

# weekly **worker**



**Return of the English  
Defence League and the  
bankruptcy of anti-fascism**

- Private mission Mars
- Lessons of May 1968
- Italian local elections
- Tory march to right

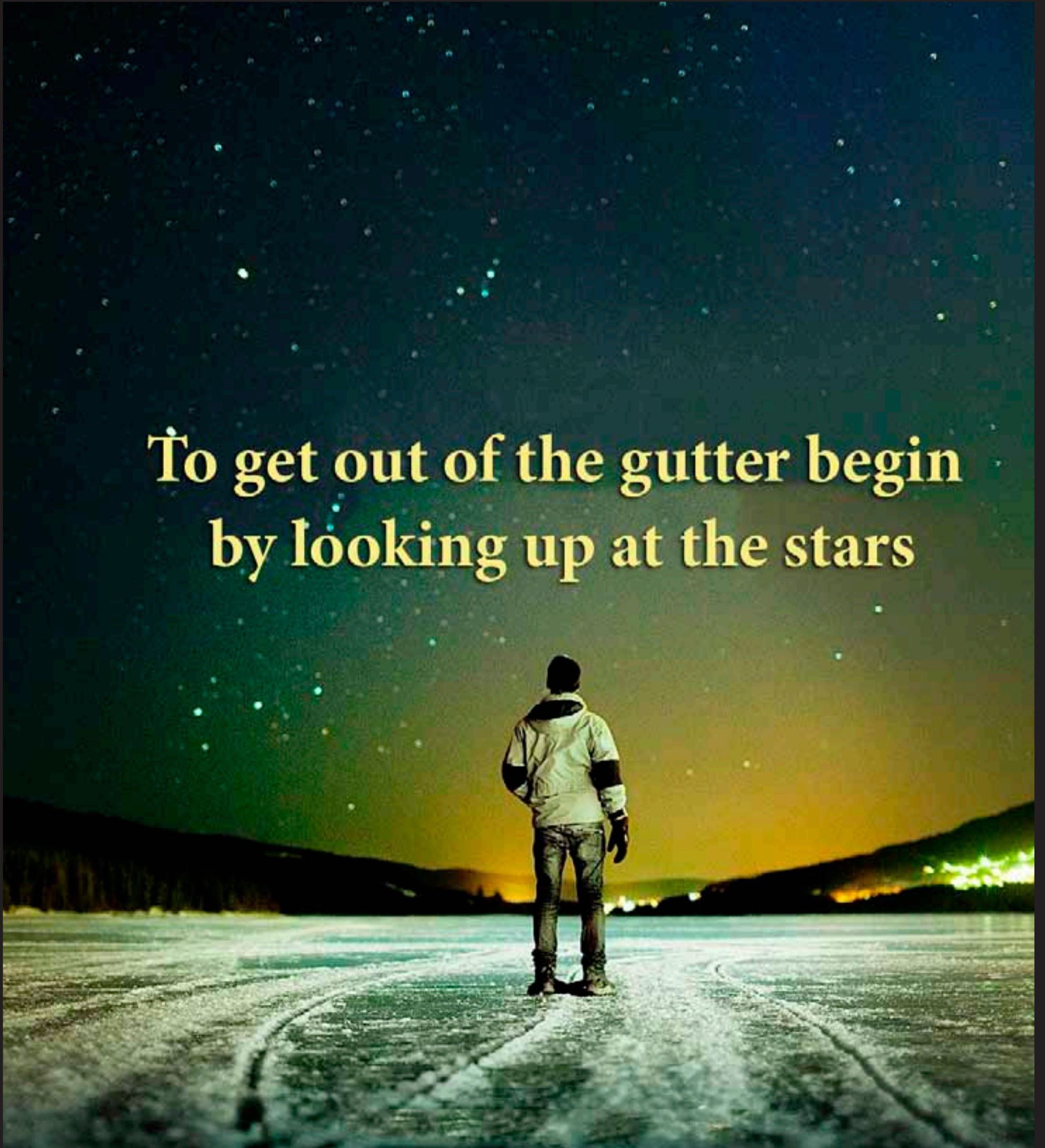
No 965 Thursday June 6 2013

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

[www.cpgb.org.uk](http://www.cpgb.org.uk)

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**To get out of the gutter begin  
by looking up at the stars**



# LETTERS



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

## Kernel

I am writing in response to Ben Campbell, whose letter (May 30) links to a site where I am supposedly quoted. But these statements have been altered from what I actually said and so do not quote me accurately. *Caveat lector!*

In response to Campbell's other alleged 'evidence', we in Platypus have only ever published anti-German and post-anti-German ('anti-national') perspectives as symptomatic of the greater death of the left in our time, not as endorsement of any perspectives in the conversations we host.

If we in Platypus are to be accused of being 'anti-left', as opposed to 'ultra-left', then that would also seem to apply to Rosa Luxemburg in 1914 when she declared the Social Democratic Party of Germany "dead" (a "stinking corpse"), which Lenin, for one, in 'Notes of a publicist' (1922), considered to be among Luxemburg's very most important historical contributions.

Platypus does not define itself by attempting to take a position 'to the left' of others on the left. But that doesn't mean that we are coming from the right. There's nothing duplicitous in what we do, hosting the conversation on the current politically 'dead' state of the left.

I must speak to my alleged "rational kernel of racism" comment, which has been deliberately distorted in its meaning. I did not mean that somehow it is reasonable or otherwise acceptable to be racist. By this statement I was applying Marx's comment about the "rational kernel" of the Hegelian dialectic, which aimed to take it seriously and demystify it, not debunk or dismiss it. The same is true in addressing racism as ideology - as the 'necessary form of appearance' of social reality. I was trying to address the issue of supposed 'racism' in terms of the Marxist tradition of 'ideology-critique', or the immanently dialectical critique of ideological forms of appearance, or, explained more plainly, the critique from within of ideologies, according to their own self-contradictions, in the interest of seeking how they might be changed.

In this, I follow Wilhelm Reich, who wrote in *The mass psychology of fascism* that Marxists had failed to recognise the "progressive character of fascism" - by which he meant, of course, not that fascism was itself progressive (Reich was a communist), but that fascism was a new ideology that met a new historical situation more successfully than Marxism did, and that Marxists were wrong to dismiss fascism as irrational, by which they tried to alibi their own failure to do better politically.

So what I meant by the "rational kernel of racism" was the need to address why otherwise rational people would have racist ideologies. It won't do, I think, to try to dismiss racism as irrational. Rather, the question is, why are people racist? What social realities do racist ideologies express? For it is not a matter that those with racist attitudes have them in their own self-interest. Quite the contrary, it is against their better interests.

However, it must be admitted that nowadays racist ideologies are not nearly as centrally important a part of the social reality of capitalism as they once were. Racism is no longer considered anywhere near as reasonable as it once was. And this is a good thing - though it does present challenges to the 'left's' own ideologies about the nature and character of social reality. Culturalism is not the same as racism, and what

is often called 'racism' today is actually culturalism, not biologically based: such cultural chauvinism would also be subject to a Marxist ideology-critique as a phenomenon of capitalism.

Beyond that, there is the issue of the actual politics of 'anti-racism', which my old mentor, Adolph Reed, has helpfully pointed out leads nowhere today ([www.leftbusinessobserver.com/Antiracism.html](http://www.leftbusinessobserver.com/Antiracism.html)), and so recommends junking present strategies of 'anti-racist politics' in favour of struggling against the concrete social and political disadvantages people face. There's no point to a 'politics' that tries to change people's attitudes, where the real issue is material circumstances. But it does suit the 'left' today very well, in its own subcultural, lifestyle, consumerist-taste community and paranoid, authoritarian, moral hectoring to focus on racist attitudes, as a substitute for real politics.

**Chris Cutrone**  
Platypus Affiliated Society

## RCG smears

Newcastle Unites against the EDL would like to thank the many people who took part in our very successful demonstration on Saturday May 25. Whilst the English Defence League opportunistically exploited the abhorrent murder of a British soldier, Newcastle Unites brought together almost a thousand local people, representing the diversity and multiculturalism of the city, all opposed to the EDL's racism and fascism. We now intend to build on the broad unity we have created and further develop the strength of this opposition.

Given our achievements, it is with regret that we have to make the following statement in order to counter a number of wholly inaccurate and disgraceful claims being circulated by a small sectarian organisation, the Revolutionary Communist Group (*FRFI*) (Letters, May 30). Whilst this group played no part in building opposition to the EDL, they have engaged in a number of divisive and disruptive activities designed to undermine the work of those who did. In doing this they have put people at risk and have targeted local Muslim activists with slanders and smears.

Newcastle Unites is a broad-based campaign involving the trade unions, local councillors, representatives of the Muslim community, faith groups and anti-racist organisations, such as Show Racism the Red Card, Unite against Fascism and the Tyne and Wear Anti-Fascist Association. At our initial meeting a number of participants, in particular representatives from the unions and the Muslim community, expressed concerns about working with the RCG on account of their previous disruptive and sometimes violent activity.

Highlighted was the fact that the group tried to storm the Newcastle May Day platform in 2012 in an attempt to prevent a local Labour MP speaking, in the process physically assaulting a number of trades council members. Newcastle Unites informed the RCG that they would not be welcome at our meetings. Despite our decision, members of the RCG turned up at our meetings on two occasions demanding to be let in and stating they were there to denounce the involvement of local Labour Party members. On the second occasion they became highly abusive and had to be asked to leave the venue.

In an act of gross irresponsibility, that showed complete disdain for the security of Newcastle Unites members, the RCG then posted details of Newcastle Unites' committee meetings on an open Facebook site. They included the date, time and venue of our next meeting and even

a picture of the venue. Because of the history of the EDL attacking anti-racist meetings in the north-east, the details of the committee meetings had been kept restricted. As a result of the RCG actions, Newcastle Unites were forced to move our meeting venue and a Muslim Labour councillor received a threatening Facebook message from the EDL saying that they would be attacking the meeting. The trades council, who own and run the building, wrote to the RCG protesting that their article had put at risk all who use the premises and asked them to take down the article. They refused.

On Saturday May 25 members of Newcastle Unites were engaged in stewarding our demonstration to ensure it was a peaceful and inclusive event. The RCG gathered at a different venue. Following the demonstration, we learnt that a number of their members had been arrested. The RCG outrageously attempted to claim that members of Newcastle Unites had been responsible for these arrests! Newcastle Unites condemns, without qualification, the arrest of anyone for exercising their democratic right to peaceful protest. To claim that we would collude in any way with such arrests is an offensive and wholly unfounded allegation. The idea that Newcastle Unites has some kind of influence over the police is frankly laughable. It is, however, necessary to refute the statement and make it clear that no-one from Newcastle Unites played any part in these arrests.

The RCG's stated view of the Labour Party, expressed both in written form on the internet and in public meetings, is that they are "worse than the British National Party". They have targeted Muslim activists and have even taken to calling Dipu Ahad, a prominent Muslim Labour councillor, a racist. To make personal attacks on a man who has fought racism all his life and has been the target of EDL death threats is deplorable and must be condemned.

Despite these tactics, Newcastle Unites will continue to build a broad coalition of all those who want to stop the racist EDL and other fascist groups. We will not be deflected from that goal by either threats from the far right or the activities of groups like the RCG. This statement is intended to correct the false impressions of Newcastle Unites circulated by the RCG and to alert people to the danger their activities pose.

**Newcastle Unites**

[www.facebook.com/NewcastleUnites](http://www.facebook.com/NewcastleUnites)

## SWP illusions

The so-called 'Socialist Workers Party' in the UK has a two-year history of spreading illusions in the opposition to the Syrian regime. While the interior workings of the party remind you more of a Stalinist outfit than the non-orthodox Trotskyist organisation it pretends to be, its political line has more and more become one of spontaneist hopes in all sorts of non-proletarian movements. This is particularly true in respect to its position on the so-called 'Arab spring'.

Based on the fact that the Syrian Ba'ath regime is a bourgeois dictatorship, which has, especially under president Bashar al-Assad, more and more turned from state capitalism to private neoliberalism and has so impoverished large parts of the toiling masses of the country, the SWP has militantly supported the oppositional forces from the beginning. While it has criticised their tactics of turning towards imperialist powers for military support against the Damascus government, it has not dared to reflect upon the problem of the political and socio-economic alternatives of the myriad of oppositional groups in that country.

*Socialist Worker's* main author on

Syria is Simon Assaf. He has on several occasions credited government forces with massacres immediately they occurred, even when it was in fact unclear who was responsible. While there is no doubt that governmental forces have committed abhorrent crimes and will certainly commit more, in several cases even the serious imperialist press has had to admit that some of those massacres they and Assaf had credited to the regime had most probably been the work of oppositional forces (maybe some who fight under the name of the 'Free Syrian Army', which as a centrally-organised guerrilla army does not exist in reality, but is only a name for getting foreign funds, or maybe the work of jihadi outfits such as the Jabhat al-Nusra).

Simon Assaf, however, has never admitted any mistakes or even doubts. You might excuse him because he is mistaking his revolutionary dreams for reality and has therefore greatly overrated the impact of the democratic and non-sectarian forces on the whole of the revolt. However, he has now crossed the red line in this respect. In one of his latest articles, entitled 'Western arms threaten Syria's troubled revolt', he writes:

"The west wants to hijack the revolution at the moment of its greatest crisis. This comes a few days after Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Lebanon's Hezbollah resistance movement, declared that his forces are now active in the civil war. Nasrallah announced that the largely Shia group is sending thousands of elite troops to spearhead the Syrian regime's offensive on al-Qusayr ... Using unprecedented sectarian language, Nasrallah described the defenders of al-Qusayr as 'takfiris' (apostates) in the 'service of Israel and the US' ... By giving military support to Assad, Nasrallah has broken a vow to only use the weapons of the resistance against Israel" (*Socialist Worker* May 28).

What's the problem with this paragraph? The problem is that Nasrallah and the Lebanese Hezbollah, whatever else they may be, are not clerical sectarians. In fact Nasrallah has argued that the religious sectarian character of important parts of the Syrian opposition is threatening the stability of the multi-religious society of Lebanon and therefore serving Zionism. This is so because "takfiris" are not "apostates", but those Muslims who declare other Muslims to be apostates, and this is exactly the position of the Al Qa'eda-linked outfits such as Jabhat al-Nusra, which is a leading force in the fight for al-Qusayr. For them, Shiites are 'apostates', meaning people who had been Muslims in the past and had chosen to turn away from their religion (in this case Shia Islam in the 7th century). While it is doubtful that the prophet Muhammad had argued in favour of killing apostates, Muslim tradition has largely held this position.

