any reduction would imply that the worker simply could not work: more calories (and access to clothes, shelter, etc) are necessary to the *ability to work* (Marx’s ‘labour-power’) than merely to avoid immediate starvation. For Allen these are wages ‘above the market clearing level’; but the actual logic is that there is no such thing as a ‘market clearing level’ of wages in the marginalists’ sense. The cost of reproduction of labour-power is a *real floor* on its price, and one which is inconsistent with the idea that markets tend to clear.

Once we accept that this is the case, we are, in fact, driven towards a labour theory of value: not necessarily in the sense that abstract labour is the yardstick which ‘measures’ different use-values to allow exchange, as Marx argued at the beginning of *Capital* volume 1, but in the sense that the abstract labour content of commodities *constrains* or *limits* possible prices if socially necessary activities are to be carried on under generalised commodity production; and, the larger the number and variety of commodities involved, the tighter these limits become. Though the *money form*, on the other hand, allows very considerable divergence of prices from these limits, this is a contradiction, and the limits ‘return’ in various forms, notably crisis.

I have discussed briefly in the first part of this review Carchedi’s account of crisis in terms of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall (FRP). As I said there, I am not convinced that simple and direct use of FRP in production is a satisfactory explanation of the tendency to cyclical crises in capitalism. Nonetheless, Carchedi’s arguments in section 4 of chapter 2 that the dominant tendency is towards FRP and the *counter*-tendencies identified are just that seem to me strong. The issue is whether this *secular* tendency to FRP leads to a tendency to increasing severity of crises - or to a tendency to monopolisation/oligopolisation and statisation.

## ‘Transformation problem’

The ‘transformation problem’ arises because Marx postulated in *Capital* volume 3 the formation of a uniform ‘general rate of profit’ through competition, leading to the movement of capital into the most profitable spheres. The ‘general rate of profit’ is an inheritance from the classical economists (and one maintained by the marginalists), but it is not without explanatory significance. Its function in Marx is to explain the market dynamics of rent, interest and ‘merchant profit’ (commodity futures speculation) under capitalism, as distinct from pre-capitalist societies, where very different social dynamics affect all three phenomena (rent is customary and ‘grows out of the harvest’; interest is either illegal or heavily regulated by law; merchant profit is so unpredictable that merchants are dependent on the formation of specialist social groups involving mutual assistance, commonly identified by nationality or religion, such as Jews, Parsees, etc).

Marx worked up ‘prices of

production’ distinct from direct labour values, which are not actual *market* prices, but prices formed on the assumption that each capital receives the general rate of profit in proportion to capital advanced. In this way surplus value *created* in particular industries at very varying levels is *redistributed* among capitalists.

The Austrian-school author, Eugen Böhm-Bawerk, argued that this procedure involved Marx smuggling into his theory of labour value an implicit contribution of value from capital. Ladislaus Von Bortkiewicz introduced a more specific objection: namely that for consistency both inputs and outputs needed to be valued at ‘prices of production’. Mathematical solutions to this ‘problem’ have attained an impressive degree of obscurity. Carchedi argues for a variant of the ‘temporal single systems interpretation’ (TSSI), also supported by Andrew Kliman, Alan Freeman and others, with the difference of the emphasis on dialectic. The essence of the TSSI, as Carchedi presents it, is that inputs do not have to be revalued at the time of output, since what is sold is a different commodity from what is purchased; where there is a change in market values of inputs during production which affects output prices, this is also a form of redistribution of value between different commodities. Von Bortkiewicz, and hence also Marxist ‘simultaneist’ interpreters of the ‘transformation problem, have tacitly introduced into Marx Leon Walras’s general equilibrium and Say’s Law (that markets inherently clear); a point made by Alan Freeman in several articles.

There is an alternative approach to this problem, not addressed or critiqued by Carchedi, which is that argued by Immanuel Farjoun and Moshé Machover in *Laws of chaos* (London 1983) and followed by (for example) Paul Cockshott and others’ *Classical econophysics* (Oxford 2009). This is to deny the reality of the general rate of profit. If so, the ‘transformation problem’ disappears because the transformation procedure is redundant: surplus value is not, in fact, redistributed between capitals in proportion to capital advanced.

Kliman, interviewed by Nick Rogers in this paper, argued that Farjoun’s and Machover’s point is true but does not dispose of the argument that Marx was logically inconsistent, because the absence of a general rate of profit is merely contingent.<sup>6</sup> Carchedi does not cite Farjoun and Machover, but in effect gestures towards their point by writing in his argument mainly in terms of the *average* rate of profit rather than the *general* rate of profit.

I am not convinced that the general rate of profit is actually a wholly redundant argument. On the one hand, the case for it on the basis of movement of capital into the most profitable businesses is, I think, untenable. This is not only empirically because if there *were* an equilibrium outcome it would be a probabilistic distribution rather than an arithmetical mean (Farjoun’s and Machover’s point). It is also because assuming that, since capital tends to move into the most profitable businesses, theory should be constructed on the basis that it has done so sufficiently to produce a ‘general rate of profit’ is like assuming because entropy tends to a maximum that thermodynamics should be constructed on the initial assumption that it has already done so; or that since, in the long run, all organisms die, biology should be constructed on the initial assumption that all organisms are dead.

The general rate of profit is not fully redundant, however, because of the role it plays - as I indicated above - in accounting for capitalist market dynamics in relation to rent,

interest (and other financial profits) and ‘merchant profit’.

This point relates back to Heinrich’s objection to FRP theories discussed in the first part of this review. Heinrich’s basic point was that Engels chose to base *Capital* volume 3 on an 1865 manuscript which contained arguments Marx had in effect rejected in subsequent work; hence Marx’s researches in the middle and later 1870s and his *non*-publication of volumes 2 and 3. Part of the meaning of these researches is that Marx had in effect abandoned the scheme of the four-volume *Capital* and returned to the scheme of the *Critique of political economy*, as necessarily including *at least* land and consideration of the specificity of capitalism in relation to rent by comparison with pre-capitalist forms; that is, he recognised that the scheme of explanation of market rents, etc in the manuscript which became *Capital* volume 3, which is dependent on the general rate of profit and hence the transformation procedure, did not work.

My point here is not that the general rate of profit is not *logically conceivable*, nor to accept von Bortkiewicz’s ‘correction’ to Marx. It is that the argument of which the ‘transformation’ is part depends on a *hypothetical* general redistribution of surplus value, flowing from a ‘completion’ of the working out of competition, which would, if it were ever to occur, bring capitalist dynamics to an end. And this cannot be an explanation of the *actual* transition to ‘market rates of interest’ and ‘market rents’, etc, which occurs fairly early in the development of capitalism (in fact, shortly following from the formation of organised financial markets, originating in state deficit financing).

The TSSI authors, Carchedi here included, are nonetheless surely right to insist that Marx’s *Capital* is not a theory of capitalism as an equilibrium system, but as a *disequilibrium* system, staggering forwards through time from crisis to crisis. Carchedi concludes his section on the ‘transformation problem’ by linking this issue to that of his interpretation of dialectic. The ‘transformation’ involves transitions from *potential* value created in production to *realised* value in goods sold, and of the same goods back to *potential* value, as they are incorporated as inputs in the following production period. To dialectic, therefore, we now turn.

## Dialectic

Chapter 1, ‘Method’, argues for a *temporal* interpretation of Marx’s dialectic. The argument is buttressed in appendix 3, which argues that this concern with temporality is manifested in Marx’s *Mathematical manuscripts*.

