



# weekly worker

**Taksim Square revolts against Islamic dictat - opposition heroic, but lacking in focus, reports Esen Uslu from Istanbul**

- SWP censorship
- CPGB aggregate
- Abortion in Ireland
- Summer Offensive

No 966 Thursday June 13 2013

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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## Hillel Ticktin: from finance capital to austerity muddle





# LETTERS



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

## Abuse and lies

On May 25, as the racist English Defence League marched through Newcastle, police arrested 14 anti-fascists, held them for up to 10 hours, and raided their homes, seizing computers and mobile phones. Seven *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* supporters were amongst them.

In the weeks before the EDL march, Newcastle Unites, a coalition of Labour councillors led by Dipu Ahad, local trade union officials and the Socialist Workers Party, had been determined to exclude *FRFI* and other militant anti-fascists from its march. Its planning meetings were held in secret and its supporters physically assaulted *FRFI* members to exclude them. On the day of the march, Newcastle Unites stewards colluded openly with Northumbria police, leading to our comrades' arrest. A defence campaign has now been set up to fight the possible charges: the comrades are currently on police bail until August 7.

On June 3 Newcastle Unites issued a public statement denying any responsibility for the arrests and any collusion with the police (Letters, June 6). The statement is a torrent of abuse directed at the Revolutionary Communist Group and *Fight Racism, Fight Imperialism*, interwoven with fabrications and downright lies. It is a desperate measure by Newcastle Unites: its reputation and that of its principal supporters lie in tatters. They have put their narrow, sectarian, privileged interests before the needs of building a serious fight against racism and fascism in Newcastle. It claims that it is 'broad-based' and counts allegiance from trade unions, anti-racist and faith-based organisations. But the fact that it ran to the police when under political challenge shows that this claim is entirely hollow.

Underpinning Newcastle Unites' sectarianism is a determination not to confront state racism. In government, Labour was a ruthless persecutor of asylum-seekers and used the 'war on terror' to criminalise Muslim youth. Now the Labour Party has made clear that it will continue to implement the Con Dem coalition's attack on welfare benefits if it wins the next general election. Critics of the Labour Party and Newcastle Unites have to be silenced by any means necessary: excluding them, censoring their views, or shopping them to the police. When *FRFI* put up reports criticising the actions of Newcastle Unites on our website, their response was to demand that we censor ourselves by taking them down and stop Newcastle comrades from posting further articles. Since the EDL march, Newcastle Unites has removed any comments critical of its actions and its statement from its Facebook page. It will not tolerate any political challenge.

The Newcastle 14 Defence Campaign is now organising publicly to protect our comrades from potentially very serious charges: they were arrested for conspiracy to commit violent disorder. All those who support the aims of the campaign are able to attend. By contrast, Newcastle Unites meets in secret. It says it has no choice because of the possibility of an assault by the EDL. Yet it is not possible to draw new people into the struggle if the key decisions are made behind closed doors: it is exclusive and undemocratic. All left and anti-racist groups have to face the possibility of fascist attack, which is why the

RCG led moves to coordinate defence following an EDL and NF attack on an anti-jubilee protest in 2012.

The Newcastle Unites statement complains that, when we reported the assault by their supporters on our comrades on May 7, we compromised their security by identifying the venue for their planning meetings. It alleges that the web article "had put at risk all who use the premises" (owned and run by Newcastle Trades Council). That Newcastle Unite Against Fascism publicly advertises the trades council building as its address shows the speciousness of this complaint, and should not obscure the real reason for Newcastle Unites' secrecy: to keep out militant anti-racists and anti-fascists.

Newcastle Unites portrays RCG/*FRFI* as committed to violent disorder in order to obscure real political differences, in particular our opposition to the Labour Party as a racist, imperialist, anti-working class party. This claim was then used by Newcastle Unites organisers to get the police to stop us from joining the demonstration on May 25 regardless of the consequences. Its statement says we were excluded from its planning meetings "on account of [our] previous disruptive and sometimes violent activities", continuing: "... 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."

This is a fabrication. Yes, we heckled an MP, Grahame Morris. Heckling is part of working class democracy. Morris supported Britain's onslaught on Libya, which left 60,000 dead, and we had every right to oppose him. But there was no violent attack, no attempt to storm the platform. Indeed the May Day organising committee, which includes Newcastle TUC secretary Jim Simpkin, a prominent supporter of Newcastle Unites, knows this: they agreed to allow us a stall at their 2013 May Day event. There was no accusation then about an alleged assault - it is a retrospective smear to deal with a political challenge today.