The notion of 'takfir' has been a prominent one for many years now in the context of the identification of salafi-jihadi forces in the Muslim world. It cannot be believed that those responsible for *Socialist Worker* have never heard of it and have thus simply overlooked a mistake made by such a 'specialist' in Middle East affairs as their Simon Assaf. It must therefore be understood as a deliberate fabrication in order to defend their - ever more indefensible - line on Syria.

Simon Assaf, of course, criticises Jabhat al-Nusra and the rest, but this is meaningless when he whitewashes them by claiming that those - in this case Hezbollah - who defend Syria and so themselves against the onslaught of the 'takfiris' are the 'takfiris'.

**Anton Holberg**  
email

## Solidarity

We are writing to ask for your support against the police brutality against ordinary people who oppose the building of a shopping centre on the site of a park in Istanbul that has existed for nearly 100 years.

On May 27, a police-escorted demolition team arrived at the Taksim Gezi Park to destroy all the parkland, including the trees. Despite resistance from local people and environmentalist groups, the site was cleared and demolition work proceeded.

The police then clashed with protestors who began to occupy the park. The activists had been camping there for three days in an attempt to stop the destruction. The demolition soon ground to a halt after Sirri Süreyya Önder, an MP for the Peace and Democracy Party, stood in front of one of the bulldozers for three hours. This led to a wider resistance and galvanised a massive stand against the demolition of the site. The determined environmentalists, community groups, members of political parties and trade unionists continued to occupy the park until on the morning of May 30, at approximately 5am, the police used tear gas and pepper spray to disperse the crowd. This only increased the support for the protestors and attracted hundreds more from all sorts of backgrounds to make the resistance stronger.

Turkish riot police continued to fire tear gas and water cannons into crowds of demonstrators gathered in Istanbul's Gezi park on May 31. Their extensive use resulted in deaths and serious injuries. Unconfirmed reports suggest that at least four people have been killed, while hundreds are injured, seven of them seriously.

At the time of writing this statement, hundreds are continuing to gather in the Taksim area to show their anger against the excessive use of force by the police and the state. The state media and most media organisations have turned a blind eye to what is happening and stopped reporting it. Prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the Istanbul mayor, Hüseyn Avni Mutlu, have denied any wrongdoing and defended vehemently the actions of the police. They went so far as to label the protestors 'troublemakers' using the protests as a cover for their own political interests. They tried to block all 3G mobile phone signals to stop the news spreading. But there is now wide anger against Erdoğan and the police, and the unrest has spread to many cities. Slogans such as 'Erdoğan must go' and 'Chemical Erdoğan' have been echoed by thousands of people around the country. Some unconfirmed reports suggest that around 400 police officers have resigned from their positions.

We are urging all our friends in the UK to show their solidarity and send messages of protest and condemnation to the Turkish prime minister: [bimer@basbakanlik.gov.tr](mailto:bimer@basbakanlik.gov.tr).

**Oktay Sahbaz**

Day-mer Community Centre

## Correction

You write: "Neil Davidson (who is also speaking at the Counterfire event, by the way, along with fellow SWP oppositionist Ian Birchall) ..." ('In decay and in denial', May 30).

I did not speak at the Counterfire event, I was never approached by Counterfire and my name did not appear in their publicity.

I should be most grateful if you would remove this falsehood from your website immediately, and if you would publish a correction in next week's issue of your printed paper.

**Ian Birchall**  
email

# MARS

## Symptom of systemic decline

**A**t a time of economic depression, while the world has yet to address some of the most fundamental issues regarding human survival on this planet, not least in terms of the environment, a millionaire space tourist, Dennis Tito, is working on plans to send a man and woman as tourists for a round trip to Mars. At the same time another private project, Mars One, is in the pipeline, with the ambition of “establishing a human settlement on the planet Mars by 2023”.<sup>1</sup>

All this follows the relative success of a number of aerospace projects undertaken by the US space agency, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (Nasa). Its ‘rover’, Curiosity, landed on Mars on August 6 2012 and has since sent reliable information about conditions on the planet, fuelling speculation about the possibility of humans surviving there.

Even before the landing of Nasa’s rover, scientists knew from studying fragments of rocks in the form of meteorites that water had once flown on the red planet, but images transmitted by Curiosity proved beyond doubt that flowing water has shaped the landscape. Mars has an atmosphere allowing a level of protection from sun rays and a day-night rhythm very similar to what we have on Earth: a Mars day lasts 24 hours, 39 minutes and 35 seconds. All in all, it is considered to be the most habitable planet in our solar system after Earth.

The two privately funded aerospace projects aim to beat Nasa’s plans to send astronauts to Mars in 2030 by 12 years, both starting in January 2018. The two years were chosen because they coincide with the best alignment of Mars and Earth - in 2018 and 2030 a round trip would take about 18 months, or 501 days, whereas in between it could take up to three years.

There are, of course, many obstacles to such plans. For example, the distance between Earth and Mars is 248 million km, and the \$2.5 billion Curiosity took 253 days to reach its destination. Even radio signals from Mars take between four and 20 minutes to reach Earth, depending on how far apart the two planets are at the time.

Equipment on board Curiosity detected high levels of radiation, both during the trip and at the destination, where the absence of a protective atmosphere means astronauts are very exposed. According to Geraint Jones, an academic at University College London, the annual exposure limit for nuclear industry employees in the UK is 20 millisieverts (20mSv), but astronauts could be subjected to 662mSv over the course of a single trip.<sup>2</sup> Humans would be kept safe if their spacecraft was encased in lead or concrete, but obviously the weight of such material would rule that out, so the race is now on for the manufacture of more lightweight material resilient to this level of solar radiation.

In addition to radiation, there is another problem, as explained by Gary Marin, director for advanced programmes at Nasa: “Being away from Earth for three years would mean that every cell of your body would be transversed by a galactic ray, and we just don’t know what that would do to people.”<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, data gathered from previous missions show that space travel weakens the human immune system, produces gradual bone loss and results in cognitive problems. Also the average temperature on Mars is -50°C.

Despite all this, at the time of writing 80,000 people have applied to Mars One to be selected for a one-way trip to set up a “colony” on the planet. The number of applications



Get your application in

is expected to reach 500,000 by the deadline of August 31. Unlike previous space expeditions, applicants need no scientific background. Instead they should show “a deep sense of purpose, willingness to build and maintain healthy relationships, the capacity for self-reflection and ability to trust”.<sup>4</sup>

Apart from the obvious questions regarding the billions of dollars necessary for the mission, what does all this say about the current state of capitalism?

Until the late 1980s the US and Soviet governments were competing in what was known as the space race. But even after the cold war had ended the competition continued. While today the US is the undisputed superpower, the landing of Curiosity was part and parcel of the strategy to shore up its declining hegemony. Successive administrations until recently refused to cut Nasa’s funding - its 2011 budget of \$18.4 billion represented about 0.5% of the \$3.4 trillion US federal budget for that year.<sup>5</sup> In 2012 it was marginally reduced and the Obama administration’s latest proposal for 2014 allocates a ‘mere’ \$17.7 billion to the agency. Despite perceptions about expenditure in the current economic climate, there seems to be few qualms about this particular form of spending.

Given the limits of scientific progress in capitalism, where university funding is driven mainly by military use or for increasing profits, academic authorities have been at pains to extol the considerable benefits derived from the by-products of aerospace research. This is not just self-serving propaganda. For example, instruments essential for studying atmospheric parameters have a use in the development of modern mammography, while breast cancer biopsy uses technology developed by Hubble Space for use in its telescopes - originally deployed to convert light from a distant star into digital images.

What is more, US missions to the moon produced magnetic resonance imaging, used extensively in medicine for locating cancerous and other tumours. Chemotherapy, used to treat cancer patients, began as an attempt to grow plants in space shuttles. Similarly, pacemakers, monitoring equipment used in intensive care units, artificial heart implants and non-invasive ultrasound are all medical by-products of aerospace research.

While data from satellites provided critical information for understanding the effects of climate change, infrared cameras, cordless equipment, modern firefighting clothing and equipment were all first put to use in space shuttles. Of course, many of the above benefits were unintentional by-products, but they are real enough. However, the problem now is that the current shift of aerospace research

from public to private will undermine and commercialise any future benefits from this area of scientific research.

For all capitalism’s claims that the free market fuels ‘dynamism’ and ‘innovation’, it is ironic that so far space exploration and the numerous revolutionary inventions that are its by-products have all resulted from state funding, driven as it was by inter-state rivalry or as an affirmation of hegemony. It is extremely unlikely that the private enterprises trying to outdo the state will be able to raise the necessary funds. After all, capitalism’s eagerness for quick profits and private property (so far no-one can envisage *ownership* of colonies on Mars) makes fundraising for such endeavours improbable.

The economic crisis has already dried up research funding. These days, research grants in science and engineering are often for ‘joint industry’ funding with military firms for the purpose of accelerating profits in what remains of the industrial sector. As one aerospace professor used to say, “Getting funding from Nestlé to improve their chocolate-cutting blades might meet universities research assessment exercise<sup>6</sup> criteria, but it is hardly rocket science and will not advance humanity’s awareness of the universe.” Even if private funding succeeded, we should expect little ‘innovation’.

What this project represents is an attempt at precipitating escape from Earth (a few centuries ahead of Stephen Hawking’s warnings<sup>7</sup>) rather than any enthusiasm for space exploration, curiosity about how life began, how the universe started and how our world was created. All these are important issues and space research has demystified aspects of the origins of the universe - subjects that are inevitably unpopular with religious conservatives of many hues.

There is nothing wrong with space exploration and curiosity about big ideas. However, for capitalism this research has been an integral part of imperialism’s military competition and its current demise is also a reflection of contemporary lack of confidence, confusion and systemic decline ●

**Yassamine Mather**

yassamine.mather@weeklyworker.org.uk

## Notes

1. <http://mars-one.com/en/mission/mission-and-vision>.
2. [www.marsnow.info](http://www.marsnow.info).
3. [http://news.nationalgeographic.co.uk/news/2001/05/0517\\_mars2.html](http://news.nationalgeographic.co.uk/news/2001/05/0517_mars2.html).
4. <http://applicants.mars-one.com>.
5. [www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2010/feb/01/nasa-budgets-us-spending-space-travel](http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2010/feb/01/nasa-budgets-us-spending-space-travel).
6. RAE aimed to “produce quality profiles for each submission of research activity made by institutions”.
7. <http://rt.com/news/earth-hawking-mankind-escape-702>.

# 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 9, 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 7: ‘Repulsion and attraction of workpeople by the factory system’.

Organised by CPGB: [www.cpgb.org.uk](http://www.cpgb.org.uk).

## Radical Anthropology Group

Introduction to anthropology

**Tuesday June 11, 6.15pm:** ‘Frogs, moon and sun at the Avebury monuments’. 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).

## Refugee rights

**Friday June 7, 5pm:** Scratch performance of *Mazloom*, a moving theatre piece about a young Afghani refugee. The Vestry Hall, London Road, Mitcham, Surrey.

Tickets online: [www.scratchmazloom.eventbrite.com](http://www.scratchmazloom.eventbrite.com).

## Wales shop stewards

**Saturday June 8, 10am to 4pm:** Conference, Maldron Hotel, Saint Mary Street, Cardiff CF10.

Organised by the National Shop Stewards Network: [www.shopstewards.net](http://www.shopstewards.net).

## Confronting the climate crisis

**Saturday June 8, 11am to 5pm:** Conference, London Metropolitan University, Stapleton House, 277 Holloway Road, London N7.

Organised by Campaign Against Climate Change: [www.campaignccc.org](http://www.campaignccc.org).

## No to EDL

**Saturday June 8, 11.30 am:** Protest against visit of EDL leader, City Hall, Barker’s Pool, Sheffield S1.

Organised by Unite Against Fascism: [www.uaf.org.uk](http://www.uaf.org.uk).

## Unite the Resistance

**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).

## 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).

## Vocabularies of the economy

**Thursday June 13, 6.30pm:** Manifesto lecture, Marx Memorial Library, London EC1. Speaker: professor Doreen Massey. Tickets from [www.vocabofeconomy.eventbrite.co.uk](http://www.vocabofeconomy.eventbrite.co.uk).

Organised by Lawrence and Wishart: [www.lwbooks.co.uk](http://www.lwbooks.co.uk).

## Protest the bankers!

**Friday June 14, 12.30pm:** Anti-banker protest, Jubilee Plaza, west exit of Canary Wharf tube.

Organised by UK Uncut: [www.ukuncut.org.uk](http://www.ukuncut.org.uk).

## The making of the English working class

**Tuesday June 15, 10am to 5.30pm:** Conference, Queen Mary University of London, Mile End Road, London E1. Discussion of EP Thompson’s classic Marxist history. For details and to register: [www.eventbrite.com/event/6046488209#](http://www.eventbrite.com/event/6046488209#).

Organised by Lawrence and Wishart: [www.lwbooks.co.uk](http://www.lwbooks.co.uk).

## Stop western intervention in Syria

**Saturday June 15, 1pm:** Protest, US embassy, Grosvenor Square, London W1.

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

## 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).

## People’s Assembly Against Austerity

**Saturday June 22, 9.30am to 5pm:** Campaign launch meeting Central Hall Westminster, Storey’s Gate, London SW1.

Organised by Coalition of Resistance:

[www.coalitionofresistance.org.uk](http://www.coalitionofresistance.org.uk).

## Stand up for education

**Tuesday June 25, 6.30pm:** Rally, Emmanuel Centre, Marsham Street, London SW1.

Organised by London NUT: [www.teachers.org.uk/node/8189](http://www.teachers.org.uk/node/8189).

## 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.

## OUR HISTORY

# Lessons of May 68

Would there have been a revolution but for the betrayal of the official leadership in France? This is an edited version of a talk given by **Mike Macnair** at a recent London Communist Forum



Not a rerun of 1905

On the 45th anniversary of the events in France of May 1968, it is worthwhile looking back at what happened. The first point to be made has to be the extreme brevity of the crisis in France.

To summarise. It was on May 6 that things moved beyond simple student protests, as first street fighting and then large demonstrations took place. These were attacked by the specialised riot forces of the French police, the CRS, and this was followed by the setting up of barricades on the night of May 10. The French Communist Party, the PCF, gave its backing to the student movement late that night, and so did the main, PCF-led union centre, the CGT, which then called a general strike and demonstration for May 13. Suddenly the lid was taken off the class struggle and there was an enormous explosion of strikes, demonstrations, self-organisation and radicalisation that ran from May 14 until May 29. The PCF tried to keep a 'red line' between the students and the strikers, and between the strikers and the far left, although it was not possible to do so completely.