Carchedi begins by limiting his approach. He will not follow Engels as to ‘dialectics of nature’, but makes claims limited to *social* reality. Further, he does not claim that his approach is applicable to all modes of production, but only that it is applicable to capitalism. And, finally, he is not engaged in Marx exegesis (though he quotes Marx at various points), but argues that his approach is to be supported for reasons of consistency and explanatory power (p2).

The starting point is empirical observation, though this is filtered through interpretive frameworks. The observed phenomena are the starting point, consisting of social relations and processes of change in unity-in-contradiction (p3). Social phenomena are always both realised (past) and potential (future possibilities). For example, in the case of the commodity, it is a *realised* product of human labour, but contains *potentially* social value which is realised only when it is sold (pp4-5). The realised and the potential have to be held in a ‘unity of identity and difference’: hence a

unity of opposites in the temporal dimension (pp6-8).

Related to this, social phenomena are always both determinant and determined (pp8-18). At pp8-11 Carchedi argues that humans attempt to develop their potentialities, but within the framework given by the class order, which is defined by the ‘ownership-relation’: to be understood not as juridical ownership, but as who has the power of decision as to what is to be produced, for whom and how; which, itself, is an outcome of the class struggle. At pp11-12 he argues for the ultimately determinant character of production relations, using quotations from the *Grundrisse*, but at the end of the day on the rather simple basis that only what has already been produced can be consumed; though the distribution may well determine what is produced in the next round of production. More generally, ‘only previously existing phenomena can determine the actualisation of other phenomena’ (p16). Thirdly, social phenomena are subject to constant movement and change (pp18-22). Because they are inherently contradictory, this movement is *tendential* rather than mechanical.

In section 3 of the chapter, Carchedi addresses dialectics of individuals and social phenomena. His key move here is to distinguish between concrete and abstract individuals - abstract individuals being individuals so far as they are members of some realised social group and as such are replaceable (pp22-25). The social phenomena are *potentially* present in the concrete individuals (and vice versa, concrete individual phenomena are potentially present in their social relations and processes); with an extensive set of corollaries (pp25-31).

Section 4, ‘Class analysis and the sociology of non-equilibrium’, draws out some implications: for example, that ‘social structure is not static but dynamic’ and that ‘reproduction is not equilibrium’ (both at p32). Carchedi also recommends the work of Resnick and Wolff in *New departures in Marxian theory* (Oxford 2006).

Section 5 addresses the relation of his arguments to Engels’s temporal dialectic in *Dialectics of nature*. While recognising similarities in treatment, Carchedi insists that he makes claims only about social reality, and objects that Engels’ attempt to ground dialectics in nature implicitly assumes the neutrality of the natural sciences, which Carchedi rejects (for reasons discussed in the first part of this review).

Section 6 offers an account of the relation between formal logic and dialectical logic. He argues that formal logic belongs only to the realm of the realised and excludes that of the potential. Dialectical logic admits contradiction, being a ‘contradiction between what has become and what can become, as contradictory to what has become’ (p41, emphasis removed). Formal logic, insofar as it rules out processes of change of this sort is ideological in the defence of the existing order; *but*, so far as we are dealing with the realm of the realised rather than the potential, dialectical logic must employ formal logic as an auxiliary method (pp43-44).

Section 7, ‘Induction, deduction and verification’, argues that reasoning begins with the real concrete, moving from it inductively in a process of abstraction, and from the abstract, forward to working up the concrete (quoting a celebrated passage from the *Grundrisse*). But, unlike induction in formal logic, the premises can be contradictory because reality is contradictory, and the result will therefore explain ‘the movement in its characteristic features rather than in all its aspects’ (p48). Verification is inextricably linked with class content: there are no neutral quantitative data

or methods, though data can be employed against the purposes for which they were created; as far as logical consistency is concerned, ‘whenever the rules of formal logic cannot decide among contradictory (elements of) theories (all of them internally logically consistent) it is the social, class-content that decides’ (p50, emphasis removed).

The idea of dialectic as addressing *temporal* problems of *qualitative* change, which is addressed by Carchedi’s approach in this chapter, is surely sound and of fundamental value. So, too, is the approach drawn from the difference between the *realised* and the *potential*. The fact that the argument is presented without Hegelianism, not as Marx-exegesis, but in terms of the explanatory value of the approach, is also an important strength of Carchedi’s treatment. This approach is a fundamental reason why the book should be widely read.

At the same time, I have already argued in the first part of this review that treating the ‘class content’ of rival theories as dispositive of their truth-value is problematic in relation to debates within the workers’ movement. This movement is not an *organic* whole, but one which is necessarily constituted - even at the level of trade unions! - by conscious agreement to cooperate for common ends among people who disagree with each other widely.

In addition, it seems to me that Carchedi’s effort to amputate the objectionable ‘Engelsisms’ of temporal dialectic both necessarily fails and is unhelpful to the case for this approach.

It necessarily fails because, however much Carchedi *says* that he is only making claims about the social world of capitalism, the fundamental claim about time, which is made by the idea of the realised and the potential, *inherently* applies at least to biology and to human history in general: so that if he were to claim that it only applies to social order under capitalism, he is obliged to show how it does *not* apply to these other domains.

It is unhelpful to the case for the reasons already given. The belief that capitalism tends towards its own end is at the very least *corroborated* by the evidence of historical materialism. The attempt to give a Marxist account which strips out this aspect of Marxism weakens the argument - and makes it *more* dependent on the unhelpful ‘class content’ argument.

It should be apparent, however, that I have found the book immensely stimulating to read. Though I am saying that it should be read critically, it should certainly be read ●

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## Notes

1. ‘What drives capital’s global crises?’ *Weekly Worker* May 23.
2. Eg, L Krader (ed) *The ethnological notebooks of Karl Marx* Assen 1972; H-P Harstick (ed) *Karl Marx über Formen vorkapitalistischer Produktion: vergleichende Studien zur Geschichte des Grundeigentums, 1879-80*, Frankfurt 1977.
3. Eg, S Timpanaro *On materialism* London 1975, chapter 3, especially p77; H Draper *Karl Marx’s theory of revolution* Vol 1: *The state and bureaucracy* part 1, New York 1977, pp23-26.
4. I put on one side here the important fact that the Marxist critique of political economy predicts the regular return of crisis, which orthodox marginalist accounts do not, for two reasons. First, because Schumpeter predicted the regular return of crisis, and the Austrian version of marginalism predicts the regular return of crisis as long as the state monopoly of money-issuance continues, which is for all practical purposes the same thing (in reality, as the early 19th century US shows, abolishing state-monopoly money and the central bank produces an increased frequency and severity of crises). Second, because Marxists (meaning here not merely Marxist left groups, but also both Marx himself and professional Marxist economists) have shown a marked tendency to over-predict crisis.
5. ‘Equilibrium in the jungle’ *Economic Journal* July 2007, pp883-96.
6. ‘Crisis, theory and politics’ *Weekly Worker* September 27 2012.



## PCS

# Dishonest debates

Tina Becker reports from the May 21-23 conference of the Public and Commercial Services Union

The Public and Commercial Services Union is in big trouble. Many of the early austerity measures forced through by the Con-Dem government have been aimed at public sector workers. The aim was to reduce the number of civil servants by 20% - and they are not far off achieving it. Fourteen percent of civil service jobs - 72,400 posts - have been cut since the coalition was elected, pay has been frozen, pension contributions increased, the retirement age raised and terms and conditions attacked. Accordingly, PCS membership has shrunk by almost 12,000 in the 12 months to September 2012 and now stands at just below 263,000.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, the government has been attacking the facility time for trade union representatives. More people are being sacked on more spurious grounds - and union reps have less time to fight back. This also affected this year's conference: no longer are delegates from several government departments allowed special leave to attend; rather, they have to take annual leave. The group conference of the department for work and pensions (DWP), in which about 30% of the delegates are employed, was markedly smaller than last year. There were a number of branches that were unable to arrange for any of their elected delegates to attend because of the new restrictions, which may well be introduced to all departments from 2014.