The statement claims that RCG/*FRFI* has targeted "local Muslim activists with slanders and insults". It can provide no evidence of this because it is a lie. It says we called Dipu Ahad, described as "a prominent Muslim Labour councillor", a "racist". That is also a lie. It says we cause "real distress to many in the local Muslim community". What nonsense! We have quite properly denounced councillor Ahad for the fact that he voted for £100 million council cuts this year - an action which represents a massive attack on the Newcastle working class and which will certainly cause the Muslim community "real distress". His support for these cuts does not seem to bother his Newcastle Unites allies, the SWP or the Newcastle trade union bureaucrats, whose members have lost their jobs as a result. And he is the only person to have insulted any part of the Muslim community, writing after a counter-protest to the EDL in March this year that "The police did a fantastic job ... I'm also concerned about some of our Asian youths who get excited and also want to cause trouble for the sake of it and have no respect for the police!"

The principal purpose of Newcastle Unites' statement is to deny it collaborated with the police. It says Newcastle Unites condemns "without qualification, the arrest of anyone for exercising their democratic right to peaceful protest". This means nothing, since they allege that RCG/*FRFI* is committed to

violence. It says that "to claim that we would collude in any way with such arrests is an offensive and wholly unfounded allegation". So here is some of the evidence to the contrary.

On May 7, after SWP district organiser Yunus Bakhsh threatened a female *FRFI* supporter as she tried to attend a Newcastle Unites planning meeting, Jim Simpkin manhandled her out of the building and told her: "Go away, little girl, or I'll call the police." Both are prominent Newcastle Unites supporters.

On May 15 an unsigned email from Newcastle Unites to *FRFI* North East said: "You will not be welcome and we shall take all necessary steps to ensure that you play no part of these activities." On May 15 Dipu Ahad elaborated on this, posting on the Facebook event for the march a "special message from Newcastle Unites" which told us: "I assure you that you will be thrown out of the demo and the public meeting by our stewards who will be many. You will also be reported to the police for causing disorder!"

On May 23 Northumbria police emailed *FRFI* North East stating that Newcastle Unites had told them *FRFI* were not welcome on the march. Later that day, at a Newcastle Unites public meeting, police were on the door with a list of names and turned away anybody whose name was on the list. Who provided them with the list other than Newcastle Unites?

Hanif Leylali, an SWP member and administrator of the Facebook event for the march, later admitted on Facebook that Dipu Ahad had told the police *FRFI* were not welcome at the meeting and claimed that, although SWP members disagreed with involving the police, "we weren't about to make it a point of unity two days before the march".

On the day of the march, *FRFI* supporters were leafleting and petitioning in the city centre prior to the march assembly time. When the police asked our comrades their intentions, they told them they were planning to join the Newcastle Unites demonstration. The police said initially that they had no problem with this, but later returned and said that the Newcastle Unites organisers had told them *FRFI* were not welcome. It was when our comrades stated that it was a public march and they proposed to join it that the police arrested them.

SWP members Nick Clark and Liam Anderson were present during the arrests. At one point while our comrades were being seized, Clark approached a police officer and told him not to arrest two women because they were "not part of that group" - ie, RCG/*FRFI*. The police officer listened to Clark and let the two women go.

During questioning, police presented the arrestees with a summary of the charges, which included a statement in writing that Newcastle Unites organisers had told the police that *FRFI* were not welcome on the march.

In the days leading up to the march, therefore, Newcastle Unites supporters threatened us with the use of the police, passed our names on to the police, worked with the police to prevent us joining the march, deliberately laid us open to police attack and worked alongside the police as we were arrested. Newcastle Unites has not refuted any of these specific allegations.

There is an urgent need to build a movement in Newcastle against racism and fascism. RCG/*FRFI* will be part of that, as it has been through its work over many years organising against deportations and immigration prisons in Tyneside Community

Action against Racism and countless anti-fascist mobilisations. Three Newcastle Unites organisers attended a meeting of the Newcastle 14 Defence Campaign on June 4 to distribute their statement attacking us. They said they opposed the arrests, but intend to continue excluding us.

This is unacceptable. If Newcastle Unites organisers want to clear their names they can identify and expel those who colluded with the police, apologise for the lies they have spread against our comrades, and their policy of excluding committed anti-fascists from their events, and provide practical support to defend the Newcastle 14.

This isn't just about RCG/*FRFI* or the SWP: this is about building an anti-fascist movement in Newcastle that is democratic, effective and defends all those attacked by racists and by the police.

**FRFI North East**

www.revolutionarycommunist.org

## Right to heckle

I wrote this letter over a week ago and I got no reply from one of your journalists. In the meantime, you print a letter from Newcastle Unites attacking *FRFI* (RCG) that is full of false allegations.