This explosion led to a government crisis. President Charles de Gaulle contemplated military action, but he was informed that there were doubts as to the reliability of the conscript army - or at least that part of the conscript army that was stationed in France - so that military action would have to mean at least moving French troops from Germany, or elsewhere. De Gaulle went to the main French base in Germany, Baden-Baden; and there is evidence that Nato effectively denied him permission to move troops

into France.

On May 27 the government and trade union leadership agreed on the Grenelle accords, which conceded massive wage increases, and on May 30 de Gaulle returned from Germany, promising early elections. At the same time the right mobilised a million-strong demonstration - double the size of the May 13 workers' demonstration. The far right also began to organise to take back the streets and engaged in direct action against the left. There was a big falling away of strikes and occupations, partly at the call of the trade union officials, and partly through the CRS taking back factories. In the June general election there was a massive parliamentary victory for the right, which benefited from a major swing from the centre parties in the second round.

The turning point had been May 30. De Gaulle then effectively held out to the PCF and the Socialist Party - then called the French Section of the Workers' International (SFIO) - two options. One was to accept the concessions on wages (and also on other issues such as working conditions), along with quick elections. The other option was expressed in the form of the slogan of the rightwing demonstrations of that day: "The communists shall not pass". In other words, 'We are ready for civil war'. It is not actually clear if de Gaulle was ready for civil war, but in substance that is what he and the French right were saying. And, of course, the PCF were not up for it, and they went for demobilisation.

In fact it would not have been easy to mobilise the French working

class to fight a civil war. Although the regime created by de Gaulle's coup in 1958 was seriously delegitimised, there was not any superior alternative in the imagination of the broad masses. The SFIO and PCF were committed to working within de Gaulle's constitution. The PCF stood for a process of transition undertaken through a popular front government.

Characteristically, the Trotskyists tend to say, 'Well, there could have been a revolution, if only the bureaucracy had not betrayed the working class.' The problem is that it is *in the DNA* of the bureaucracy that, in circumstances like these, it will betray the movement. So all that the Trotskyists are actually saying is that revolution was not on the agenda because the labour bureaucracy was too strong. And if you ask *why* the labour bureaucracy was too strong in May 68, the answer is because at the end of the day it had political support in the mass of the working class. The PCF and the CGT could demobilise people because they had given their loyalty to these leaderships. And, for that matter, de Gaulle was able to mobilise a million people on the streets because that actually did represent the existence of a strong, solid, rightwing bloc in society.

Why did the crisis of May 68 and the subsequent demobilisation take the form they did? For that we have to look to some extent at the international context.

The most immediate context is the Prague spring. Alexander Dubček was elected first secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party in January 1968. By the end of February

he had released the journal *Literární Listy* from censorship. In April he issued his 'action programme', involving significant relaxation of Communist Party control both of politics and the economy, and in addition national decentralisation - the breaking up of Czechoslovakia into a federation of the Czech and Slovak republics.

From Nato's point of view Dubček and the Prague spring represented an opportunity to destabilise the Soviet bloc round national contradictions within the Warsaw Pact and the question of democracy. And that was the way it was being pushed by the bourgeois media at about the time the May events broke out in France.

The other side of the coin was the Tet offensive in Vietnam - part of one of the running national liberation struggles going on since the late 1940s. The United States had massively escalated the number of troops it had on the ground, the scale of its military and bombing operations and so on. It thought, as of late 1967, that counterinsurgency had worked. It believed it had stabilised the South Vietnam regime. The Tet offensive demonstrated that the methods of counterinsurgency designed on the basis of Weberian managerialism had failed. Thus, the United States had other fish to fry in May 68.

Going a step further back, the US had backed a coup in Greece in April 1967. That year was also the high point of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, and the moment at which it seriously hit the western media. The death of Che Guevara in October 1967, although it was the result of a hopeless attempt to carry on rural guerrilla warfare without

mass support, was received globally as a martyrdom (and a symbol of the tyrannical character of the regimes backed by the US in Latin America).

The general background of all these events is the policy of the 'containment of communism' which had been running since 1948: the 'cold war'. The US and USSR were manoeuvring at the margins, in places militarily, but mostly politically and diplomatically, for allies and popular support. Hence from the point of view of global politics in spring 1968, the last thing the US wanted was a major military crackdown in France, especially if the result might be a split in the French military and French units fighting one another. There had, after all, been mutinies on French ships and in French barracks during May. In other words, escalation from the side of the state between May 10 and May 30 was for practical purposes out of the question for global geopolitical reasons.

## Latecomer

Bukharin and Trotsky attributed to Lenin the phrase, "The imperialist chain breaks at its weakest link." The Mandelites, who identified May 68 as in some sense an example of that, then went on throughout the 1970s attempting to find the weakest link, which they were convinced in Europe would be Spain - but then the revolution in Portugal broke out. In the Middle East it was to be Lebanon/Syria - but then the Iranian revolution broke out. In Latin America it was Bolivia - but then the Nicaraguan revolution broke out.

In reality, as James White has pointed out,<sup>1</sup> Lenin, in his marginalia

on Bukharin, disavowed the idea and said that, actually, it is not the case that the imperialist chain breaks at its weakest link, because there has to be a certain level of development in a country where a revolution breaks out in order for anything serious to happen. That a country is simply 'the weakest', with the most acute contradictions, etc, is not in and of itself a sufficient explanation.

This is true not merely in relation to the objective level of development, in the sense that there can be no workers' revolution without a working class, which implies a certain level of capitalist development; but also in a subjective sense, in that an antecedent level of class-consciousness and class organisation is required for the question of revolution to be posed.

The global geopolitical context is part of the story. But the second part of the story is related to the forward movement of the working class - the direct economic and trade union struggle - and in that sense France was a latecomer.

The UK had what was called the 'British disease' ever since the early 1950s. The Tory abandonment of austerity for the middle classes, while still attempting to keep the lid on the working class, in effect broke up the social bargain that allowed the trade union leaders to keep control of disputes over wages and conditions that had applied during the 1945-51 Labour government. This resulted in the very rapid re-emergence of the shop stewards' movement and a major increase in unofficial actions: guerrilla warfare conducted at the shop level.

It was at first said that the British just did not have the necessary relations with the trade unions, which had not been properly integrated into structures of Weberian managerial rationality. But by the early to mid-60s the US had started to feel the first effects of the profit-rate slowdown, and when the employers tried to put the squeeze on wages and conditions there were unofficial 'wildcat' strikes. The same was true in West Germany. In Spain under the Francoist regime there arose the workers' commissions - forms of illegal, clandestine organisation; a hybrid between a shop stewards' organisation and trade union proper - closely linked to the Communist Party. In Italy, what came after 1968 to be called the 'creeping May' of unofficial strikes, etc, actually began around 1966.

So why were the French late? The answer is the Gaullist regime created by the 1958 coup. The Fifth Republic featured a two-tier election process, designed to produce majorities for the sitting government, and a president with very substantial powers. The constitution of France has been normalised by history, but in the late 1950s and early 60s it was generally understood to be a Bonapartist regime. In the workplace it imposed direct statutory controls on wages, which in French industry tended to fall behind inflation.

That in turn had the consequence that French capitalism looked unusually profitable throughout the 1960s. German capitalism was beginning to worry about a slowdown, but French capitalism seemed to be powering ahead. However, the flip-side was that in the US and Germany with their 'wildcat strikes', and in Britain with the shop stewards' movement, there was a pressure-release valve in the system. In France there was no such mechanism. The great wave of strikes, occupations and so on when everything finally exploded in May 68 was the French working class catching up after a generation where it had fallen behind.

France was unique then, in that it experienced an explosion which appeared to immediately call into question political stability. It looked

like a revolution and indeed had certain real features of a revolution, but part of what was happening was the forcible adjustment of conditions to those prevailing in the rest of Europe.

Then there was the student movement. Leftwing student politics had been mobilising around international issues through the 1960s. That was as true in France as it was elsewhere, but was less striking. There was, for example, nothing approaching the mobilisations that had occurred in the US or Britain around Vietnam.

French student radicals took their immediate ideas from the Germans, who in turn had taken their ideas to a considerable extent from groups like Students for a Democratic Society in the US. In Germany the student movement had kicked off in 1967, triggered by a visit from the shah of Iran. But, of course, the German student movement in 67 did not produce a movement of the working class or a government crisis. So France was part of a general movement, but was a special case because the extent of the pressure build-up in relation to the direct class struggle under the rigidities of the Gaullist regime were very much more serious there than in countries that had not imposed such a tight set of controls on trade unions, wages, etc.

There was another, very specifically French feature: the tradition of barricades. Barricades were a major feature of 1830 and 1848, and for the French workers' movement there is as well the tradition of the Commune in 1871. The barricades that were erected in Paris from May 10 thus fed into something that had immense cultural resonance. It is still the case that the traditions of 1789, 1830 and 1848 are part of mass memory, and that, I think, is also a substantial part of the explanation for May 68.

The student actions not only imitated features of the student movement elsewhere, but latched hold on to that particular moment of a great symbol of French historical memory. This helped produce the situation where the PCF felt it necessary to come in on the students' side, although there were other reasons too. You can imagine Brezhnev saying to the PCF leaders: 'Yes, give it a go, as long as you don't really destabilise de Gaulle, who is an important diplomatic partner of ours. It will be useful at a time when the west is concentrating attention on Czechoslovakia, to have trouble over the question of democracy in a western country.'

To sum up, 1968 was not a peculiarly French event, but a peculiarly French *version* of an international set of developments - and one which was framed by the geopolitical context of the cold war.

## Class and revolution

The far left primarily thought of May 68 as the equivalent of Russia 1905. It was seen as a movement which is both a harbinger of and a guide to the future revolution. This argument is completely mistaken. First of all, 1905 was followed within 12 years by the Bolshevik revolution, but 45 years have now elapsed since 1968 without a large-scale revolutionary crisis in Europe other than the Portuguese revolution of 1974.

Secondly, broad masses in France saw an opportunity to break the rigidities of the Gaullist regime; but they had not yet reached the point of thinking that the whole state structure was utterly intolerable. The left has had since 1968 a tendency to overstate the degree of pressure which has built up. For example, in 1979 there was a debate in the International Marxist Group, the British section of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International. The Usec leadership

was proposing a generalised turn to industry, which meant that everybody should go and get jobs in factories. A small example: my partner at the time was instructed to leave the civil service, where she was a member of the section executive and of the Broad Left in what is now the PCS union, and go and get a job in telecommunications - the reasoning being that telecoms is an industry, whereas work in an unemployment office is not.

I myself had spent two years just before this working on the line in the Cowley car plant, and as a result I was inclined to the view that it was not going to be particularly politically useful for former students of one sort or another to go and get jobs in car factories, mines, etc. But the majority was arguing that the political pressure cooker was boiling and was likely to explode in the very near future - there were going to be mass struggles in the core sectors of industry and we had to be there.

If it had been true, then it would have been useful to have comrades working in factories. So I am not saying we should never send people to work in industry - for example, it seems to me that it is better to go and work in a factory than it is to be on the dole. The point I was making in the debate was that the conditions leading to an *explosion* of mass struggles were absent in Britain in 1979: things were going to have to get a lot worse before such an explosion would be posed.

From a certain point of view, today the situation of the working class is a whole lot worse, but, as far as the major imperialist countries are concerned, it is a case of the lobster cooking so slowly that it is unaware it is heading towards death. We see a gradual chipping away at wages and conditions, but a repeat of May 68 on a European scale does not seem to be a particularly likely option.

That said, May 68 is in a sense a mirage of a revolution. It does display aspects of the phenomenon of revolutionary crises that were perfectly genuine and worth paying attention to.

- Creativity: those last few weeks in May display the enormous creativity of the working class masses in methods of struggle, organisation and communication.

- Loss of nerve on the part of the ruling class, or at least of the ruling political institutions - again, round about the end of May there was a profound crisis of the political institutions of the French bourgeoisie, though it is very much more short-lived than the repeated governmental crises in the Portuguese revolution in the mid-70s, or the conditions likely to be produced by real revolutionary crisis.
- Extreme political fluidity - there was a shift from a situation where the right was very much in the ascendancy as of April 68, through to left ascendancy in May, then back to the ascendancy of the right in June. This sort of shifting, unstable ground, exemplified in a small way in May 68, is a feature of all revolutions. Relatedly, the question of confidence was decisive - not least when de Gaulle presented the union and PCF leaders with the choice of concessions or a civil war.

But there is also the sense in which this was a serious crisis *because of* the PCF, albeit *very much against the will of* the PCF. Why? The answer lies precisely in the fact that, after the fall of the coalition governments in which the PCF was engaged in the 1940s, the Nato European regime was constructed on the basis that the various communist parties would not be let into such coalitions: and the Gaullist regime was an extreme form of this policy, which was also present in Italy.

Hence, the PCF, in spite of its popular-front, nationalist and constitutionalist commitments, was nonetheless *in effect* an extra-constitutional party - and one that built up workers' mass organisations, most obviously the CGT, but also other organisations; one which still upholds in its distorted way an alternative working class culture through institutions like the annual *Fête de l'Humanité* - something far richer than the Socialist Workers Party's Marxism festival.

That tradition remains because the PCF was a mass party, which, although it would have liked to have been in government, was excluded on the grounds that it was 'anti-constitutional'. Because of this it was driven, in contradiction with its own constitutionalist and popular-front strategy, to build up the practical solidarity of the working class as a class for itself, and with it implicitly to spread the idea that 'We are many, they are few'. This same idea was expressed in a peculiar way by Occupy and its slogans of the 99% against the 1%. But a big organisation is capable of *concretising* the idea that 'We are many, they are few' on an *ongoing* basis; and then when something triggers an outbreak of mass struggles, as happened in May 68, the *possibility* exists for radical change.

I stress the contradiction. National roads to socialism, the people's front, the idea of the party monolith and the subordination of the party to the diplomatic imperatives of the USSR - all worked against class-consciousness. But the exclusion of the party from government and aspects of its *formal* commitments to Marxism, 'Leninism' and so on made its organisation capable of providing a way in which the working class could express a *form* of class-consciousness.

Secondly, '1968' was an international movement: an international process of development, which found momentary expression in a national crisis. There was an intense contradiction between, on the one hand, the nationalism of the PCF and, on the other hand, its consciousness of being part of an international communist movement, which was expressed in a deformed way in its intense commitments to Stalinist orthodoxy and partial resistance to Eurocommunism.

May 68 was part of an international movement expressed in particular national *form*. The Mandelites understood this in the late 1960s to middle 1970s, but then lost that understanding, as the sectional interests of the full-time apparatus of the national sections came into the ascendancy in the later 1970s. The 'official communists' had an intensely contradictory combination of nationalism *together with* understanding themselves as part of an international movement; as the class movement fell back from the later 1970s, the purely nationalistic

ideas became the ascendant side of the contradiction.