The union's fightback against these attacks has been hampered by the hesitancy of other unions. Last year's conference committed the PCS to fight - but only if, for example, Unite and the National Union of Teachers were willing to participate in joint action. However, those soon proved resistant to pressure and so the PCS decided to go it alone after all: there has been short-term "rolling strike action" by various departments, which is aimed at "disrupting the employer's activities". In some workplaces, PCS members walked out for an hour or two. This tactic will continue in the foreseeable future, "because it doesn't look as if the TUC will call a general strike any time soon", as PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka put it. There will be localised action throughout the year. Plus, starting on Monday June 3, the DWP and HM Revenue and Customs will call out members in two regions (about half the union's membership) for a day each. At the end of June, it looks like there will be localised, joint action with the NUT.

But a long-term all-out strike by PCS that could actually put pressure on the government seems pretty unrealistic for a number of reasons, mainly financial. For example, the union does not have a strike fund, so members are not compensated

for loss of wages. Last year, conference overwhelmingly rejected a motion to set up even a voluntary strike levy.

However, this year Mark Serwotka simply announced that the national executive committee would look into setting up a strike fund. "Not everybody in the union likes it, but I have come to the conclusion that it is necessary in order to organise effectively." Clearly, some very painful lessons have been learnt in the last 12 months. It is just a shame that rather than openly discussing the mistakes that have been made, every conference feels like a totally new, unconnected event. Some of the motions seemed to want to skirt around difficult questions.

## Merger with Unite

Take the first big debate at conference, which was "about forming a closer working relationship with Unite", as Serwotka put it. Everybody in the hall knew that, in reality, this was about the merger of the two unions. The PCS is in dire financial trouble - chiefly because of the fall in membership the union incurred "net liabilities of £3.2 million" in the 12 months to December 2012, compared to "net assets at December 2011 of £687,000".<sup>2</sup>

It does not help that a whopping 57% of the union's total outgoings of £29.9 million was spent on employment - that means £17 million paid to the 271 PCS employees, or just over £70,500 per staff member (which includes pensions, national insurance contributions, etc). By comparison, the even smaller Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers Union RMT spends 'just' 40% of its income on its employees. A couple of PCS employees are on pay band 7, the maximum of which is £89,847. Still, a rather tame motion that sought to make sure that "full-time officer pay rates in PCS are much closer to the pay received by the majority of PCS members" was heavily defeated.

The union leadership has taken some measures to counter the effect of the loss of membership, but things could easily get worse. No wonder then that rumours of a merger with the mighty Unite union have been doing the rounds for a few years.

The formulation in the actual motion was curiously dishonest, however. After listing reason after reason why a merger would be a good idea, we find the following crucial sentence: "If approached by Unite, the NEC is authorised to open discussions on a merger." In other words, the PCS would not take an active role in pursuing the merger.

Clearly, this dishonest formulation was supposed to win over the very

sceptical membership. And opposition to a merger is huge, despite the obvious advantages of building a bigger union. "With almost two million members in Unite, this would in reality be a takeover, not a merger," said one delegate. The PCS is, on the whole, more democratic and membership-driven. Unite has, for example, just closed dozens of area branches without consulting the members, as a furious conference delegate pointed out.

And there is, of course, the elephant in the room: the Labour Party. Unite is affiliated to it; PCS is not. The motion only talked about the "Tory/Lib Dem government's brutal and damaging cuts programme". One delegate asked: "Does that mean we would not oppose such attacks if they came from a Labour government?" A couple of others raised the possibility that the Socialist Party in England and Wales, which effectively runs the union through its Left Unity platform, supported Len McCluskey over Jerry Hicks in the recent Unite elections so as "to not endanger the merger". It sounds plausible. Clearly, SPEW comrades are hoping that, in return for pushing the merger forward, they will keep most of their jobs and at least some of their leadership positions. We are reliably told that the PCS employs 15 members of the Socialist Party.

Rather than discussing the issue of the Labour Party properly, supporter after supporter of the NEC position merely insisted that delegates should read the motion properly, as it "does not tie us to a merger". Coming back to defend the motion, Mark Serwotka was the only one who at least made an effort to address some of the concerns. "We have real difficulties on our own, because we are a lone voice fighting against the attacks", he said, somewhat ignoring the fact that Unite is hardly putting up a huge fight. "But if the price paid was affiliation to Labour, if our members had to pay into the political fund, we would not go ahead," he promised. But things change quickly and so do the principles of trade union leaders. In the end, the vote was too close to call and a card vote had to be taken: 109,620 voted in favour, 100,493 against.

For a union that is so proud of its fighting and political edge, it is curious that, when it comes to UK politics, it has been somewhat lost in the wilderness (though it has to be said that Labour MP John McDonnell has done sterling work in the PCS parliamentary group).

In 2005, PCS voted to establish a "political fund" that would allow it to intervene in "and between" elections. I n

2007 it first established a 'check list' of "our key industrial issues" and put them to parliamentary candidates, publishing their answers online. In a ballot in June 2012, members endorsed the proposal that the union "has the authority to stand or support candidates in elections, in exceptional circumstances, where it would help our campaigns to save jobs, stop office closures and defend public services."<sup>3</sup>

Not necessarily a bad political strategy. But the real problem is that, in reality, SPEW still wants to stick with the stillborn Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition.

## Scottish referendum

Similarly dishonest was the only other big debate at conference: what position, if any, should the PCS take in the Scottish referendum in the autumn of 2014?

The NEC had put forward a motion that argued pretty openly in favour of independence. It sought conference's approval, for example, to "highlight the potential impact of the proposed independence model upon the employment conditions of members in Scotland", to "promote a Scottish alternative vision of investing in public services" and "promoting a Scotland which improves workers' rights, trade union freedoms, social justice and equalities".<sup>4</sup>

This position would have been totally in line with the view of SPEW, which supports a 'yes' vote, "while campaigning for an independent socialist Scotland as the only viable solution to the fundamental issues facing the working class and young people."<sup>5</sup>

However, in the run-up to conference it became clear that opposition to a 'yes' was stronger than anticipated, with various branches submitting motions to commit the PCS either not to take a position at all or to call for a 'no' (the latter being pushed by the Alliance for Workers' Liberty).

So the NEC decided, on rather spurious grounds, to withdraw its original submission in favour of on "emergency motion", which turned out to be far more neutral on the issue of independence. It did, however, call for a special conference of Scottish branches, which would make a recommendation to the PCS nationally on "whether the PCS should adopt a stance for or against independence". A cop-out, in other words.

Nevertheless, many delegates were not so easily fooled and quite rightly attacked the movers (rather than the mealy-mouthed motion) for their illusions in the prospect of socialism in Scotland. "There is nothing naturally socialist about people in Scotland," one delegate said. Another pointed out that the referendum "will not ask if you're in favour of a socialist Scotland; it will ask if you're in favour of an independent Scotland on capitalist terms". AWL member Charlie McDonald argued against leaving it to PCS members in Scotland to take the decision, "which will affect the other 90% of PCS members. This is about breaking up the historically constituted working class in Britain". Dave Vincent correctly asked: "Have we learned nothing from Stalinism? You can't have socialism in one country. Scottish and English workers have more in common with each other than Scottish workers and Scottish bosses."