According to the Labour Party and SWP, the RCG/*FRFI* have dared to be openly critical of the Labour Party and SWP. What particularly offended Jim Simpkin, chairperson of Newcastle Unites, is that they heckled the Labour Party speaker last May Day, Graeme Morris, who voted for the atrocity of bombing Libya, resulting in the deaths of thousands of civilians.

My point of view as an independent communist is this. The *FRFI* activists had every right to heckle an imperialist spokesperson of the Labour Party. If the Labour Party and SWP do not want heckling, then allow communists to express their opinion of the Labour Party on its anti-working class austerity programme and imperialist ventures.

My comrades in Canada are keenly waiting your reply.

**Peter Sinnott**

email

## WWI chauvinism

Next year we will suffer a dreadful avalanche of xenophobic and chauvinist nonsense about World War I. Of course, all of us can have nothing but pity for the slaughtered and maimed on both sides, but I felt that a couple of historical bits of evidence to counter some of this disgusting tide of nonsense in a letter to your weekly would be of use to everyone who reads it. And, as far as I know, just about everybody on the left does read it, for whatever reasons. I therefore hope any and all tendencies, not simply yourselves, will take advantage of these two little bits of freely available information.

The first is a little article in *Labour Monthly*: 'Mr Austen Chamberlain on the origin of the war' (March 1922, pp256-58). It is on the Marxist Internet Archive at <http://bit.ly/118tnSG>. It is very useful to cite if anyone mentions "gallant little Belgium". We went to war for what were considered to be our 'national interests' - just like Germany. Some silly old Tories in the mother of parliaments found this difficult to take in 1922 and spluttered into silence. It is all there in *Hansard*.

The second piece of evidence is rather more eccentric from a leftwing point of view: Brian Pearce's book, *How Haig saved Lenin* (London 1987). Pearce argues that Soviet Russia would have been doomed if the British offensive in August-November 1918 had not broken the power of the German army. I have

not the slightest doubt that he is correct, but this generally strikes dumb any union jack-wavers and the less thoughtful of the would-be Bolsheviks. Neither of them had really thought of praising general Haig for that. It reminds me of something I read somewhere: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living."

Brian Pearce was a splendid and dedicated Trotskyist and excellent translator from the Russian. We all need as many arguments as we can for next year and a little bit of humour seldom goes amiss with some of those we shall be arguing against.

**Ted Crawford**

email

## Broad what?

The proposal for a 'broad party' confuses 'party' with 'movement' ('To get out of the gutter, begin by looking up at the stars', June 6).

A 'broad party', including reformists, centrists, etc, will necessarily be an electoral party - ie, a second Labour Party. The Bolsheviks ran candidates in the duma elections, but their focus was not getting the Bolsheviks into office to reform tsarism.

Marxists need to build broad movements. These movements will probably include reformists, centrists, etc. But movements are not parties. Movements as such need organisational forms, or they end up disappearing like Occupy. These organisational forms can be stewards' councils, united fronts, people's assemblies, soviets or all of the above.

We may even be able to coordinate actions with reformists and centrists ... without forming a 'party' with them. But we have to avoid gimmicks to build a quick big 'McParty'. For example, in the 1940s Max Shachtman first proposed to build a "small mass party". And then in the 1950s proposed entry into the US Socialist Party because - according to him, that was the party the masses would be joining when they first become radicalised. Dissolving the Independent Socialist League, he finally ended up on the extreme right of the social democracy.

We need to build a revolutionary party not 'from above' or 'from below'. Instead there needs to be a dialectical unity. Workers today often have college degrees; they are not illiterate Russian peasants. We need to learn to speak to the new working class and listen to it.

**Earl Gilman**

email

## Party-movement

It's nice to see the term 'party-movement' gain traction in comrade Mike Macnair's article ('Lessons of May 68', June 6).

It's also better to read into the situation that France did not really have a revolutionary situation in May 1968 and, at best, prospects for mere regime change. Yes, there was mass hostility between the state and the workers, not least because of the absence of a pressure-value to address falling real wages, and there was a collapse in confidence of the ruling political institutions, but there was no majority political support for a mass party-movement within the French working class. This was demonstrated, first, by the lack of an upward explosion in the PCF's membership and, second, by



its inability to cash in electorally, even for the protest votes at the time.

The solution for May 1968 would have been something like the July days, not 1905. A mass party-movement would still have told workers to end the wildcat strikes and get back to work. However, it would have accepted that half of de Gaulle's offer which didn't involve quick elections. Furthermore, during and after this whole situation, said party-movement would have conducted a massive membership recruitment drive (not of the SWP kind, of course), since a voting membership is a much stronger indicator of political support.