The effects of the fall of the Soviet Union have been paradoxical on this front. You might think that it would have opened up possibilities, because it removed the constraints that 'official communism' imposed on the development of working class consciousness; but simultaneously it also destroyed the internationalism of both the 'official communists' and the Trotskyists. It left behind nothing but a nationalism which is incapable of creating the conditions for class-consciousness and revolution; or even those of a mirage of a revolutionary crisis, like May 68.

## Lessons

There are positive lessons to be drawn from the events of May 68. Of course, we should not fetishise particular features - occupations, barricades or whatever - as much of the far left does: the idea that all we need is 'initiatives in action', which will then cause it all to kick off. That is nonsense. The barricades in the Latin quarter in May 68 were a product of the very specific features of French politics and French history at that conjunctural moment; and all the attempts since then - in Britain, whether through the Anti Nazi League, Stop the War Coalition or Occupy - to get the masses on the streets in order to spark a revolutionary uprising are futile in the absence of a mass workers' party which develops oppositional class-consciousness.

On the other hand, we equally should not fall into the trap of fetishising gradualism and constitutionalism, as the PCF, SFIO and the bulk of the reformist left did in May 68. It is absolutely not the case that the British government out of the goodness of its heart gave us universal suffrage, for example: it did so because at each stage in the extension of the suffrage, the state felt itself to be under threat from *political* action of the working class.

What we should focus on is, firstly, the need for a party-movement - an organisation which in non-revolutionary times concretises the idea that 'We are many, they are few'. Secondly, we must focus on the need for an international dimension: the need to say that our struggle is the same as the struggle of the French workers, of the Iranian workers, etc. We do not look for 'national roads', least of all socialism in a single country. We need at least the degree of internationalism that the Second International and the Cominform in deformed ways expressed, but taken to a much higher level, in order to get to the point where the question of power is posed at all ●

mike.macnair@weeklyworker.org.uk

## Notes

1. J White *Karl Marx and the intellectual origins of dialectical materialism* Basingstoke 1996.

# Appeal from the editor

Readers will have noted that not much has been happening in relation to the legal dispute in which the *Weekly Worker* was embroiled earlier this year (see 'Unreserved apology' *Weekly Worker* February 7). In fact the complainant's solicitors have still not informed us of the expenses they wish to claim.

Unsurprisingly, following the receipt of a number of very generous donations to the appeal we set up, contributions have now dried up and the total received has

remained static at £3,530. We have therefore decided to suspend this appeal until such a time as there is movement to report. I would like to reassure donors that in the meantime the money collected is being held in a specific account, ready to be released as and when appropriate.

I would also like to thank once again all comrades who have contributed. Please watch this space.

**Peter Manson**

## PARTY

# To get out of the gutter begi

Should the left aim for a non-socialist stage of capitalism? A stage acceptable to Stalinites, trade union bureaucrats and left reformists? **Ben Lewis** responds to Tim Nelson of the International Socialist Network

I am pleased that Tim Nelson of the International Socialist Network responded<sup>1</sup> to my critique<sup>2</sup> of his article 'Left Unity and the need for a mass party' (jointly written with Paris Thompson).<sup>3</sup> It is also encouraging that the comrade was prepared to submit it to the *Weekly Worker*. If he had still been a member of the Socialist Workers Party, then that would almost certainly have been out of the question.

Not that the ISN has broken with the SWP's method. Instead of engaging in the serious and absolutely vital task of debating the key strategic questions, the majority of its leadership seems determined to repeat all the mistakes of its parent body. Eg, in the name of engaging in day-to-day struggles and helping to build the Left Unity project into a 'broad party', the ISN rejected the offer of joint talks with the CPGB. Meanwhile the ISN appears to be determined to cement 'revolutionary' unity with Socialist Resistance and the Anti-Capitalist Initiative, mainly because they too are committed to a 'broad party'. A 'broad party' designed to accommodate everyone from Stalinites, Trotskyites and left reformists to anarchists, feminists, eco-activists and anti-austerity protestors. In other words, a 'broad party' in which 'revolutionaries' are expected to drop or suspend their principles in the name of unity with forces whose politics are, in fact, incompatible.

Anyway, I must say that comrade Nelson's solo effort is a disappointment. Nevertheless, being much shorter than the original article published on the ISN internet site, it rather succinctly summarises many of the dead-end arguments which currently pass as common sense on the left, conjuring up a picture of 'Leninism' that, ironically, continues the fallacies of Tony Cliff, Chris Harman and Alex Callinicos, but merely places a minus where they place a plus. The 'Leninist' caricature remains.

What results is a distinct lack of clarity about how to proceed, beyond the ISN intervening in the Left Unity initiative in order to argue for politics based on day-to-day struggles of the working class, couched in the language of "socialism from below".

To highlight what I think are incorrect politics is not to dismiss the comrade or the ISN more generally: I appreciate that he and his comrades will take some time to find their feet politically, especially given that they have only just been freed from the stifling and proscriptive regime of the SWP, a regime that is absolutely antithetical to the kind of strategic thinking our movement requires. My criticisms, therefore, are offered in a spirit of a comradely exchange: pointing out where I think Nelson is going wrong and why such strategic errors could lead him and the ISN towards yet another round of disillusionment and demoralisation.

### Permanent minority?

I would like to assure comrade Nelson that I have absolutely no intention of setting up "straw men" or deliberately misrepresenting his views. Indeed, one reason why exchanges such as this are important is precisely to establish where we are talking past each other, so as to focus on our actual differences. The starting point for my article was to critique the idea



**Aim high**

of a broad, 'halfway house' party project, such as the one envisioned by the main driving forces behind LU, including SR and the ACI. Obviously both comrade Nelson and comrade Thompson agree with the CPGB that the Labour Party remains a "capitalist workers' party". Therefore I argued that it is nonsense on stilts to think that we on the left can replace the existing Labour Party with a Labour Party mark two. Not only is such a perspective pointless: it is illusory.

Before we move on to our substantive differences, it is worth stressing one or two things: we in the CPGB strive to work alongside all others seeking to defend and advance the interests of the working class. We also strive to engage with all serious left unity initiatives, even when we think the motivating politics are highly questionable. After all, CPGB comrades were involved in the Socialist Labour Party, Socialist Alliance, Scottish Socialist Party and Respect. None of these were parties in the sense of organising a meaningful part of the working class - but they were certainly sites of intervention where communists could fight for the right politics and programme.

Anyway, the main issue between us is this: is it incumbent upon Marxists themselves to *establish* such formations? Do such organisations as the SLP, SA, Respect, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition and LU represent the highest form of mass politics in present-day capitalist conditions? Will there be a Respect, Tusc or LU stage, a Respect, Tusc or LU government, before socialism and the rule of the working class? In other words is there - as the title of comrade Nelson's and Thompson's original piece explicitly states - the *need* for

a broad party as part of revolutionary strategy? We in the CPGB answer all these questions in the negative.

Comrade Nelson asserts that his conception of the broad party is different from some version of warmed-over social democracy (and in some ways his view does seem to differ slightly from the implied orientation of SR, ACI and co), but he then proceeds to define such a formation as including "in its ranks all those who wish to bring about the socialist transformation of society", even though "some may believe this could be brought about through reformist means". He contends that the establishment of such a party and fighting for revolutionary unity are not "mutually exclusive" - they are two "separate, but linked" tasks for revolutionaries today.

In light of the abject failure of the British left's 'broad party' initiatives over the past couple of decades, I am slightly bewildered that this argument still has any purchase at all. Even according to their own extraordinarily limited aims these 'broad parties' have achieved nothing but further demoralisation and sub-political splits. Failure after failure should teach us something. Not surprisingly then, the entire notion of revolutionaries setting up 'halfway houses' runs counter to the Marxist method in three fundamental ways.

Firstly, it implies (in contrast to Nelson's correct insistence that the liberation of the working class must be of its own making) that 'ordinary people' are incapable of being directly won over to the inspiring world outlook of Marxism. They must spend some time in a kind of non-Marxist purgatory, because it is simply unthinkable that they can be

convinced right now of the necessity of combining the struggle for reforms with the struggle for the masses to take over the running of all aspects of society for themselves.

In a second, and related, sense, the broad-party approach is indicative of an outlook that is not actually aiming to become a genuinely mass force seeking to influence, inspire and empower the millions upon millions of conscious, dedicated fighters needed to break through the fetters of the capitalist system. Instead, it relies on small forces leveraging larger ones: ie, frontism, manipulation and a certain cynicism. In organising in the name of revolutionary expediency around politics we actually know to be *wrong*, the left is falling back on pre-Marxist/anti-Marxist conceptions of revolution, which emphasise the role of the all-seeing *elite*, not the self-emancipation of the majority.

Thirdly, if we think that Marxism is *scientific* socialism that must be studied, understood and developed, then how on earth can it further our side to initially peddle illusions in views that are alien and fundamentally hostile to Marxism's basic propositions on the nature of capitalism, imperialist war, the police and the army, the communist future? Would it perhaps be better to teach children the theory of evolution by first schooling them in the Lamarckian theory of inheritance of acquired characteristics as a necessary 'first step' in the process of arriving at Darwinism, natural selection and so forth?

Essentially, what our 'broad partyist Marxists' are doing is adapting to the left's *current* marginality and the overwhelming dominance of bourgeois ideology. Rather than locating that weakness in the series

of strategic defeats we have suffered and doing the hard thinking needed to arrive at the correct orientation, they take for granted the notion that Marxists will always be in a minority, organised in small groups until the day of revolution dawns. Moreover - as leading SWP oppositionist Ian Birchall did in a recent article - many comrades project this picture back onto history, arguing that the "Bolsheviks were always a minority until a revolutionary situation arose".<sup>4</sup> Actually this is not true. Yes, the Bolsheviks did gain a very narrow majority in the workers' and soldiers' soviets in 1917. Their 'majority' came from their alliance with the Left Socialist Revolutionaries. Certainly when it came the elections to the Constituent Assembly the communists won only around 30% of the votes. However, we should not forget that the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks both assumed *mass* proportions with the 1905 revolution and these roots in the working class were maintained historically. Eg, the Bolsheviks won the entire workers' curia in the 1912 дума elections.

Marxists in Russia were far from unique. Across Europe, in the late 19th century, mass Marxist parties modelled on the million-strong Social Democratic Party in Germany were formed. And, of course, with the formation of the Communist International in 1919, mass parties grew in places such as China, India, Indonesia and Iran.

### First International

Yet how has it come to pass that so many of today's Marxists, who in their meetings and events will no doubt castigate the betrayals of reformism, the treachery of opportunism, etc, actually end up (consciously, or most probably unconsciously) deploying the political outlook of Eduard Bernstein (and much worse) as an integral aspect of what passes for their strategy?

To the extent that the 'broad front' approach is justified historically, the example of the International Working Men's Association (First International) will be invoked. Established in 1864, it consisted of an array of different working class trends and outlooks, such as British trade unionists, Proudhonists, Bakuninists, Owenites, supporters of Marx and Engels, and many more.

This is often seen as a model for the kind of "class struggle" organisation that comrade Nelson would like LU to become: after all, it sought to "unite all those who wish to confront the capitalist system", with Marx and Engels gradually winning support. Indeed, on the face of it, the supporters of Marx *were* able to gain influence within the International, as part of their struggle against other tendencies and outlooks.

Marx was certainly under no illusions as to the nature of the forces he was collaborating with. In a letter to Engels' cousin, Karl Siebel, he argued that the Lassallean General German Workers' Association should affiliate to the International, but with this caveat: "Later on this organisation must be completely destroyed, because the foundations on which it rests are false."<sup>5</sup>

There are, however, two main problems with the First International analogy. Not only did it bust apart when put to the test of the Paris Commune: it was *not* actually initiated

# in by looking up at the stars

by Marx and Engels as some kind of sea in which they could swim. It actually came about due to the efforts of an international working class movement that was still in its infancy but was being spurred on in particular by the revolutionary events in Poland and the United States. There had been several other vague unity initiatives. Yet, as historian August Nimtz notes, “Marx had turned down apparently similar invitations” before 1864. What made this attempt at unity different, and what made it worth entering and fighting within despite the awful politics of many who were involved, was that it represented real working class forces internationally. As Marx wrote to Engels, “I knew on this occasion ‘people who really count’ were appearing, both from London and from Paris.”<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, if we take 1864 as some kind of starting point for revolutionary organisation today, then we are ignoring some of the key organisational and political lessons that Marx and Engels had drawn from the *failure* of the International.

At the International’s final congress (the only one he actually attended) in the Hague in 1872, Marx was adamant that, in order to achieve its goals, the workers needed to organise in a *political party* of the class, based on a clear and principled programme. This Marxist programme was not, as he constantly stressed, to be fought for as some kind of *point d’honneur* to artificially separate the party from the working class movement, but because its basic propositions and solutions were true. As the resolution passed at the Hague congress underlined, “... the working class cannot act, as a class, except by constituting itself into a political party, distinct from, and opposed to, all old parties formed by the propertied classes”. Constituting the working class into a political party, it continues, “is indispensable in order to ensure the triumph of the social revolution and its ultimate end - the abolition of classes”. Instead of fudging, remaining silent on or downplaying tasks, the message was clear: “To conquer political power has therefore become the great duty of the working classes.”<sup>7</sup>

Those on today’s left who sneer at the idea of standing on a “full Marxist programme”, should take note. The conclusions drawn in these resolutions informed the establishment of the parties that later came together in what we now know as the Second International: a real victory, as Engels never ceased to point out. Contrary to the claims of some ‘broad partyists’ today,<sup>8</sup> the programme of the Parti Ouvrier in France (in part written by Marx himself), the Erfurt programme of German Social Democracy, the Hainfeld programme of Austrian Social Democracy and - perhaps most importantly for our discussion with comrade Nelson, the minimum-maximum programme advocated by Lenin - were not ‘broad’, but actually drew sharp lines of demarcation against anarchists, reformists and labour bureaucrats who could not countenance talk of the working class overthrowing the capitalist state and taking political power.

Therein lay the *strength* of these parties: their clear understanding of how to “merge socialism with the workers’ movement” and map out the historic mission of the working class. From cooperatives and clubs through to newspapers and demonstrations, these parties touched the lives of millions. Yet in terms of their theory, their principles and their programmes, they were all built ‘top down’. That

is from the theory, principles and programme of Marxism.

## Nelson’s trap

For comrade Nelson, however, such an approach - surely the ‘A’ and the ‘B’ of the ABCs of Marxism - is indicative of an elitist disdain for the working class masses. He is aghast: “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.”