But support for the motion was equally vocal. A delegate from Scotland furiously told conference: "I won't be patronised by members from England on this question." Another one demanded that "the PCS must put internationalism at the heart of the pro-independence debate". Sounds like a contradiction to me. Another PCS member thought it outrageous that people in England should tell Scots what to do. And, anyway, Scottish nationalists are not like nasty British nationalists: "Scottish nationalists include everybody who lives in Scotland." After a long, fractious debate, the motion was won with about two thirds of delegates voting for it.

This might be one of the last political issues that the PCS will be campaigning on before it becomes part of the much larger Unite union. Not a great heritage ●

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## Notes

1. National organising strategy - PCS brochure released at the 2013 annual conference.
2. PCS finance report 2013: [www.pcs.org.uk/en/resources/finance/index.cfm](http://www.pcs.org.uk/en/resources/finance/index.cfm).
3. [www.pcs.org.uk/en/campaigns/political-campaign-ballot/branch-briefing-members-vote-yes-for-political-campaigning-cfm](http://www.pcs.org.uk/en/campaigns/political-campaign-ballot/branch-briefing-members-vote-yes-for-political-campaigning-cfm).
4. Motion A86.
5. [www.socialistpartyscotland.org.uk/news-a-analysis/scottish-politics/397-yes-scotland-independence-referendum-campaign-launched](http://www.socialistpartyscotland.org.uk/news-a-analysis/scottish-politics/397-yes-scotland-independence-referendum-campaign-launched).





## PORNOGRAPHY

# A rounded view of sexuality

Do children need to be protected from pornography? Christina Black looks at the latest official report

**B**egin with a study into pornography, add a deputy children's commissioner and stir with the bourgeois media to achieve the perfect recipe for moral panic and uninformed hysteria. That is exactly what we can see in the reaction to the report led by the University of Middlesex, commissioned by the Office of the Children's Commissioner, launched on May 24.

The report has four essential findings:<sup>1</sup>

- "Children and young people's exposure and access to pornography occurs both on and offline, but in recent years the most common method of access is via internet-enabled technology" - hardly surprising, given the ease of access to free sites and internet-ready mobile devices.
- "Exposure and access to pornography increases with age" - one would assume that is natural and has always been the case.
- "Accidental exposure to pornography is more prevalent than deliberate access" - to an extent that will also always have been true, but now that is more so, thanks to ease of access through the internet.
- "There are gender differences in exposure and access to pornography, with boys more likely to be exposed to pornography than girls" - a societal factor that I shall deal with later on, though it ought to be noted that adult women are increasingly searching for porn online.

As the BBC notes, "In an age when 'extremely violent and sadistic imagery is two clicks away' school sex education is struggling to keep pace, a study suggests."<sup>2</sup> Leaving aside, for now, the idea that extreme sadism is merely two mouse clicks away (it is, if you type in "extreme hardcore S&M" and your idea of extreme sadism is anal fisting or mild Japanese bondage vignettes - yes, I did just check). It is also probably fair to say that sex education in schools has been struggling to keep pace with the reality of young people's sexual experiences for - well - ever.

"Pornography can distort children's attitudes to sex, said deputy children's commissioner Sue Berelowitz."<sup>3</sup> This is, of course, the mantra of the anti-porn left and right. It is probably true that it *can* distort the attitudes of children, as well as young people and adults, but, one wonders, to what extent *does* it? Most people, including children, have enough savvy to differentiate between reality and fantasy. While individuals may enjoy action movies or play *Call of Duty*, we know that these are fictional scenarios that we engage with, in the former passively and in the latter more actively.

In other words, despite my recent Google search noted above, I do not expect my next sexual encounter to be with two blokes, a very attractive Japanese woman, a bondage device and a rather unusual looking vibrator. In the same way, neither would you expect a teenager who has been playing an online 'first person shoot 'em up' game the previous night turn up to school the next day and start gunning people down (by and large). That is not to say that there are not some extreme cases where individuals cannot fully distinguish between fantasy and reality, which can lead to acts of violence, but that is less the fault of Hollywood, computer games and pornography than it is the deeply alienating society we live in.

### Charges

Aside from the 'Pornography is the theory, rape the practice' view, briefly dealt with above, there are various



Fantasy and reality

other charges levelled at the porn industry, when discussed in relation to young people's sexuality. A common complaint is that pornography skews the expectations that young boys hold from their girlfriends in the bedroom (we have all heard the apocryphal tale of the teenage girl being pressured into having anal sex because her boyfriend watches porn online). This view presupposes heterosexual encounters, boys doing all the pressuring and all the watching of porn and, for that matter, a bedroom (whatever happened to romance in the local park?). This is not necessarily representative of what actually goes on when young people experiment sexually.

The idea that porn is responsible for heightened expectations of sex is also questionable - is the implication that we should strive to make sex as mediocre an experience as possible? And, again, we have to go back to the idea that people (including teenagers) can, by and large, differentiate between fantasy and reality. As female porn director (and former Liberal Democrat candidate for Gravesham) Anna Arrowsmith (pseudonym Anna Span) pointed out in an April 23 Intelligence Squared debate entitled 'Is pornography good for us?',<sup>4</sup> it is the equivalent of blaming comedy directors for the fact that that our real lives are not as funny as a TV comedy show.

Another ill-informed gripe is that pornography portrays an unrealistic view of the female body (incidentally, one can rest assured it also portrays an unrealistic view of the male anatomy in certain respects, though this rarely gets a mention). This view tends to be held by people who have never watched porn or at least have never watched porn since the early 1990s. The days of the blonde, leggy, busty bimbo are no more (unless you type that into a search engine - in which case, go ahead and enjoy your vanilla flavoured porn).

The truth is that since the rise of the internet there is a phenomenal amount of porn out there representing all body shapes, ethnicities and practices (isn't it funny how the anti-porn lobby tends to view pornography as both the hotel

room generic pay-per-view variety and at the same time 'extremely violent and sadistic'?). The truth is, it is all out there: skinny, fat, tall, short amputee, scarred, hairy ... Again as Anna Arrowsmith points out, think of what aspect of your body you like least, type it into a search engine, followed by the word 'porn' and see how many people are into exactly that. Young people are more likely to get the impression that the world is full of skinny, white, blonde people with sparkly teeth and pert breasts from American sit-coms than they are from internet porn.

The report warns that parents may not be fully aware of the nature of what their children are seeing: "Some types of online porn are 'very different' to what today's parents may have seen as children, said Ms Berelowitz."<sup>5</sup> As previously discussed, the porn freely available online differs greatly to the porn of the early 90s and before (though I do have a certain romantic nostalgia for the copies of *The Razzle* left in the bushes by the porn fairies). The idea that nowadays it is all male-dominated, extreme violence is a far cry from reality. Just as there are any number of porn genres out there, there are also diverse ways these are consumed: eg, fantasies or fetishes to spice up a relationship. In other words, it is not the preserve of the dodgy old man in a long trench coat, as some politicians and journalists would have us believe.

The report reckons that "There is a correlation between children and young people who use pornography and 'risky behaviours', such as anal sex, sex with multiple partners and using alcohol and other drugs during sex."<sup>6</sup> This represents a very conservative view of what is deemed 'risky behaviour', as opposed to what others would consider just good fun or, in some cases, perfectly normal. For example, the above definition would suggest that a gay, male couple having a glass of wine and retiring to the bedroom should be classed 'risky behaviour' on two counts.