**Jacob Richter**  
email

## Moody

I strongly disagree that *Socialist Worker* was "crass" in dancing on Thatcher's coffin ('SWP: party council', [www.cpgb.org.uk/home/weekly-worker/online-only/swp-party-council](http://www.cpgb.org.uk/home/weekly-worker/online-only/swp-party-council)). Uniquely among the left, they picked up the mood of the best elements of the working class. I say this in a non-sectarian spirit, because I'm in the Association of Musical Marxists and very involved with the opposition and International Socialist Network.

I would also like to comment on a statement in the SWP's perspectives document: "We side with Len McCluskey against the right." This is

strange, given the boasts elsewhere about supporting Jerry Hicks, who accuses McCluskey of being an overpaid fat arse sabotaging genuine rank-and-file party-building by union activists.

**Ben Watson**  
email

## Centre stage

According to Tony Abse, Beppe Grillo's characterisation of 'L'Italia A' and 'L'Italia B' is demagoguery ('Grillo's populism exposed', June 6). However, the reasoning that followed was off the mark for two reasons.

First, 'L'Italia B' suggests the potential for class-collaboration between "the self-employed ... small and medium enterprises, students", on the one hand, and "laid-off workers, precarious workers", on the other. Beyond a political front, of course, this should be avoided.

Second, Abse could easily be interpreted as implying that public-sector employees and pensioners should be at the forefront of a workers' movement. Of course, no-one on the left likes employment assaults on public-sector employees (except police and prison security), but isn't it about time we had a bottom-up workers movement, instead of defending the more traditional, trickle-down workers' movement? Whether called 'freeters' in Japan, 'emergent service workers' in the UK, or the 'precarariat' everywhere outside the distortions

of British sociology, it is high-time this stratum of the working class and related public policy demands take the centre stage and front seats in a reformed workers' movement.

**Nick Tan**  
email

## Authoritarian

Speaking as someone who has been beaten and arrested four times for participating in successive Moscow Gay Pride parades, from 2007 to 2011, I believe the new law passed in Russia is one of the harshest against gay freedom of expression anywhere in the world. It is symptomatic of president Vladimir Putin's increasing authoritarianism and his crackdown on civil society. It violates the Russian constitution, which guarantees freedom of expression, and the European Convention on Human Rights, which Russia has signed and pledged to uphold.

Although the law is ostensibly aimed at prohibiting the dissemination of so-called 'gay propaganda' to young persons under 18, in reality it will criminalise any public advocacy of gay equality or same-sex HIV education, where a young person could potentially see it. In practice, gay marches, festivals, posters, magazines, books, welfare advice and safer sex education will be at risk of criminal prosecution.

It is a blanket censorship of any public expression of same-sex love or gay human rights. This is likely to result in the purging of many books, films and plays from libraries, schools, theatres and cinemas, including many classic works of art and literature.

**Peter Tatchell**  
Peter Tatchell Foundation

## Devotee

It is well known that Lenin devoured the press of his day. He read everything. Not only the bourgeois papers, but in particular the entire gamut of the left press. He read the Mensheviks, the Socialist Revolutionaries, the 'left' Communists, the Bund and, of course, the Bolsheviks too.

And yet today's left is increasable insular. Often comrades doggedly, fearfully stick to their own group's paper. The result is a million miles from Leninism. Much of the left consists of ineffectual - and boring - confessional sects.

The purpose of *Socialist Worker*, *The Socialist*, *Socialist Appeal*, etc, is not to engage with the world. Certainly not to engage with the world of the left. No wonder so-called ordinary people don't buy them. Why should they? In effect they are advertising sheets with all the interest of *Auto Trader* (which at least has the virtue of being useful if you want to upgrade your car).

Too much of the left press exists in a suffocating bubble. The articles are written not to inform, not to educate, but to hand down the 'line'. A line which the devotee is expected to repeat whenever they appear in public. If you fail to do this then there is trouble. The full-timer, the district committee member, the branch secretary will have a 'quiet word'. Failing that, there the is the door marked 'exit'.

At least that has been my experience.

If we are ever to achieve socialism there has to be a whole mass of thinking, critical, engaged men and women. In other words, we must develop cadres. That is why, for all its faults, I like the *Weekly Worker*. True, its coverage of trade union politics is near non-existent and its focus is very narrow. But at least you don't treat us as idiots waiting for the latest anti-capitalist 'initiative' or broad party wheeze.