Perhaps this is indicative of comrade Nelson reacting, in a rather knee-jerk fashion, to his alienating experience of ‘Leninism’ in the SWP, whereby the all-powerful and all-knowing central committee dishes out the orders to the minions. Yet comrade Nelson and his ISN comrades must be careful not to draw simplistic conclusions from their SWP days. The entire ‘IS tradition’ must be scrutinised. As I warned in my previous article, the baby must not be thrown out with the SWP bathwater in a rejection of leadership and leaders *tout court*.<sup>9</sup>

As things currently stand, comrade Nelson could not be more wrong when it comes to Lenin and Leninism. He seems to be aiming his fire at the ‘infamous’ passage contained in Lenin’s 1902 pamphlet, *What is to be done?* Lenin, in order to prove that what he was arguing for was utterly unoriginal, bog-standard Marxism, approvingly quoted Karl Kautsky: “Socialist consciousness is something introduced into the proletarian class struggle from without [von Aussen Hineingetragen] and not something that arose within it spontaneously [urwüchsig]. Accordingly, the old Hainfeld programme quite rightly stated that the task of social democracy is to imbue [literally, to saturate] the proletariat with the consciousness of its position and the consciousness of its task” (the comments in parentheses are those of Lenin).

Lenin is making the (surely pretty obvious) point that a rounded, genuinely Marxist consciousness amongst a working class that has transcended its existence as a mere slave class and attained a genuinely world-historic and scientific outlook (embodied in works like *Capital*, *Anti-Dühring*, etc) does not result from the *economic struggle*: ie, the constant ‘guerrilla warfare’ over things like hours, wages and conditions.

*Urwüchsig* is the key term here, which is why Lenin retains its use in brackets. Often translated as ‘elemental’ or ‘primitive’, it underlines how Kautsky is referring to the working class movement in *its most elemental form*: ie, the immediate conflict between the worker and the boss, which can manifest itself in a variety of ways. Marxism is not needed to invent such a thing: it is a constantly recurring feature of capitalist society. Yet the role of Marxism is to stress the need for a political organisation adopting a revolutionary stance in respect to all classes in society as a whole. Simple as that.

None of this is to say that economic struggles are irrelevant to revolutionary strategy, but merely that the role of Marxists is not to limit agitation and activity to such bread and butter issues, but to constantly champion, and seek to *imbue* the masses with, the kind of rounded vision that addresses how we are ruled and oppressed, how this oppression

can also affect other classes, how this can be overcome, etc. This is why we in the CPGB place so much emphasis on clarity and demarcation when it comes to strategy and programme (and why we take such issue with the notion of halfway houses with their mystifying, fudging and confusing).

Lenin, all the while following Marx, Engels and Kautsky, was seeking to combat the economistic idea that there is something contained within the economic struggle itself that, as this struggle heightens, will result in socialist consciousness. Interestingly in this regard, last year ISN comrade Richard Seymour offered a similar economistic explanation for why we on the far left appear to have embraced left reformism: “In practice,” he said, “we are all pursuing ‘left reformist’ agendas, in the hope that the ensuing class struggles and crises will provide the means (popular self-organisation, workers’ rebellion) to turn them into tools for transition.”<sup>10</sup> The movement is everything, the final goal is ...

## Elitism?

To imply, as comrade Nelson does, that Lenin was out to create a party of intellectuals, whose elitist outlook necessarily entailed a ‘distrust of the workers’ and their energy, creativity and ability to develop ideas, is an enormous disservice to Bolshevism and some of our movement’s best traditions.

I would encourage comrade Nelson to take another look at *What is to be done?* and to also find the time to read Lars T Lih’s *Lenin rediscovered: ‘What is to be done?’ in context*. One of the great merits of this study is that it proves how - in yet another of the ironic twists of our history - at the 1902 congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party it was actually the *Menshevik minority* that was characterised by an elitist aloofness to the worker activists in the movement. The Mensheviks also thought that they were above the democracy and discipline of the party, mocking the Bolshevik *majority* faction for its lack of ‘intellectuals’.

Given these basic misrepresentations of ‘Leninism’, it is hardly a surprise that comrade Nelson arrives at the following conclusion, as if he were polemicising with Workers Power or the International Bolshevik Tendency: “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.”<sup>11</sup>

No, comrade, arguing that the Marxist programme is developed ‘top down’, as the result of painstaking theoretical work and discussion, is not the same as arguing for a *sect*. After all, while Marx, Engels, Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg were all of non-proletarian origins and did not spend a day of their lives working as a factory hand, can we think of more dedicated and selfless *working class* fighters than these?

We in the CPGB are clear: the current crisis of the far left can to no small extent be traced back to a crisis of, and an indifference towards, programme. This is particularly true of the ‘IS tradition’, which has generally viewed a revolutionary programme as a hindrance, not the springboard from which to unite and tool up the workers’ movement. In fact, it is the IS tradition that has displayed all the characteristics of an “ideologically pure” group, based as it is upon agreement with particular shibboleths and historical interpretations - such as the permanent arms economy or state capitalism - and the gagging of

even the most minor dissenting views within that group.

We, in contrast, state that the existing far left can, and must, unite on the basis of a political programme that can map out the transition from capitalism to the rule of the working class (the minimum programme) and the transition to communism and generalised human freedom (the maximum programme). We are clear that our *Draft programme*, as the title implies, is not the last word on this question, but something that we contribute to and fight for in that struggle. Comrade Nelson’s thoughts on it would be most welcome.

We are certainly not out for ideological purity. We merely ask that all comrades *accept* such a programme as the basis for action. Moreover, we stress that comrades have the right and the duty to publicly raise their criticisms and differences within the framework of that programme. If we are serious about building organisations that can “relate to the class” in any meaningful way, then this is the kind of culture we need to fight for and win across the whole movement - not frontism, short-termism and lowest-common-denominator ‘broad parties’.

Comrade Nelson takes issue with me for discussing the kind of party that could bring about the socialist transformation of society. Dismissing this as “elitist nonsense” (presumably along the same lines as his dismissal of his own caricature of the supposed aloof intellectual, Lenin), he argues: “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.”

But a class with what ideas, what programme, what organisations? A class in itself is not the same thing as a class *for* itself. We agree that no “sect or union” can bring about socialism. But, to paraphrase Marx, is the class able to act as a class without a revolutionary party? Victorious revolution, after all, not only presupposes that our rulers cannot continue to rule, but that there exists a certain maturity of will, firmness of organisation, depth of consciousness and resolute unity of our class. If this is not the case, then why would Marxists need to do anything at all beyond promoting routine economic struggle?

Moreover, while the best of intentions doubtless lie behind comrade Nelson’s emphasis on building “bottom up”, such methods are actually disingenuous. After all, precisely because of the “contradictory” nature of working class consciousness that he notes, as well as the fact that human beings possess different talents, skills, interests and so on, there are always going to be those who *lead* in politics: even (and perhaps especially!) in groups that claim to have eschewed leadership and leaders. In this sense, for us in the CPGB, ‘top down’ does not translate into a disdain for democracy: leadership in a revolutionary party, as well as across the workers’ movement as a whole, has to be based on the most thoroughgoing democracy and accountability.

Comrade Nelson concludes: “The task is to build a mass, democratic, socialist organisation”. I agree. But hang on a minute ... why does this task also entail setting up a party that includes Stalinists, trade union bureaucrats, left reformists, anarchists,

petty bourgeois ecologists, etc? Why are there two tasks, rather than one: establishing the unity of Marxists as Marxists and winning militant workers to what results?

After all, the main motivating forces behind LU actually self-identify as Marxists. It is their sectism, economism and political *conservatism* which hold them back from fighting for a revolutionary alternative. At a dangerous historical juncture of capitalist crisis and turmoil, where the need for a higher form of society (as opposed to a bandaged and plastered version of the existing one) is so painfully obvious, our ‘broad party’ comrades are allowing the *right* - ie, the trade union bureaucracy and the liberal bourgeoisie - to set their agenda, all in the name of ‘common sense’ and/or ‘making a difference’. Yet here is the rub: precisely because the forces of reformism are either loyal to or cannot see beyond the existing capitalist state, they are rather poor fighters for reform and change. Revolutionary principles, tactics and methods of struggle are the surest way of actually winning reforms. We must look to the potential of our own organisational power, not to the generosity of those above.

So as to unleash this potential, we on the far left must urgently begin to organise around what we are actually *for*, especially given that there are various backward-looking, reformist and even reactionary outlooks amongst many “who want to confront the capitalist system”, as comrade Nelson puts it. We need to loudly and unashamedly proclaim that the only type of organisation worth its salt, the only organisation that can, with time, become fully *mass*, is one that openly champions the supersession of capitalism and the achievement of working class power. Would comrade Nelson vote for such politics in LU, or, like his allies in the ACI and SR, would he fudge them in the name of ‘breadth’ and inclusivity?

To quote Oscar Wilde, “We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars” ●

ben.lewis@weeklyworker.org.uk

## Notes

1. T Nelson, ‘Illusion is the first of all pleasures’ *Weekly Worker* May 30.
2. B Lewis, ‘Broad party illusions’ *Weekly Worker* May 23.
3. T Nelson and P Thompson, ‘Left Unity and the need for a broad party’: <http://international-socialist-network.org/index.php/ideas-and-arguments/organisation/left-unity/116-tim-nelson-and-paris-thompson-left-unity-and-the-need-for-a-broad-party>.
4. I Birchall, ‘What does it mean to be a Leninist?’ *Socialist Review* June 2013.
5. Quoted in R Morgan *The German Social Democrats and the First International 1864-72* Cambridge 2008, p95.
6. A Nimtz *Marx and Engels: their contribution to the democratic breakthrough* New York 2000, p179.
7. ‘Resolution on the establishment of working class parties’: [www.marxists.org/history/international/iwma/documents/1872/hague-conference/parties.htm](http://www.marxists.org/history/international/iwma/documents/1872/hague-conference/parties.htm).
8. C Trafford, ‘The road to a united left’: <http://anticapitalists.org/2013/02/08/the-road-to-a-united-left>.
9. Unfortunately, the leaflet distributed by ISN comrades at the May 31-June 1 Dangerous Ideas event staged by Counterfire seems to suggest that some are veering in this direction. See <http://international-socialist-network.org/index.php/downloads/126-socialism-from-below-a-real-dangerous-idea?1=1>.
10. R Seymour, ‘A comment on Greece and Syriza’ *International Socialism* No136, October 2012.
11. Workers Power nicely sums up this version of ‘Leninism’. In one statement, the comrades write, without any sense of irony or humility: “We do not present our programme as an ultimatum, in a ‘take it or leave it’, ‘all or nothing’ way. We are clear, however, that without it the new organisation would not be a fully revolutionary organisation; it would be some sort of intermediary centrist organisation.” This is all the more absurd, as WP agrees that it is the duty of Marxists to *establish* centrist parties!

## ITALY

# Grillo's populism exposed

The Five Star Movement has suffered a sharp drop in support. Toby Abse reports on the first round of the local elections

The Italian local elections of May 26-27 represent a massive setback for Beppe Grillo and the Movimento Cinque Stelle (Five Star Movement - M5S). Whilst there was a record level of abstention by Italian standards,<sup>1</sup> with only 62.5% of the potential electorate voting, this did not - contrary to what was universally expected when the low turnout was known, but the votes were as yet uncounted - primarily impact on the Partito Democratico (PD), many of whose voters were far from pleased by the formation of the 'grand coalition' with Silvio Berlusconi's Popolo della Libertà (PdL).

In none of the 16 provincial capitals in which polling took place this year did M5S mayoral candidates make it into the second, run-off ballot to be held on June 9-10.<sup>2</sup> The centre-left - consisting of the ex-'official communist'-dominated PD, the soft-left Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà (SEL) and a number of smaller formations - won five of these mayoralties by gaining over 50% of the vote on the first ballot, and in the 11 where a second round is required the centre-left candidate was in the lead in the first round, so it is reasonable to suppose that a centre-left candidate will be victorious in the majority of cases.

The collapse of the M5S vote since the February general election was a nationwide trend, with relatively little in the way of regional variations. In Rome, for example, M5S got 12.5% in the local elections, compared with 27.3% in the general election, and everywhere else the drop in support was just as dramatic or even more so.

Although M5S lacks the deep roots in specific localities that the PD (or rather its predecessors, particularly the Partito Comunista Italiano) built up over many years, by no means all of Grillo's poor showing can be ascribed to the virtual nature of his internet-based movement, with its relatively small membership and lack of functioning territorial branches. At least some of the shift results from political rather than organisational or technical deficiencies, even if Grillo's official line, defied by some M5S parliamentarians, of a boycott of all television stations, was probably an own goal, given that a large portion of older voters get their political information from television and not the internet. The behaviour of M5S in parliament over the last three months has clearly disappointed its own supporters, who imagined the party would bring about a rapid change in the Italian political climate.

Grillo had calculated that his intransigent approach to the PD would pay off, since it would strengthen the hand of those in the PD favouring a grand coalition, whose formation would enable him to present M5S as the only real enemy of a corrupt system. That would lead the virtuous Italian people into a frontal confrontation with the political class as a whole, according to the classic populist scenario. However, many of those who had voted for M5S in February still regarded Berlusconi, and not the PD, as the main enemy and were, therefore, far from happy to see the defeat of the seemingly more open-minded Pierluigi Bersani with his apparent willingness to do a deal with M5S, or at any rate adopt some of its programme, by the more pro-Berlusconi wing of the PD and in effect blamed Grillo for precipitating the formation of the grand coalition and its natural concomitant: Berlusconi's return to total centrality



**Beppe Grillo: going down**

in Italian politics.

All of this should have been blindingly obvious to Grillo and his close associate and internet guru, Gianroberto Casaleggio - any rational appraisal of the feedback M5S had been getting for months, either directly from comments on Grillo's blog or more generally in terms of what appeared on Facebook, Twitter and political websites, should have indicated that Grillo's total unwillingness to compromise even tactically with the more open-minded elements of the PD was incomprehensible to M5S voters. Instead of which, the slightest criticism of Grillo and Casaleggio, whether by the more astute M5S parliamentarians or by ordinary citizens posting on Grillo's blog, was dismissed as the work of trolls, infiltrators and traitors in the pay of the PD.

Whilst Grillo and Casaleggio should shoulder the greatest responsibility for the M5S debacle, the obsessive and widely reported discussions of the M5S parliamentarians over what portion of parliamentary salaries or expenses should be accepted, returned to the state or given to 'good causes', and in what circumstances receipts were required, has not impressed their own electorate. This is partly because there is some suspicion that M5S members elected to parliament want to get their snouts in the trough in the same way as the PD and PdL parliamentarians whom they had denounced and partly because at a time of falling real wages, rising prices, growing unemployment and numerous bankruptcies, they would regard these issues as secondary at best and irrelevant at worst.