The report finds that more men and boys are more likely to access

porn than women and girls. "Boys and young men generally view pornography more positively and state that they view it primarily out of curiosity, while girls and young women generally report that it is unwelcome and socially distasteful."<sup>7</sup> This suggests to me that young women and girls are expected by society to be more sexually repressed, and therefore purport to find such things "distasteful" rather than admitting to being "curious" like their male counterparts - surely curiosity is a more natural reaction, especially for those beginning to develop sexually? These responses help to back up the anti-porn agenda (one might argue, an agenda supported by the people who had the report commissioned in the first place) that young girls are the victims of porn culture.

### Education

One potentially positive feature to come from this report is that it urges the department for education to ensure that "all schools", including private schools, faith schools, colleges and academies, "deliver effective relationship and sex education". Sexual Health and Relationships Education (SHRE) is incredibly inconsistent from school to school, in terms of content and quality - in faith schools it will tend to promote the teachings of the particular religion on homosexuality, abortion, etc. Currently in England and Wales only maintained secondary schools are obliged to deliver sex education. Primary, independent, free and faith schools are not. In Scotland all schools must deliver sex education (though the Catholic schools are given a pope-friendly version) and the student's wishes come before those of the parent, should the parent want their child withdrawn.

The report provoked the usual stupid screeching noises from the *Daily Mail*, which in its own moral-crusading way, aimed at 'protecting young people' from the 'evils' of sex education, ran with the headline, "Teachers should give lessons in pornography and tell pupils 'it's not

all bad', experts say"<sup>8</sup> - misleading, to say the least. And then there are the 'family values' types, who would have us believe that mandatory sex education across all schools covering pornography as a curricular issue translates as showing five-year-olds hard-core gonzo on a Monday morning. There will also be complaints from the religious right, when parents, whose reactionary views on women, abortion, homosexuality, etc are all too often pandered to by schools, no longer have the right to opt their children out of sex education. Not to mention rightwing campaign groups such as Mothers at Home Matter, who wish to 'protect' children from sex education ...<sup>9</sup>

Even within the National Curriculum in England and Wales, the quality of SHRE is often dreadful. The focus tends to be on the negative aspects of sex, such as sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancy and abortion. It mostly deals with heterosexuality, promotes monogamous relationships as the only 'correct' forum for sex, makes moral judgments and advises young people to put off having sex until they are older. The idea that sex is pleasurable and fun does not really come into it - let alone the idea that it does not have to be a deep and meaningful act between two people (sufficiently over the age of consent) who 'love each other very much'. No wonder young people consider the sex education they are subjected to in school irrelevant.

Making the curriculum more relevant to young people's lives and including pornography, as the report urges, might mean something different to Ms Berelowitz than it would to young people in schools. For her, it is all about building "healthy relationships" and "teaching children about the dangers of pornography".<sup>10</sup> Of course, there is the obligatory mention of teaching children and young people how to stay safe online. Incidentally, this is already taught as part of the Personal, Social and Health Education curriculum and has much more relevance to using social media, where people actively engage in chatting with and posting images/videos to other users than it does to porn sites, where the user is a consumer rather than an active participant.

Young people should have interesting and relevant sex education. They are entitled to a rounded view of human sexuality. Of course, they must be made aware of issues surrounding sexual abuse and rape. They need to know about safe sex practices and be empowered to give consent or not. But not everything to do with sex should be presented as a negative (especially when it pertains to teenagers). After all, if it was so terrible we would not do it (let alone think about it every seven seconds, as popular mythology would have it). Young people should be confident when discussing sex, not feel obliged to conform to the moral values imposed by the national curriculum, the faith school - or the deputy children's commissioner ●

### Notes

1. www.mdx.ac.uk/aboutus/news-events/news/child-protection.aspx.
2. www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-22643072.
3. Ibid.
4. www.intelligencesquared.com/events/pornography-is-good-for-us.
5. www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-22643072.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. *Daily Mail* April 26.
9. *The Daily Telegraph* May 23.
10. www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-22643072.



## DEBATE

# Churchill and the Jewish question

Paul Flowers replies to Eddie Ford

Writing in these pages a few weeks back, Eddie Ford made what should be for leftwingers the axiomatic point that Winston Churchill “was without doubt the most virulently anti-working class representative of the British high establishment in the 20th century *bar none*”;<sup>1</sup> and proceeded to demonstrate just how reactionary he was in both his ideas and practice.

However, Ford is wrong when he states that Churchill “was an anti-Semite”. His attitude towards Jews was rather more complex.

Churchill was a life-long believer in race theory and in the idea of the inherent superiority of white people. His deprecatory attitude towards members of what he considered to be inferior races has been well documented, and it was central to his strongly held belief in British imperialism and his opposition to even the slightest concessions to home rule within the colonies. His last recorded political statement was to criticise Harold Macmillan’s ‘Winds of change’ speech, saying that this Conservative prime minister should not have gone to Africa, “encouraging the black man”.<sup>2</sup>

It is indisputable that Churchill considered ‘International Jews’ such as Rosa Luxemburg, Béla Kun, Karl Radek, Grigory Zinoviev and - in particular - Leon Trotsky as the most dangerous threat to the world as he knew it. His portrayal of Trotsky, written in 1929 - that is, after his expulsion from the Soviet Union - and revised and sharpened for his collection, *Great contemporaries* of 1937, was unbelievably vicious, compared to his almost solicitous treatment of Paul Hindenburg, Kaiser Wilhelm II and even Adolf Hitler.<sup>3</sup> As Ford points out, Churchill’s descriptions of Jews in the revolutionary movement were highly reminiscent of those of outright anti-Semites - he openly referred to the Bolsheviks as “these Jew commissars” with their aim of “a worldwide communistic state under Jewish domination”<sup>4</sup> - but this does not mean that his attitude towards non-revolutionary Jews was the same.

## Unusual prejudice

Anti-Semitism is an unusual racial prejudice because it is based not upon a sense of superiority towards an ethnic group that is deemed as inferior, but rather upon a sense of fear towards an ethnic group that in certain ways is seen as superior. Alongside the general stereotypes of Jews as tightly ethnocentric, unduly ambitious and obsessed with wealth, milder forms of anti-Semitism present Jews as sharp businessmen and lawyers or clever at monopolising certain professions, whilst the most extreme forms present them as a secretive cabal using their sinister powers in order to achieve global dominance and the enslavement of the gentile world.

The presence of Jews in radical movements, just as with their presence, if usually exaggerated by anti-Semites, in various other fields of modern society, is not explained by a socio-economic analysis that situates the position of Jews as an ethnic group within the complexities of world history, but by a prejudice that assumes that this small group is somehow blessed with special immanent powers denied to the rest of humanity. Hitler’s inclusion of Jews within his category of *Untermenschen* sits incongruously with his dread fear of what he saw as their almost magical powers of manipulation.<sup>5</sup>

In his 1920 article, ‘Zionism versus Bolshevism: a struggle for the soul of the Jewish people’, Churchill referred to “the Jews” as “beyond all



Churchill and Hitler: anti-Bolshevism

question the most formidable and the most remarkable race which has ever appeared in the world”.<sup>6</sup> This was a key passage, and was one that underpinned both his anti-Semitic stance towards Jews in the revolutionary movement, and his very appreciative - philo-Semitic - stance towards Jews who eschewed such a viewpoint. Churchill believed that they were literally a race apart, but, although his view of Jews within society rested upon the same analysis by which anti-Semites base their hostility to them - hence the tell-tale use of the definite article in “*the Jews*” - he nevertheless considered that a Jew who was loyal to and identified with the country in which he lived was by dint of both his patriotism and his innate qualities an extremely valuable citizen.

So Churchill’s attitude towards Jews can best be described as a combination of philo-Semitism and anti-Semitism, depending upon the specific political outlook of any Jew when considered as an individual. To paraphrase a popular saying, ‘When they were good, they were very, very good; when they were bad, they were deadly.’ He had no problem with ‘good’ ‘national Jews’, as he considered that their innate talents were harnessed to the wellbeing of the nation,<sup>7</sup> and historically he felt that Judaism had done much to influence the Christian ethical framework which he so appreciated. On the other hand, ‘bad’ ‘international Jews’ were a scourge and a mortal danger to civilisation - and Trotsky represented in its most concentrated form the ‘bad’ Jew, the member of “this same astounding race” who put his innate talents at the service of revolution.

Whilst he was a firm believer in race theory, for Churchill, although it is highly unlikely that he personally recognised it, the ultimate determining factor in politics was the question of *ideas* and in particular ideas that expressed *class interests*, and not the biological one of race. For a believer in the “world Jewish conspiracy”, communism is a secondary factor, one of the ploys by which the ‘elders of Zion’ bamboozle and manipulate the gullible gentile world in their quest for supreme power. For Churchill, communism is an idea - and after 1917 a reality - was his principal enemy; the “international Jew” was by dint of his immanent qualities the most adept proponent of the theory and now the practice of communism: he was a dangerous adversary and

one to be fought relentlessly, but what ultimately made him so dangerous in Churchill’s eyes were the *ideas* of class struggle and workers’ revolution which motivated him.

Churchill therefore considered that Trotsky personified a deadly, *class-based* threat to the capitalist system even after he had been removed from the leadership of the Soviet Communist Party and the Communist International and had been unceremoniously turfed out of the Soviet Union. It was this realisation that encouraged Churchill to write and subsequently to beef up his florid attack upon the by-now exiled Bolshevik leader.<sup>8</sup>

## Usefulness of Zionism

Churchill’s article, ‘Zionism versus Bolshevism’, appeared at a time when anti-Semitism was on the rise across much of the world. In Britain during World War I, Jews had often been accused of making a fortune from government contracts, and had sometimes been portrayed as German agents (in Germany, Jews were often seen as pro-Entente). Rightwing newspapers, in particular the *Morning Post*, and magazines regaled their readers with a stream of anti-Semitic stories about the Soviet regime. The appearance of Churchill’s article coincided practically to the month with the first publication in Britain of *The learned protocols of the elders of Zion*, and the lurid assertions about the “world Jewish conspiracy” in this notorious forgery and other inflammatory anti-Jewish tracts were often taken seriously in the mainstream press of the day.

Although Churchill’s diatribes against “international Jews” were practically indistinguishable from those of heavy-duty anti-Semites - he even cited as a reliable authority on revolutions by the conspiracy crackpot and future British fascist member, Nesta Webster - and almost certainly gave credibility to them on account of his weighty reputation and his adherence to race theory, his article can actually be seen as an attempt, if a rather ham-fisted one, to counter the tide of anti-Jewish sentiments. He implored “national Jews” to “come forward on every occasion” and make a stand against Bolshevism. “In this way,” he continued, “they will be able to vindicate the honour of the Jewish name and make it clear to all the world

that the Bolshevik movement is not a Jewish movement, but is repudiated vehemently by the great mass of the Jewish race.” The fundamental battle was not the anti-Semites’ clamorous defence of the gentile world against the “world Jewish conspiracy”, but a political struggle against communism, in which, he hoped, a good number of Jews could be persuaded to take the anti-communist side. For Churchill, therefore, an essential part of the fight against Bolshevism was the “struggle for the soul of the Jewish people”.

This, however, required “positive and practicable” ideas and activities, and Churchill was an enthusiastic supporter of Zionism and of the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. He viewed Zionism as useful both as a means of diverting Jews away from revolutionary ideas through its promotion of “a national idea of a commanding character”, and as a means of defending British imperial interests, stating that “a Jewish state under the protection of the British crown ... would be especially in harmony with the truest interests of the British empire”. It can be seen here that Churchill did not suggest that the rise of Zionism might result in the development of a ‘dual loyalty’ amongst Jews in Britain, or, to put it another way, he foresaw no conflict of interests developing between the British empire and a Jewish state in Palestine. This too marked him off from the anti-Semites, for whom the question of ‘dual loyalty’ amongst Zionists was a matter of considerable concern.<sup>9</sup>

Not surprisingly, Zionist commentators have often viewed Churchill as a great ‘friend of the Jews’, although this has required some selective amnesia to get around his use of anti-Semitic language in his descriptions of Jewish communists and his enthusiastic endorsement of race theory - a dogma which helped to propel Hitler’s movement and underpinned the wartime holocaust and other manifestations of Nazi inhumanity during the 20th century.<sup>10</sup>

## Defender of capitalism

Although the fruitcake ends of fascism and Islamism view Churchill as a ‘tool of the Jews’, just as many Zionist writers lavish fulsome praise upon him for his philo-Semitism and support for Zionism, it is important to remember

that Churchill’s concern for Jews had its limits.

During the Russian civil war, Churchill was the foremost advocate of military action to overthrow the Soviet regime, and he demanded that the British government give full support to the counterrevolutionary Whites. He was, however, dismayed at the Whites’ widespread anti-Jewish pogroms, and he wrote discreetly to White general Anton Denikin, asking him to put a stop to them. Hardly surprisingly, nothing came of it. The pogroms continued apace, hundreds of thousands of Jews were killed, injured or driven from their homes, yet Churchill carried on publicly championing the counterrevolutionaries. The overthrow of the Soviet regime was his main priority; the victims of the atrocities committed by his allies could be quietly forgotten.

It is important also to remember that Churchill’s attitude towards Zionism was conditional, and was based fundamentally upon his main concern: the welfare of the British empire. When his friend, Lord Moyne, was assassinated in Palestine in 1944 by Zionist terrorists, Churchill thundered in parliament against this “set of gangsters worthy of Nazi Germany”.<sup>11</sup>

Churchill’s philo-Semitism, his support for Zionism and his belief in some mythical Jewish essence or qualities were certainly real, but they were all subordinated to his primary political objectives of defending the British empire against external rivals and internal opposition and protecting the British bourgeoisie from working class militancy, and without doubt would have been put to one side had the requirements of British capitalism