## Narcissism

Grillo's reaction to his own setback has been counterproductive, to say the very least. His wounded narcissism has led him to lash out against the electorate rather than make any real self-criticisms. Whilst attacking the role of the media - a fairly standard response to a poor result amongst most politicians all over the world - is particularly illogical on the part of somebody who has spent the last few years pronouncing on the utter irrelevance of 'obsolescent' forms like television and newspapers in the face of the triumph of the internet, the attack on large sections of the Italian population is far less amusing.

According to Grillo, the population is divided into two main sociological

camp: 'L'Italia A' and 'L'Italia B'. The first is "composed of those who live from politics (500,000 people), those who have the security of a public-sector job (four million people) and pensioners (19 million people)". The second is made up of "the self-employed, laid-off workers, precarious workers, small and medium enterprises, students". Allegedly 'Italy A' can be written off as only interested in the "status quo". Continuing his rant against 'L'Italia A', Grillo declares: "Voting for those who reassure them but in reality have destroyed the country, they are condemning it to a road with no way back" and concludes, sarcastically, addressing this section of the population: "I understand you - you have done well."<sup>3</sup>

Despite the demagogic appeal to students, the unemployed and casualised workers, this is a fundamentally rightwing, anti-working class stance. It attacks those workers most likely to be unionised and retaining some measure of protection under what remains of the workers' statute (after Elsa Fornero's counter-reforms a year ago) and demonises the elderly, whose pensions have been repeatedly and severely reduced by successive Italian governments over the last 20 years of 'reforms' (even if they have not been reduced enough to satisfy foreign neoliberal ideologues like Bill Emmott or his German counterparts). Grillo's attack is also likely to consolidate the tendency of public-sector workers and more class-conscious pensioners from a proletarian background to vote for the PD, in the absence of any viable electoral force to its left, rather to draw them towards M5S.

Grillo's extremely personalised and hostile reaction to an interview that the octogenarian presidential candidate backed by M5S, Stefano Rodotà, gave to the *Corriere della Sera*,<sup>4</sup> probably made things even worse. Rodotà had criticised the tactical errors of M5S, which he felt contributed to its poor local election result, and Grillo's reaction was highlighted by several mainstream commentators. They drew attention to his rapid shift from idolising Rodotà as the ideal candidate for the presidency of the republic in April to dismissing him in May as an 80-year-old has-been who had been resuscitated by the internet. This was presented as an example

of Grillo's untrustworthiness as a serious political figure.

## No left challenge

The PD may have emerged as the strongest force in the local elections, but it seems unlikely that it has actually gained any substantial portion of those voters who deserted M5S between February and May. Moreover, in Siena, which would have been regarded as a first-round certainty for the PCI and all its successor parties, the PD candidate only got 39.6% and will have to go to a second round run-off with the PdL. The poor PD showing resulted from a massive scandal leading to the resignation of many leading figures in a very long established, locally based bank, and the Sienese PD's very close links to the bank clearly harmed their electoral prospects. Yet Grillo failed to make the headway he had anticipated in Siena.

In fact the third-placed candidate was not that of the M5S, but Laura Vigni, who gained 10.3% challenging the PD from the left with the backing of Rifondazione Comunista. The PRC itself only got 2.7% and the allied local list, Sinistra per Siena, picked up 2.8% - a slightly better outcome than that obtained by the communists elsewhere in this round of local elections.

In other words, the left is in no position to mount an electoral challenge. It is true that the metalworkers' union, Fiom, managed to organise a very respectable demonstration of between 50,000 and 100,000 people against the austerity policies of the grand coalition in Rome on May 11. The event united SEL, Rifondazione, sections of M5S and a few prominent individual dissidents from the PD, along with trade union activists and pensioners' organisations, and hopefully signalled the beginning of some sort of mass fightback. But the local election results gave no indication of opposition to the coalition finding any widespread electoral outlet other than M5S or abstention ●

## Notes

- Participation rates in Italian local elections have been much higher than their British equivalents throughout the period since 1945. The original reasons for this were both good and bad: the presence of ideologically based mass political parties, on the one hand, and the extent of clientelism and corruption in local government, on the other. But the pattern persisted after the cold war conditions that gave rise to it altered in the early 1990s.
- Since Italy's introduction of directly elected mayors in 1993 municipal elections have been conducted according to rules somewhat reminiscent of French elections. Groupings whose mayoral candidates do not make it into the second round do, however, obtain representation on the council in accordance with their score on the first ballot, so on this occasion M5S did increase its nationwide total of councillors, albeit from a low starting figure.
- Quoted in *La Repubblica* May 29. This 'analysis' first appeared on Grillo's blog.
- Corriere della Sera* May 30. Rodotà stressed the importance of choosing good local candidates. He criticised over-reliance on the internet during the campaign and Grillo's blaming of the voters after the result was known.

## Fighting fund

## Summer Offensive

The leadership of the CPGB is proposing to an aggregate of members on Saturday, June 8 that our Summer Offensive fundraising drive be launched by the meeting. The SO is an intensive campaign which lasts until the end of our summer school, Communist University, on August 18. The proposed aim is to raise a total of £30,000.

All cash donated to the *Weekly Worker* fighting fund during the SO will be included in the total - although it goes without saying that it will still be used to meet the paper's running costs. But this means that this week's column is the last from me until the end of the SO - CPGB national organiser Mark Fischer will be reporting on the progress of the Offensive, beginning next week with the pledges taken at, before and after the launch.

But beforehand I have my own reporting to do. First, the May fund. I'm pleased to say we exceeded our £1,500 target by £23 - not quite enough to wipe out the remaining £36 deficit from earlier in the year

though! But the last two days of the month brought in a fantastic £175, thanks to TR (£50) and RS (£20), who both made use of PayPal hours before the deadline, to HB for her £30 bank transfer and to MN for his £50 cheque. Thanks also to AR, JC and RL for their standing orders amounting to £25.

Secondly, our June fund begins and ends with this issue of the paper, but in the short time since June 1 we have collected £297. Most of that came in the shape of no fewer than 15 standing orders for amounts ranging from £6 to £30 and totalling £222. The rest came from three PayPal donations - from EJ (£50), NW (£20) and DT (£5). They were among 9,718 online readers last week, by the way.

Thanks to all our supporters for your continuing generosity. I am sure many of you will be answering the call of comrade Fischer! ●

**Robbie Rix**

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

## TORIES

# Fraying at the edges

Desperate anti-Europe posturing shows that the Tories are being pulled sharply to the right by Ukip, writes **Eddie Ford**

Nothing is going right for the Tories at the moment. An opinion poll published by *The Observer* on June 1 showed that support for the Conservative Party has dropped to 26%, whilst Labour is on 37% - and it almost goes without saying that the Liberal Democrats, facing possible decimation at the next general election, are languishing way behind on a wretched 6%. However, the most worrying finding for the Tories is that the United Kingdom Independence Party - not so long ago dismissed as a mere bunch of "fruitcakes" by David Cameron - are surging high on 21%, with the European elections less than a year away.

Clearly, Ukip now poses a very real threat to the Tories - even if it is the case that the Labour Party too is in *long-term* decline, not getting anywhere near the poll ratings it has previously enjoyed under the Tweedledum-Tweedledee British political-electoral system, which is now so clearly in serious trouble. Like a noxious acid, Ukip is eating away the Tory vote and its chances of forming a 'true blue' government at the next general election.

### Despicable

Even before *The Observer* poll came out, the Tories were still reeling from the developing scandal involving the MP for Newark, Patrick Mercer - the public school-educated former colonel who completed nine tours in Northern Ireland and latterly commanded a battalion in Bosnia. He resigned the Conservative Party whip following claims that he had tabled parliamentary motions after taking thousands of pounds from a fake lobbying firm purportedly representing "Fijian business interests" in a newspaper sting - to whom he admitted, or boasted, that he came cheap at £1,000 a day. Tory sleaze is back.

Unhappily for the Tories, Newark is regarded as a 'natural' hunting ground for Ukip. Indeed, Mercer recently invited Nigel Farage to address his constituency - the Ukip leader mischievously telling *The Observer* that he came away with the impression that the local Tory association was "closer to us than to their own leader". Mercer himself has been widely touted as a possible defector to Ukip and you can see why. He was hurriedly sacked from Cameron's shadow cabinet in 2007 after saying that as an army officer he had met a lot of "idle and useless" ethnic-minority soldiers who used false claims of racism as a "cover" for their laziness - after all, being called a "black bastard" was a just a normal part of army life (hard to deny). Then notoriously in 2011 he was taped at a prestigious party - doubtlessly after a drink or two - making extremely disparaging remarks about Cameron, describing him as "despicable" and the "worst politician in British history since William Gladstone".<sup>1</sup>

Naturally, he is now coming under pressure to stand down as an MP before the next general election. Labour and Ukip, not to mention the likes of *The Daily Telegraph* - which has a distinctly ambiguous relationship to the Tory Party - are bound to agitate for a by-election, not unreasonably. As things stand now, Mercer is going to sit there for two years receiving a handsome wage (plus all the perks and expenses that



David Cameron: right, right, right

come with the job), but who does he represent: his Newark constituents or Fiji? Farage denied that Mercer had any plans to switch to Ukip, claiming he had a strict code of loyalty - being an officer and a gentleman, of course. The Ukip leader has stated that he would not stand in Newark if Mercer did eventually quit, but another Ukip candidate would be found - perhaps Des Lynam? It is easy to imagine Ukip doing embarrassingly well. In fact, it is not entirely inconceivable that it could actually win the seat.

If things were not bad enough, the *Mail on Sunday* decided to run the dramatic headline story, "Number 10 rocked by secret love affair" (June 1). We are told that Cameron held "crisis talks" after being told of allegations of a "sensational" love affair between two "middle-aged figures", neither of whom, it seems, serves in the current cabinet. When aides, we further read, told Cameron the identities of the alleged lovers he was "stunned" and, according to senior sources, "immediately realised the importance of the story" - worried that any public disclosures of the facts surrounding the affair could "blow out of the water" any major political set pieces planned by the prime ministerial team. Needless to say, the blogosphere and Twitter is awash with rumours - including the suggestion that the two "middle-aged" people concerned are men.

If the identity of the 'tryst' participants is revealed (the lawyers are on permanent stand-by) we are led to believe that the subsequent public shock will be at least as great as the disclosure of the affair - steamy or otherwise - between John Major and Edwina Currie, which was kept secret for nearly two decades until 2002. Cameron has also had to deal with other unwanted scandals in recent weeks. Leaving aside for now the non-story about Boris Johnson's "love child", there was the news that the Tory MP and deputy speaker, Nigel Evans, had been arrested following allegations that he raped one man and sexually assaulted two others between 2009 and 2013 - with the police investigating an alleged fourth victim, a former parliamentary intern aged 22-years-old, who claims that he was "intimately groped" by Evans in a House of Commons bar in 2011. Evans has branded all the accusations as "completely false". Cameron must dread opening the newspapers in the morning or logging onto the internet, whatever the truth or otherwise of all or any of the above allegations.

### Common sense

However, there is yet another nightmarish scenario to contend with - losing next year's European elections

to Ukip. A not impossible outcome, given the elections are conducted under a form of proportional representation. The latest Com Res/Open Europe opinion poll, for example, has Ukip ahead on 27%, with Labour on 23%, the Tories on 21% and the Lib Dems (not trailing nearly so badly when it comes to projections for the Euro PR elections) on 18%.<sup>2</sup>

It is fair to say that coming third in such a way would be catastrophic for the Tories. It would undermine the morale of the grassroots activists - already alienated from the party hierarchy - and further diminish any hope of forming an outright Conservative government in 2015. The fact of the matter is that Ukip supporters/activists will be far more motivated to vote on the day and, more importantly still, Ukip will be able to scoop up the 'anti-politics' protest vote - its message being far more simple, directly linking immigration with the European Union. While those 'politically correct' metropolitan leaders are out of touch, Ukip speaks plain common sense - the Poles, Romanians, Bulgarians, etc are taking our jobs and depriving us of our housing. A simple explanation that requires a simple solution - getting out of Europe and asserting our own destiny as a nation again. Totally false and reactionary, of course, but a potentially very powerful message that could bring success for Ukip - something the Tories know only too well.

Almost inevitably, the Tories feel they have no choice but to make a dash to the right in an attempt to undercut Ukip. Hence the desperate, nonsensical posturing in the last week from the government. So William Hague pulls out his 'red cards' on Europe under the guise of making the EU "more democratically responsive". His new proposal is to extend the 'yellow card' system already in place, under which parliaments can demand that a proposed law is reconsidered by the European Commission. The red card, naturally, would go further by blocking legislation altogether. Overtly appealing to potential Ukip voters, Hague complained that "too often" the British people feel Europe is "something that happens to them, not something they have enough of a say over". Thus it was crucial, he said, to increase the role of individual member-states when it comes to EU decision-making. "Ultimately", the foreign secretary continued, it is "national governments and national parliaments that are accountable to our electorates" - arguing that they are the "democratic levers voters know how to pull".

Hague also outlined other "key challenges" for the EU, including deepening the single market in order to "improve competition", creating a "business-friendly" regulatory framework and building "new trade partnerships". Hague received the enthusiastic endorsement of Business for Britain, which believes that a "flexible, competitive Europe" with more powers devolved from Brussels is "essential for growth" and urges all political parties to commit themselves to a "national drive" to renegotiate the terms of Britain's membership of the EU.<sup>3</sup>

Then we had Iain Duncan Smith's huge hullabaloo about European migrants to Britain *not* being given equal treatment, much to the approval of the rightwing press. "At last!" rejoiced the *Daily Express*, as Smith "finally snubs EU rules and bans migrants from benefits" - now "determined to scrap any automatic eligibility for handouts" (June 3). The obnoxious work and pensions secretary wants to ensure no-one who has spent less than six months in Britain can access welfare. The new 'six-month' system will be drawn up after the department for work and pensions implements current plans to demand more evidence of residency rights from EU migrants - meaning migrants will be asked to go even further to prove that they have a permanent address. Would-be claimants will have to provide details of their mortgage or the length of their rental lease in order to secure eligibility - as well as explaining how exactly they have spent their time in the country.

Duncan Smith ordered for these plans to be fast-tracked after the EC launched a legal fight at the European Court of Justice over "discrimination" by the British government. The commission contends that British rules deciding how foreign EU nationals qualify for social security payments violates Britain's ostensible commitment to a common EU system, which by definition includes eligibility for welfare. According to the EC, 28,400 applications for benefits from non-British EU citizens/nationals living in the UK had been rejected between 2009 and 2011 - two out of three applications. It believes many of them would have been granted were it not for the tighter 'right to reside' test, which was actually introduced by the last Labour government. Additionally, the commission also cited a London University study which found that EU nationals living in Britain paid in more to the social security system than they took out - highlighting the unfairness or discrimination.