demanded it •

## Notes

1. *Weekly Worker* May 2.
2. Cited in C Ponting *Churchill* London 1994, p808.
3. W Churchill, ‘Trotsky: the ogre of Europe’ *Nash’s Pall Mall Magazine* December 1929; revised version, ‘Leon Trotsky, alias Bronstein’ *Great contemporaries* London 1937, pp197-205.
4. Cited in C Ponting *op cit* p230.
5. Thus in *Mein Kampf* Hitler raged at ‘the Jews’ for ruining Germany’s chances of victory in World War I, fulminating that “if at the beginning of the war and during the war 12 or 15 thousand of these Hebrew corrupters of the people had been held under poison gas ... the sacrifice of millions at the front would not have been in vain” (cited in R Black *Fascism in Germany* London 1975, p243).
6. W Churchill, ‘Zionism versus Bolshevism: a struggle for the soul of the Jewish people’ *Illustrated Sunday Herald* February 8 1920, in L Brenner (ed) *51 documents: Zionist collaboration with the Nazis* Fort Lee 2002, pp23-28.
7. *Pace* Ford, I do not believe that Churchill viewed Jews as “parasitical finance capitalists”, nor that he distrusted them *in toto*. In the article cited here, he *praised* the Jewish bankers and industrialists of the tsarist period for having “promoted the development of Russia’s economic resources”.
8. Although when the first Moscow trial took place in 1936, Churchill was concerned that the accused “were nearly all Jews” and he felt that “the nationalist elements represented by Stalin” were “developing the same prejudices” against Jews that were becoming “so painfully evident in Germany”, the balance sheet was largely favourable: “Clearly Soviet Russia has moved decidedly away from communism. This is a lurch to the right. The throne of a world revolution which animated the Trotskyist is cracked, if not broken ... Stalin has now come to represent Russian nationalism in somewhat threadbare communist trappings” (W Churchill *Step by step 1936-1939* London 1939, pp59-61, 70-73).
9. Even as one prominent British fascist, recoiling at the Nazis’ anti-Jewish policies in the aftermath of the Kristallnacht state pogrom, considered that Jews in Britain should enjoy full civil rights, he emphasised that this did not include Jews who were Zionists or communists, whom he felt could not be loyal British citizens. See F Yeats-Brown *European Jungle* London 1939, pp186ff.
10. See, for example, the obituaries of Churchill in the *Jewish Chronicle* (January 29 and February 5 1965); and the summary of his politics by his official biographer and staunch Zionist, Martin Gilbert, in *Churchill’s political philosophy* (Oxford 1981).
11. Cited in C Ponting *op cit* p701.



## POLEMIC



Was Lenin an anti-worker intellectual?

# Illusion is the first of all pleasures

**Tim Nelson** of the International Socialist Network calls for a broad party in which Marxists fight to build a revolutionary movement from the bottom up

I would like to start by welcoming the article by Ben Lewis,<sup>1</sup> written in response to mine and Paris Thompson's article about Left Unity.<sup>2</sup> I hope that the debate can continue in a fraternal manner. However, there are a number of straw-men in the piece that Lewis has constructed, which need to be identified. I also think that the manner of the differences in approach between us and Lewis needs clarifying.

To begin with, Lewis accuses us of seeming to "flit back and forth" between the need to build a revolutionary organisation and a broad party of the left. This argument is only valid if the author maintains that these projects, rather than being two separate but linked tasks, are mutually exclusive. Seemingly they can be. A revolutionary organisation, by its very definition, is only made up of those who agree with us Marxists that the only way to achieve socialism is through revolutionary means. A broad party, on the other hand, includes in its ranks all those who wish to bring about the socialist transformation of society, but some may believe this could be brought about through reformist means.

If, however, we recognise that workers' consciousness under capitalism is contradictory, and that it is only by participating in the class struggle that workers will be able to develop revolutionary consciousness, then the role of revolutionaries in such a party can become clearer. Their role is to actively engage in the struggle against capitalism alongside those who are involved, while at the same time arguing for revolutionary methods and ideas.

Lewis seems to fall into the classic 'Leninist' trap of believing

that revolutionary consciousness can be brought to the masses from the outside. A common theme of dogmatic Leninism is the idea that workers on their own cannot develop revolutionary ideas, and it is the role of Marxist intellectuals to enlighten them. He is right that we "hide the left for producing abstract propaganda", not because theoretical debates are not valuable to the communist movement, but if as revolutionaries we limit ourselves to this we will fail to relate to the class. By involving ourselves in Left Unity we aim to increase the audience for revolutionary ideas, while at the same time arguing for the most radical action against capitalism, and building a mass organisation capable of confronting capital.

Secondly, Lewis, whether through accident or design, conflates our tactical method of building a broad party, with the idea that such a party could "bring about the socialist transformation of society". This is elitist nonsense. No party, sect or union is capable of bringing about the socialist transformation of society. In this, the International Socialists stand firmly in the Marxist tradition of the self-emancipation of the working class. It is the workers themselves who are the vehicle for the socialist transformation of society. By arguing for a broad party that includes all those who wish to bring this transformation about, we are simply arguing that such a tactic is a practical step revolutionaries should make at this time in order to achieve that goal.

The role of revolutionaries is, at every point in the struggle, to aim to encourage the greatest level of self-activity of the working class in confronting capitalism.

In doing so, the working class develops its own organisations, and begins to recognise its own agency. This cannot be achieved from the "top down", as Lewis argues. If Left Unity provides a vehicle for revolutionaries to involve themselves in the day-to-day struggle against capitalism, and at the same time provides a forum revolutionaries can use the experiences to said struggle and encourage others to reach revolutionary conclusions, then it is essential that they are involved.

After conflating an organisation to be used to confront capitalism and spread socialist ideas with an agency capable of bringing about socialism, Lewis goes on to perform another sleight of hand. He points out that we refer to the Labour Party as a social democratic organisation which continues to have roots in the working class, then questions why we want to build another. This would be a reasonable question if we had made such a case, but we did not. Lewis's proof of this ambition is the involvement of reformists in the leadership of Left Unity.

Firstly, as the author recognises elsewhere in the article, we used the formulation "class struggle organisation" to describe our ambition for Left Unity, not 'social democratic party'. Secondly, as the author also recognises, we describe social democratic parties, and the Labour Party specifically, as "capitalist workers parties", in that their base is in the working class, but their programme, actions and leadership are capitalist. This is the polar opposite of a class struggle organisation. Labour is not a party of class struggle, but one of class collaboration. It is the political expression of the trade union

bureaucracy, in that it seeks to mediate between boss and worker, while ultimately siding with the boss because its very existence relies upon the continuation of the capitalist system. A class struggle organisation, by definition, is a party that aims to oppose capitalism, and support the workers in doing so.

Ultimately, what differentiates Lewis's position from ours is that he fails to recognise the ability of the working class to liberate itself. It is not the role of revolutionaries to be the vanguard of the working class, but to *relate* to the vanguard - those who are confronting capitalism and developing socialist ideas as a result. The problem of organisation is therefore subject to a very simple question: How are revolutionaries best able to relate to those workers engaged in struggle?

If you believe that revolutionary consciousness is brought about from "the top down", then the task is to build an ideologically pure organisation, which can at its leisure develop a word-perfect revolutionary programme. If instead you believe that we need to work with all those who are engaged in struggle against capitalism, and in the course of the struggle we should aim to build a revolutionary movement from the bottom up, the task is to build a mass, democratic, socialist organisation. It is far from guaranteed that Left Unity will be such a party, but it is the best chance that we have had for a long time •

## Notes

1. 'Broad party illusions' *Weekly Worker* May 23.
2. <http://internationalsocialistnetwork.org/index.php/ideas-and-arguments/organisation/left-unity/116>.

## What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



# weekly Worker

Against both  
the Tehran  
regime and US  
imperialism

## Boycott sham elections

On May 22, the US moved closer to imposing a full trade embargo against Iran, as the Senate reaffirmed US support for Israel - should it be "compelled to attack Tehran's nuclear programme in self-defence".

The Senate voted unanimously to adopt a non-binding resolution urging Barack Obama to fully enforce existing economic sanctions against Iran and to "provide diplomatic, military and economic support" to Israel "in its defence of its territory, people and existence".

On the same day the Republican-dominated foreign affairs committee of the House of Representatives unanimously approved new proposals for sanctions. If passed into law, these would blacklist all countries or companies that fail to reduce their oil imports from Iran to virtually nil in the next 180 days. In other words, it aims to close off Iran's main source of income.