Upping the nationalist, anti-EU

rhetoric - you could almost call him swivel-eyed - Iain Duncan Smith thundered how he will "not stand by" and allow Brussels make a benefits "land grab" that could cost taxpayers £155 million a year, vowing to "fight every step of the way" the EC court case. Duncan Smith said he had been given assurances by Cameron that social security would be a "red line" for the Conservative Party in its broader 'renegotiations' with the EU. Douglas Carswell, a Eurosceptic Tory backbencher and libertarian, declared that the EC's "lunatic and offensive decision" would just demonstrate to more people how "we need to leave the EU completely". For Nigel Farage, the commission's "audacity" provides clear evidence that in a Britain-versus-EU fight, "we just don't win" and never can - so get the hell out of Europe.

By making a great show of bashing the Brussels bureaucrats and 'standing up for Britain', the Tories think they can steal Ukip's clothes. In reality though, far from manifesting a display of principled resolve, it just adds instead to the distinct impression that the Tory Party is fraying at the edges - more concerned with holding the squabbling factions together than projecting a coherent political message that will change hearts and minds at the next general election. And Cameron does appear to be running scared of Farage, wanting to exclude him from future TV debates between the political leaders ahead of the general election on the grounds that he represents a party without any MPs - therefore Ukip is not a serious organisation. Never mind the 26% of the electorate who voted for Ukip at the local elections or the 16.5% in the 2009 European elections. Irrelevant. Unsurprisingly, Farage is threatening court action over the issue.

Unlike many on the left, we in the CPGB never thought that the coalition government was inherently weak and would fall apart at the first mass strike or demonstration - a pitiful illusion. However, like many others, we did think that after a few years the pressure would build up within the Lib Dems. Perhaps an MP or two would cross the floor of the house to Labour or a serious ruction would erupt at a party conference - especially as the Lib Dems are relatively open and democratic, compared to the ghastly, stage-managed events held by the Labour and Conservative control-freaks.

But it has not really panned out like that. A surprising feature of this coalition is that the Tories are proving to be the weakest link rather than the Lib Dems - who at the moment seem almost eerily united (though time will tell). The main explanation is that under the impact of the economic crisis society as a whole is moving sharply *to the right* - mainly because the left is not able to present a viable alternative. In a sign of the times, the fascist English Defence League is organising anti-Muslim demonstrations, the British National Party is 'returning to the streets' and Ukip is on the rise - pulling the Tories to the right ●

eddie.ford@weeklyworker.org.uk

### Notes

1. *The Daily Telegraph* November 13 2011.
2. [www.comres.co.uk/polls/Open\\_Europe\\_EU\\_and\\_Westminster\\_VI\\_Poll\\_May\\_2013.pdf](http://www.comres.co.uk/polls/Open_Europe_EU_and_Westminster_VI_Poll_May_2013.pdf).
3. <http://businessforbritain.org/about>.

## ANALYSIS

# Far right on the march

The chauvinist atmosphere in the wake of the Lee Rigby murder has thrown the British far right into the spotlight. **Paul Demarty** assesses the balance of forces

**T**he murder of Lee Rigby in Woolwich was, among other things, a gift to Britain's far right.

Had any of the crackpots at the head of the various far-right organisations sat down to write the script, they could scarcely have done better. Two Muslims - *black* Muslims! - were caught, in a morbidly literal sense, red-handed after butchering a (white) British soldier in the streets. There is something here for every variety of racist, Islamophobe or chauvinist (except, perhaps, the oddball 'third positionists', who used to consider such people allies against the depredations of international Jewry).

So it has come to pass. The UK Independence Party continues to ride high in the polls, and the fact that the suspects were British-born and possessed of thick south London accents will not prevent them making an immigration issue out of the whole affair. More spectacular, however, is the response of the English Defence League, which has managed to get serious numbers out on the streets to push its Muslim-baiting agenda. Altogether less successful was the British National Party, which betrays all the signs of disintegration.

## BNP decay

The BNP's flagship post-Woolwich protest was a complete disaster. The organisation was initially barred from protesting in Woolwich, or indeed marching anywhere at all by the police. Nick Griffin used his Twitter feed to call on his faithful followers to defy the latter order; but in the event a few dozen dishevelled racists were penned in on Whitehall Gardens, with a much larger anti-fascist contingent nearby (see opposite).

It is a measure, in fact, of how dramatically its star has waned in the last half-decade. Four years ago, Griffin and Andrew Brons were elected to the European parliament, on votes approaching 10% in the North-West and North-East England regions respectively. Since then, nothing has gone the BNP's way at all; the European courts ordered it to change its constitution to allow non-white members, leading to a costly court battle, and after that to a perpetual financial crisis. Griffin's much heralded appearance on the BBC's *Question time* show was a total humiliation for him, leading to further leakage of support.

The rise of the EDL, meanwhile, cut into some of the traditional reservoirs of far-right

support - football casuals, the most atomised lower working class youth. The BNP had demobilised such elements in favour of pursuing an electoral strategy, which seemed a smart move until Ukip - a slicker, more moneyed electoral operation - was able to recover from its own mid-2000s troubles.

The BNP will no doubt slope on until Griffin and Brons are squeezed out of the European parliament next year; but any anti-fascist types feeling triumphant should remember that it was the BNP's own contradictions, not the endless hysterical counter-mobilisations, that did for it in the end.

It is one thing to position your party as a British chauvinist-populist alternative to the main parties, as Griffin attempted to do. It is quite another to do so with the human material actually at the BNP's disposal - people who, like Griffin, have danced around in every fruitcake fascist subset of the last three decades. Griffin has been a Strasserite Nazi, a Hitlerite Nazi, a third positionist, a Powellite, a Leesite and almost everything else. In a country whose modern national myth is the wartime triumph against Hitler's barbarism, no group will ever get too far with as many stock photos of leading members making stiff-arm salutes as the BNP.

## EDL on the rise

Which brings us to the EDL. The comparison is instructive, not least because recently the group has been beset with the same kinds of trouble as the BNP.

Its leader, Stephen Yaxley-Lennon (aka 'Tommy Robinson'), was recently arrested by US border authorities (of all things) for travelling on a friend's passport in defiance of a banning order. Like Griffin, he has assumed absolute dictatorial control of his group, which (when its initial flurry of successful marches started to peter out) has led to internal grumbles and strife.

Ridding the EDL's ranks of closet Hitler-worshippers and die-hard racists has proven a fraught affair at the best of times; and a putative

electoral intervention with the British Freedom Party came to nothing - again, at least partly due to Ukip's recovery. The result was - until a week or two ago - much smaller demonstrations, boxed in by police and outnumbered and harried by anti-fascist groups.

Yet, while Woolwich showed up the BNP as an utterly spent force, the EDL has returned to its former strength almost overnight. It is not difficult to see why. The group was formed ostensibly in response to protests at the funerals of British soldiers organised by the likes of Anjam Choudary, the noted Islamist lunatic. The murder of Rigby provided almost exactly the same backdrop, albeit that bit more grisly.

The EDL turned out over 1,000 people in both London and Newcastle, and several hundred elsewhere in the country. It organised a coordinated series of much smaller marches to lay wreaths on war memorials. The sun was shining; it made hay. Anti-fascist counter-demonstrations have almost invariably been utterly outnumbered; where scuffles have broken out across police lines, the anti-fascists have come out worse.

Why, then, has the EDL benefited so dramatically, while the BNP has been humiliated? It is because the EDL is both more and less fascist than its erstwhile competitor. It is less fascist inasmuch as its credentials are far less problematically English. Its provenance in and around the military helps; it is relatively untroubled by overtly neo-Nazi personal history on the part of its leaders; and the bonehead hard core have tended to produce splinter groups (North-West Infidel and North East Infidel are geographically self-explanatory examples). Both the BNP and EDL brandish the cross of St George; only the EDL, however, has proven truly able to make the banner its own.

On the other hand, the EDL is more classically fascist in its *methods*. Its orientation is to the streets, not the ballot box. While its protests are ostensibly non-violent, its membership base is generally made up of fighting men: EDL members have attacked picket lines and leftwingers selling papers. Add it all up, and the post-fascist BNP is in a far worse position to turn the Woolwich murder into street intimidation than the fascist EDL.

## Reflection needed

What is equally clear is that the anti-fascist response has been mediocre at best. For once, it appears that the participants realise this.

Unite Against Fascism, the front group led by the Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Action, is hardly in rude health. The National Union of Students executive voted down a motion on fighting racism from its Black Students campaign (for most of recent history, effectively stitched up by SA) on the basis that it included a call to re-affiliate to UAF. The latter's reputation has been tarnished by

association with the SWP - a situation not helped by the prominence within UAF of the alleged rapist at the centre of the SWP's recent turbulence.

Reports from ground zero at recent anti-EDL mobilisations speak to a creeping demoralisation. The hysterical chants of the UAF faithful ring increasingly hollow from inside a police kettle, with two, three or four times as many EDL boot boys a couple of streets away. The UAF contingents are smaller and more isolated from kindred anti-fascist groupings and campaigns than at any time in recent years.

Dave Renton - an SWP oppositionist who continues to publish critical writings under his own name - has a not uninteresting post-mortem of the major EDL counter-demonstration in London. He quotes various comrades, including one pretty perceptive remark from 'RS': "Our tactics didn't really work ... A month ago the EDL looked like a spent force. But clearly that was rather superficial, since all it's taken is a single murder for them to launch multiple mobilisations and outnumber anti-fascists. We seem to have made very little impact on actually undermining the basis of Islamophobia in Britain."

It is the latter sentence which is the most encouraging, as far as these things go. *Why* did the EDL suddenly brush away all its internal strife and problems? Quite simply because it feeds off the chauvinism present in the ideological atmosphere: it is given strength not necessarily by holding successful demonstrations (barring total routs, even a march smashed by police or counter-protestors can put fire in the belly if it is well handled), but because its ideology is coterminous with the xenophobic, jingoistic bilge thrown about by the gutter press, and the concessions made to it by a rudderless, cowardly political class. That bilge has been flowing all the more freely since Rigby's murder.

Defeating the EDL - or whatever fascist sect replaces it when Tommy Robinson commits one embarrassment too far - means defeating the reactionary ideology of the *state* and the bourgeois establishment. Renton nudges in this direction to a point, but is rather trapped in nostalgia for the old Anti-Nazi League:

"A large part of the campaign's dynamism came from the activity of a relatively small group of comrades in Rock Against Racism. They made sure that fascism was never misunderstood as *just* a very aggressive form of popular racism. They fought all the time to join up the popular racism of the [National Front] to the institutional racism of the police, prisons and courts; its anti-black racism to its simultaneous, swaggering and homophobic masculinity. They fought, in effect, for a broader, more heterogeneous anti-racism."

It is very easy for an SWPer to look back to the high point of the ANL and RAR as a "model" for anti-fascism, as that period marks the high point of the SWP's impact in society beyond the far-left fringe. Yet a truly honest assessment is that, *as campaigns to defeat fascism and the far right*, the ANL and UAF are both unqualified and total failures. The National Front collapsed not because the Clash headlined a couple of gigs with SWP stewards, but because Margaret Thatcher was rightwing enough to attract back their floating, peripheral supporters. The BNP was defeated

by Ukip, not UAF - let alone Love Music, Hate Racism, RAR's culturally moribund descendant (let's face it - Hard Fi are a bit of a step down from The Specials).

UAF's decade-long stretch of jumping up and down and shrieking 'Nazi!' has achieved absolutely *nothing*; in the same period, the centre of gravity in Britain has shifted markedly to the right. Our side has gotten more disorganised and marginal; the far right, meanwhile, now has by all appearances a stable party capable of achieving mass votes and pulling the Tories in a chauvinist, revanchist direction, in the form of Ukip.

In a sense, this is an entirely obvious and expected outcome. Fascism and similar far-right lunacy is an effect of the decomposition of capitalist politics and ideology - cyclical to an extent, but also a long-term secular trend in tandem with the decline of capitalism as a system. Anti-fascism as a *permanent* campaigning priority necessarily poses an alliance between the far left and the bourgeois political mainstream; it forces us to prettify, however much we gripe about biased policing and 'institutional racism', the very political state regime which makes the emergence of far-right groups inevitable (as if David Cameron is incapable of physically smashing the left or attacking migrants!). It is utterly self-defeating.

Marx remarks that history only sets itself such tasks as it can achieve. Unfortunately, the far left is not quite so wise as history. UAF, the ANL and more 'militant' competitors such as Anti-Fascist Action, set themselves the impossible objective of defeating fascism once and for all, or for whole historical periods, *without* overcoming its actual material grounding in capitalist society and the imperialist system of states (such complicated matters are left for the Sunday sermons).

Genuine united front work - to defend mobilisations of the movement, neighbourhoods, places of worship or whatever from genuinely likely fascist attacks - has value in itself. If the EDL's newfound vigour should continue (which is by no means inevitable, but a real danger), such work will become all the more urgently necessary in localities around the country. 'Anti-fascism', as a *strategic* campaign and objective, is not, has never been and will never be more than a waste of effort.

Renton notes approvingly that "a younger generation of party comrades (the very ones, it seemed, who had been on the losing side of the recent faction battle) took it upon themselves to organise. They produced their own leaflets; they distributed them by their thousands." Very good, coming from an organisation not known for the rank and file taking initiative - but when was the last time these comrades took it upon themselves to print and distribute thousands of leaflets calling for the revolutionary transformation of society? The answer, one suspects, is 'never' - and that, more than anything else, is the problem; the idea of a *real* alternative to this suffocating society has been allowed to wither. Not even the murder of Lee Rigby is a more generous gift to the EDL.

paul.demarty@weeklyworker.org.uk

## Notes

1. <http://livesrunning.wordpress.com/2013/06/01/getting-it-right-3-after-whitehall-where-next>.



Tommy Robinson: back in business

## REPORT

# Out of the woodwork

Maciej Zurowski reports on the BNP's return to the streets and the demonstration mounted by anti-fascists

As descriptions of the June 1 British National Party demonstration and the anti-fascist counter-protest in Westminster, phrases such as 'good clean fun', 'solid Saturday afternoon entertainment', and 'decent spectacle' spring to mind. Following years of infighting, faction struggles and near-absence from the public eye, the whites-only outfit was attempting to test the waters in the wake of Woolwich - and we were curious to find out just how many followers it could still mobilise.

Instead of enduring UAF speeches about defending multiculturalism, Cable Street and the Nazis in World War II, our expedition team headed straight for the BNP assembly point in the Old Palace Yard, which the BNP web team had renamed "Old Place Yard". Depending whether you consulted the party's website, Facebook or Twitter pages, the demonstration was either about Muslim men grooming pubescent girls, Islamic "hate preachers" or the murder of Drummer Lee Rigby.