All this is happening in the middle of an election farce in Tehran. A day before the Senate resolutions, Iran's religious supervisory body, the Guardian Council, announced the final list of eight candidates it deemed acceptable to contest the presidential elections on June 14. It did not include either the former president and main hope of the 'reformists', Hashemi Rafsanjani, or the outgoing president's chosen successor, Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei.

Although the remaining candidates all promise to 'resolve the nuclear issue', the US administration has made up its mind: bar a miracle, conflict with Iran, most likely in the form of Israeli air attacks, is now inevitable. Even if one of the remaining centrist or 'reformist' candidates gets elected, Washington does not believe such an individual will be strong enough to convince the country's supreme leader of the need to compromise. By all accounts, Rafsanjani was the only candidate capable of arguing the case for ayatollah Ali Khamenei to 'drink the poison' and make a U-turn either on the nuclear programme or on Syria.

Whoever gets elected on June 14, Iranians are resigning themselves to the fact that confrontation with the west will continue, and so crippling sanctions and devastating economic hardship will persist. The supreme leader had promised an 'epic year', when massive participation in the elections would prove the nation's tenacity in confronting the foreign enemy. But the final list of mediocre candidates will make it difficult for even the most hard-line supporters of the regime to muster any enthusiasm.

No-one should underestimate the severity of the current situation. Iran is completely isolated internationally and regionally, while its support for the Syrian government has brought it into direct conflict with Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States and the Muslim Brotherhood, in addition to the usual suspects. Economically the country is bankrupt.

Life is getting excruciatingly hard for most Iranians - even some among the middle classes are finding the price of basic goods beyond their means, and one can only imagine the hardship faced by the increasingly unemployed working class.

When 'targeted' sanctions were proposed by the US, its supporters claimed only the rulers of the regime would suffer and ordinary Iranians would hardly notice the effects. Reality could not be further from this pledge. For example, in theory medicines were exempt from sanctions. However, the current rate of exchange means that many are beyond Iran's means. In addition most pharmaceutical companies have stopped exporting to Iran. The consequence is that Iranians are dying because of acute shortage of medicine and surgical equipment - not to mention dangerous black market fakes and imitations. The US war against Iran has long started.

### Candidates

Now that the TV debates and official campaigning have begun, all the candidates claim they will deal with the country's economic problems. Speaking at an election conference at the University of Tehran, Ali Akbar Velayati, who is one of the supreme leader's senior advisors, said if he wins the election he will prioritise the resolution of economic issues.

Mohsen Rezai, former commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards, brags about a new system of "economic federalism". He will "fight poverty and unemployment" by empowering the provinces to manage their own economy.<sup>1</sup> Mohammad Qalibaf, who is appealing to the middle classes and the private sector, is defending "positive competition" and "better integration into the global economy" through "expertise-oriented" economic management.<sup>2</sup>

Ayatollah Khamenei keeps saying he has no favourite candidate - it must be difficult to choose from amongst all those trusted nominees. The final list of presidential candidates includes not only Velayati, but Haddad Adel, who is Khamenei's son's father-in-law, and two of Khamenei's personal appointees to the Supreme National Security Council, Saeed Jalili and Hassan Rohani. Qalibaf is a former police chief appointed by Khamenei, who is currently mayor of Tehran, while Rezai was the longest serving head of the Revolutionary

Guards (1981-97).

All the presidential candidates except one, Jalili (ironically Iran's main negotiator in the current talks with the 5+1 countries), claim they will resolve the nuclear issue. Jalili, who is said by some to be the supreme leader's favourite and did his PhD thesis on "the foreign policy of the prophet Muhammad", is himself a 'living martyr' (having lost a leg in the Iran-Iraq war) and his supporters' slogan is: "No compromise. No submission. Only Jalili." Clearly Iran's chief negotiator is a master of diplomatic language, but at least Iranians now know why negotiations are going nowhere.

None of these candidates explain how, in the absence of a political solution and an end to sanctions, they will achieve the promised economic miracles. Iran cannot get payment for the limited oil it sells and the country's banks have been excluded from the global banking system. Swift, which facilitates the majority of global payments, has disconnected Iranian financial firms from its messaging system. Food prices have gone up by 60% compared to last year, while factories are closing down every day, as transnationals move out of Iran (Peugeot, Saipa and Citroen have all closed down or reduced production); smaller service and spare parts suppliers are going bankrupt and do not pay their workers. The slogan dominating recent workers' protests sums up the situation: "We are hungry".

Of course, it would be wrong to blame all Iran's economic problems on sanctions. For all the promises of moving away from a single-product economy, 34 years after the Islamic regime came into being, Iran remains a rentier state relying solely on oil exports. For many years Bank Markazi, Iran's central bank, has used all the country's income from oil exports to prop up the currency, the rial, causing hyperinflation, so it comes as no surprise that the oil embargo, combined with unprecedented increases in food prices, has brought Iran's economy to its knees.

However, as I mentioned earlier, Iran's economic problems are

completely intertwined with its international political relations and here lies the problem.

### Boycott

Of course any conflict has two sides and there are many reasons why the United States is committed to regime change in Iran: revenge for the overthrow of the shah, the US embassy hostage seizure, punishing a rogue state, the benefits of a rumbling conflict at a time of economic crises.

However, most Iranians, struggling to feed their families, are desperate to see the end of the current conflict and expect more from their 'negotiators'. In this context it is understandable that sections of the Iranian opposition, mainly amongst the 'reformist' left, were tempted by Rafsanjani's claims that he would start serious negotiations and 'save the nation'. It is inevitable that sections of the population will ignore calls for a boycott of these elections and vote for Mohammad Aref or Hassan Rohani (the two remaining 'reformists'). But 'reformist' leaders, including Rafsanjani and another former president, Mohammad Khatami, have yet to make up their mind if they will recommend a vote for any of the vetted candidates. They are considering running a poll amongst members/supporters of the green movement on whether they should stage a boycott.

There are a number of issues to consider when coming to that decision. First of all, there is no reason to believe that the US and its western allies would compromise. Supporters of participation would look pretty stupid if air raids or regime-change attempts happened under Aref or Rohani.

The second consideration relates to the left. Surely it would be completely compromised if it recommended voting for one of the above. This does not mean we should fall into the blind alley of always calling for a boycott when there is no working class candidate, irrespective of circumstances. The Bolsheviks debated and indeed participated in electoral processes where the choices were limited and the processes entirely undemocratic. However, choosing from amongst a

religious dictator's close advisors and nominees would certainly bring the left into disrepute.

The deteriorating situation has persuaded sections of the Iranian left to openly support regime change from above. In early May the Canadian government held a two-day 'global dialogue conference' at the University of Toronto, where foreign minister John Baird said: "The people of Iran deserve free and fair elections. Not another version of ayatollah Khamenei's never-ending shell game of presidential puppets. Not the rise of a regressive clerical military dictatorship."<sup>3</sup> Also attending was Iran Tribunal prosecutor Payam Akhavan, who was quoted as saying: "Canada should continue to explore every avenue of assistance to civil society with a view to facilitating non-violent change."<sup>4</sup> Last weekend "republicans, leftists, constitutional monarchists and the green movement"<sup>5</sup> joined forces to hold a two-day conference in Stockholm, at the invitation of the Swedish Democratic Party. They decided to form an umbrella organisation: United for Democracy in Iran.

In Hands Off the People of Iran we have always maintained that the Iranian people have to confront simultaneously two enemies: imperialism and their own rulers. Any compromise with either of these camps will tarnish the left and represent a betrayal of the interests of the working class. Adherence to this principle is as important today as it was in 2007, when Hopi was founded.

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### Notes

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