Furthermore, patriots were asked to "dress smart", implying that the party aimed to preserve its pointedly petty bourgeois image rather than try something a bit more English Defence League. Nonetheless, Nick Griffin reportedly attempted something known to us on the left as a 'cynical recruitment raid': the leader with the radiant smile extended a warm welcome to the competition, cordially inviting EDL members to join the protest.

But rival leaders guard their flock jealously, and the EDL's Tommy Robinson is no exception. Among the assembled BNP supporters, only one 'footy lad' sporting the EDL's 'No surrender' brand was spotted. A man with a 1981-style Mohican haircut, who looked suspiciously like he had got his punk costume from a fancy-dress shop, raised the union jack and a St George's cross banner for the press photographers. With images of punk serving as testimony to Britannia's national heritage at the Olympics opening ceremony, perhaps this display was the logical conclusion and final death knell.

A more characteristic sight, however, was that of the BNP's London assembly candidate, Clifford Le May, who had donned his - now ruined - best suit for the occasion, as he later confessed to *The Guardian*. The paper reported between 50 and 100 protestors, but to us the number appeared closer to 40 - a truly miserable figure and certainly not the cash-in Griffin had hoped for. With the UK Independence Party serving, for the time being, as a respectable and dynamic umbrella for rightwing nationalists, and the EDL lending weight to its defence of our ailing imperialist bloc through street thuggery, perhaps the sapless BNP veterans were just not the men of the hour.

It was not long before a couple of hundred black-clad antifa activists, who had broken away from the designated Unite Against Fascism route, came running towards us and the BNP, chased by an apparently ill-prepared police contingent. The thin blue line of cops managed to prevent the heavily outnumbered BNP activists from being attacked physically, but they could not safely escort individual BNP latecomers through the crowd of counter-protestors. The aforementioned Clifford Le May, for example, had to fight his way through a heavy rain of fists, and there were one or two more such incidents.

In one instance, a BNP supporter



Nick Griffin: pathetic turnout

ran in my direction, tailed by some 30 anti-fascists. I could have easily tripped him up. But within the two seconds or so I had to contemplate my actions, something in me must have decided that 30 people jumping on one was hardly a useful response. Naturally, there is nothing intrinsically reprehensible about using physical force against your enemies. But should such tactics not correspond to the actual threat posed? For the life of me, I could not see what great peril a small group of washed-out nationalists waving union jacks in Westminster posed to anyone. Even if the Führer's famous words about the left's failure to crush the Nazi movement "in its infancy" are your sole guide to anti-fascist strategy - rather than, say, a tactical assessment based on actual material and historical factors - then it is still hard to fathom how the right-populist ex-fascists of the BNP fit the bill.

Whatever criticisms one may have of the antifa, it is hard to conceive of a bigger waste of time than the SWP's liberal 'united front', Unite against Fascism. Having held a lengthy counter-protest with speakers in Whitehall - where it partly managed to get kettled - UAF

ultimately did march down Parliament Street towards Westminster, but came to a halt at a distance sufficiently far away for the BNP to be unable to hear nor see it. As far as SWP organisers were concerned, it was now time to strike a militant posture and erupt into over-excited chanting.

What was the UAF objective? It had decided that the BNP "shall not pass". Why? First of all, because that's what the anti-fascist slogan from the Spanish civil war says - even if, in this case, it was just a handful of no-hopers totally outnumbered by police. Secondly, the BNP was planning to march to the Cenotaph, the United Kingdom's official war memorial. As every UAF activist knows, British troops were "fighting fascism" in World War II. So who, if not UAF, will defend the empire's monuments to freedom - even when they happen to mark the signing of the Versailles treaty as a milestone for peace?

Incidentally, the fact that UAF did not get anywhere near the action did not prevent some of its activists from getting arrested later on, as police orders to clear the street by 4pm were ignored. The BNP's deadline,

meanwhile, was extended till 5pm - presumably to avoid its supporters getting beaten to a bloody, humanoid pulp. This prompted indignation in Twitterland: "Anti-fascists being arrested *en masse* while BNP free to leave," lamented Laurie Penny, before concluding that the Met had "clearly picked a side today". Likewise, a UAF newsletter sent out on Monday complained that police tactics were "biased towards fascists".

Oh, how the left loves its conspiracy theories. Has Laurie Penny never been at a demonstration where police effectively protected weedy leftwingers from pissed-up fascist hooligans? Has she never heard of rampaging EDL members getting arrested or compelled to leave the city limits? And if she has, does this mean police had "picked a side" and decided to support the left on that day? Did UAF expect the Met to arrest BNP protestors for being 'fascists'?

Frankly, this is silly - equivalent to the BNP 'theory' that UAF is a rent-a-mob employed by the 'communist multiculturalists' who 'rule Britain'. Short of a severe political crisis of Greek proportions, the police do not 'pick sides' in confrontations between marginalised groups on the far left and far right. Nor does the bourgeois establishment normally court the extreme right, which it regards as unwelcome political competition. What the police do is uphold the 'rule of law' in relation to property rights, while defending the state's monopoly on violence - often aggressively so and to the point of severe physical abuse. At a demonstration where one side complies with police instructions while the other side does not, it is not hard to work out whom the forces of order are more likely to target.

As mentioned earlier, proceedings in the antifa section of the protest were not without their entertainment value. A surrealistic note was added when the ill-fated patriots were chased by young women in badger costumes, who had attended a nearby protest against the government's badger cull.

After several hours of a fairly *laissez-faire* approach from the Met, the predictable kettling ensued, with arrests peaking at a reported 58. Having enjoyed the circuses and aching for bread, our team had already left by that time.

UAF and fellow anti-fascists were not slow to declare the counter-protest a victory, for the "fascists did not pass". Like most anti-fascist success stories these days, this one was of a very notional nature ●

## Great victory

Celebrations of the great anti-fascist victory continued on the evening of June 3 at a UAF meeting in the University of London Union, where around 150 supporters, mainly SWP, celebrated their success under the watchful eye of national secretary Charlie Kimber.

A range of top-table speakers thanked the UAF for its support over the past couple of years in fighting the "Nazi" EDL and BNP. The chair said the June 1 mobilisation had been a "successful event from our perspective" and the sweet mood music continued with Jude Woodward of One Society, Many Cultures who thanked UAF for having "played an important part in setting our agenda".

The loudest applause was reserved for the SWP's lead figure in UAF, central committee member Weyman Bennett, when he quoted an EDL tweet showing just how important Unite Against Fascism is held to be: "UAF has to be stopped". Comrade Bennett

disclosed plans to build on the latest tremendous success, including rallies like those in Trafalgar Square after 7/7 organised by Ken Livingstone. There is to be an advert in *The Guardian* to garner the widest possible support for the fightback against the fascists, Ukip and xenophobia.

Paul Holborow, one of the co-founders of the Anti-Nazi League, said that without the UAF the May 27 EDL demonstration could have numbered around 20,000. Presumably referring to dissident SWP members, he asked those who have been criticising UAF to take down their blogs: discussions should be kept internal, so that we can concentrate on the main task. Another contributor revealed the perilous state of the finances of the UAF in the absence of union support.

There is nothing like a good rally to celebrate success and motivate the troops. And it also helps in diverting attention from the SWP's internal divisions ●

Simon Wells

## What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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# weekly Worker

## Pornography and violent crime

# Causative or correlative link?

As is often the case when the media deals with emotional issues, irrationality replaces any form of sane, measured or analytical response - in the last week this has taken the form of calls to police more effectively what can or cannot be accessed on the internet.

The abduction and murder of April Jones in west Wales last year provoked the kind of emotional public outpouring of collective grief that sells loads of newspapers. Terrible, tragic murders of children seem to have their place in a, roughly two yearly, news cycle. The much more unpleasant truth is that the murder of children happens considerably more frequently than that - but it does not always make for such a good story. The reality is that the vast majority of murder and rape cases, where the victim is a child or young person, are committed by a close family member or someone they know well.

According to statistics collated by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, child homicides in England and Wales occur around one per week (52 per year), two thirds of the victims are under five years of age and in most cases a parent is the prime suspect.<sup>1</sup> This makes more uncomfortable, less titillating reading than the 'crime drama' notion of the deranged stranger waiting for the one moment when you are not dutifully watching your daughter play, to snatch her away in his car (loaded with sweets and puppies).

Last week, following the sentencing of April Jones's murderer, Mark Bridger, the NSPCC stated that there was a "worrying link" between his viewing of pornography online and the violent crime he went on to commit. This was reported by *The Daily Telegraph* in its front-page lead, headed: "Murder of April Jones 'proves porn link to sexual assaults'".<sup>2</sup> But at no point in the *Telegraph's* story, or that of any other media outlet, as far as I know, is there any evidence of causation. Sure, there may well be a "link", but is it merely correlative? Or can we prove that the watching of pornography has *caused* the individual to commit the violent crime?

One would have thought that someone who has sexually violent urges towards children would be more likely to seek out pornographic material of that nature than the majority of the population. Does viewing this material make the person in question more likely to offend? Has the perpetrator of the crime gone from looking at increasingly explicit material to acting out their fantasy in a spiral of ever more demanding gratification?

The counter-argument is that, rather than encouraging someone to go out and commit violent sexual crimes, living out the fantasy through a video can act as a release. For example, professor Todd Kendall's paper on *Pornography, rape and the internet* claims that in countries where pornography had been harder to come by instances of rape have decreased since the arrival of the internet<sup>3</sup>. Naturally, the accepted wisdom is that the opposite is true, but personally I would be wary of how statistics are used to support either argument - it could equally be the case that the viewing of pornographic material has no effect on violent crime



Warping minds

statistics whatsoever.

The claim that viewing extremely violent porn or child pornography (and, whatever one's views on the sex industry, it is important to make a distinction between these two things) causes people to mimic what they view online seems not to take into account people's ability to distinguish between reality and fantasy. A small minority of people may not be able to do so - quite possibly this is true of Bridger - but should it then follow that all hard-core porn be banned? The same *Telegraph* article reported that the End Violence Against Women campaign has called for "a change in the law to close a loophole that allows some simulated images of rape".

While we are at it, let us also ban extremely violent movies and games such as Grand Theft Auto, where the player steals cars, bangs hoes and gets involved in all sorts of unsavoury criminal activities. Of course, this is a ridiculous proposal. Why? Because, by and large, people can watch movies and play computer games without feeling the need to go off on a murdering spree. For those who cannot differentiate between reality and fantasy, their problems are much more deeply rooted and will not be solved by the banning of explicit

material (incidentally, certain types of pornography are, of course, already illegal - yet people who wish to access them still manage to do so).

One of the demands provoked by this story is that Google and other internet service providers need to tighten up their controls on sexually explicit material involving children. For the sake of the argument let us assume we are discussing actual children. The production of such material clearly involves the exploitation and sexual abuse of those children and therefore is, and should be, illegal. Those producing videos and photographs of actual child abuse should be charged appropriately.

In relation to this, how should those people who deliberately view online content of this nature be dealt with? By being punished for what is, to all intents and purposes, a thought crime? It has been argued that it is the demand for the material that causes the sexual abuse and exploitation of young people in the first place, and so the viewer should be regarded as complicit in the abuse. One could make a similar argument about sweatshop labour and technology. Probably what is more to the point is that, because society (myself included) finds the idea of viewing child pornography

as morally repulsive, people are more likely to seek punitive rather than restorative solutions to issues surrounding paedophilia. So the act of looking at something that most people find horrific carries with it a prison sentence. As with all aspects of censorship, the question is, at what point is the line drawn? Animated, computer-generated images of an explicit nature? Books or films such as *Lolita*? Anime films depicting rape? The video of the primary school Christmas play that was posted on a social media site?

It is very important to make the distinction between child pornography and hard-core porn - it seems that the two things are being equated by the likes of *The Daily Telegraph*. What might be deemed 'hard-core' porn is all over the internet, easy to access, and perfectly legal. It is made and produced using adult performers who have given consent. I am not including snuff movies in this definition, which fit none of the above stipulations (seemingly these are referred to as "criminally obscene material"). The idea that governments should force internet service providers to block adult content, but over-18s can opt in using a credit card, is fraught with difficulties. Firstly, teenagers are remarkably clever at subverting and overcoming rules and restrictions: they are generally more savvy than their parents when it comes to technology and will work out the PIN code (possibly their own birthday or their parents' wedding anniversary) or just 'borrow' their credit card. Secondly, perhaps not all members of a household are upfront with each other about their online habits, which could lead to all sorts of domestic fun. And, most importantly, it is generally speaking a bad idea to call on the state to censor online material: 'First they came for the pornographers ...'

The moral panic-mongers in the print and broadcast media are quick to blame the internet for all social ills - not just sexual violence, but other hot topics such as Islamic extremism. But, if it were true that internet porn was to blame for sexual violence, then one would expect an exponential rise in

instances of rape over the last 15 years or so. Yet, we know this is not the case. In other words, there is no rationale behind the panic, beyond politicking and selling newspapers.

Mark Bridger and Stuart Hazell (jailed for the murder of his partner's granddaughter, Tai Sharpe) were both found to have sought out sexual images - in the former case of young children; in the latter of violent rape and incest. Would these men have committed these acts, had they not accessed these images? Quite possibly. Would having tighter controls on Google have prevented them accessing such material? Doubtful - if someone is prepared to rape and murder a child, they probably have very few qualms about flaunting censorship laws. Does the fact that these two men accessed horrific imagery prior to committing a crime prove a causal link between pornography and violent crime? Absolutely not.

Child pornography and snuff movies are already illegal. Those who operate within such circles and know each other from prison, etc will be able to access the material they want irrespective of Google - so tighter controls will make little, if any, difference.

Knee-jerk calls for more censorship are idiotic. As with most censorship, increased restrictions on who can view legal online pornography will be ineffectual and pointless. If what you consider 'hard-core' offends you, don't watch it. The idea that in general people imitate whatever they see - whether it is porn movies, films or video games - would suggest that the human race is entirely delusional.

Some deeply dysfunctional people will commit horrible crimes. Whether they are influenced by the material they view or read, or whether they seek out such material because of their existing impulses, is up for debate. Either way, it is unlikely that further legislation will affect people's behaviour very much.

Christina Black

### Notes

1. [www.nspcc.org.uk/inform/research/statistics/child\\_homicide\\_statistics\\_wda48747.html](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/inform/research/statistics/child_homicide_statistics_wda48747.html).
2. *The Daily Telegraph* May 30.
3. <http://obu-investigators.com/xuk/porn/clemson/kendall.pdf>.

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