**Cubbitt Swift**  
Bristol

# Communist University 2013



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# 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 16, 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 8: 'Modern industry's revolution in manufacture and handicrafts'. Organised by CPGB: [www.cpgb.org.uk](http://www.cpgb.org.uk).

## Radical Anthropology Group

Introduction to anthropology

**Tuesday June 18, 6.15pm:** 'The origin of the family, private property and the state'. Speaker: Chris Knight.

St Martin's Community Centre, 43 Carol Street, London NW1 (Camden Town tube). £10 waged, £5 low waged, £3 unwaged. Discounts for whole term.

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

## 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).

## Defend Tower Hamlets fire cover

**Friday June 14, 2pm:** Protest march to City Hall. Assemble Altab Ali Park, Adler Street, London E1 (opposite Tesco Express).

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

## Remember Stephanie

**Saturday June 15, 12 noon:** Protest, Chamberlain Square, Birmingham B3. In memory of Stephanie Bottrill, who committed suicide because of the bedroom tax.

Organised by Birmingham Benefits Justice Campaign:  
[www.facebook.com/groups/375417799240410](http://www.facebook.com/groups/375417799240410).

## Stop Lambeth College cuts

**Saturday June 15, 1.30pm:** Protest. Assemble Clapham Common for march to Windrush Square, Brixton.

Organised by UCU, Unison and Lambeth Save Our Services:  
[www.lambethsaveourservices.org](http://www.lambethsaveourservices.org).

## No 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).

## Stop water apartheid

**Tuesday June 18, 8pm:** Debate on Palestine rights, South London Irish Centre, 140-142 Hartfield Road, Wimbledon.

Organised by Merton Palestine Solidarity Campaign:  
[www.facebook.com/merton.psc](http://www.facebook.com/merton.psc).

## 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).

## The condition of the working class

**Thursday June 20, 7pm:** Documentary film showing, TUC Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1. A group of working class people put on a theatrical interpretation of Engels' classic. Free admission but booking essential: [sertucevents@tuc.org.uk](mailto:sertucevents@tuc.org.uk) or 020 7467 1220.

Organised by Sertuc film club:

[www.tuc.org.uk/the\\_tuc/sertuc\\_filmclub.cfm?regional=7](http://www.tuc.org.uk/the_tuc/sertuc_filmclub.cfm?regional=7).

## 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).

## The spirit of '45

**Tuesday 23 July 2013, 8pm:** Showing of Ken Loach's film, North Road Community Centre, 230 Burnt Oak Broadway, Edgware.

Organised by Barnet Alliance Against Cuts: [www.barnetalliance.org](http://www.barnetalliance.org).

## 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.



SWP

# Offering token concessions

As the crisis rumbles on, the SWP leadership admits it has gone through an 'extremely bruising period'. Peter Manson reports on the central committee's perspectives

It seems that the Socialist Workers Party has to a limited degree finally accepted reality: the crisis that has afflicted the organisation over the last few months has not been resolved and the repercussions rumble on. The central committee has at last admitted to the membership that there has been a split, with over 100 SWP members collectively announcing their resignations in March. It had previously ignored this parting of the ways, merely insisting that "a line has been drawn" under the 'comrade Delta' affair and the intense controversy that had gripped the organisation following the annual conference in January and the subsequent March special conference.

The recognition that all is not well came in the CC's perspectives document put to the June 2 meeting of the party council - the branch delegate body that, according to the SWP constitution, "normally meets once a year". Party council "reviews the political and organisational work of the SWP" and "has power to take decisions on matters of general policy binding on the CC".

The internal *Party Notes* reported "an excellent day of debates, reports and discussion".<sup>1</sup> Along with *Party Notes*, the leadership sent to all members its own perspectives document, which was discussed at party council, but not put to the vote. This document begins in the SWP's usual 'official optimism' mode: the organisation has enjoyed a "number of successes in recent months" - in fact the SWP's "recognition of the bedroom tax as a key issue, our support for the Hicks election campaign, our response to the death of Margaret Thatcher, and to the Woolwich murder, are things that all members should take pride in". Hmm.

However, the document - available on the CPGB website<sup>2</sup> - went on: "... there is no doubt that the SWP has also been through an extremely bruising period of internal debate. We have lost members and trust has broken down between some groups of comrades." What is more, "the CC faces criticism from inside the organisation itself". In such a situation, the leadership concludes, "There are two dangers. One is that the party turns in on itself and concentrates solely on internal debate and argument. The second is that we pretend there is nothing wrong and hope that by ignoring the problem it will go away."

Well, I am tempted to refer to that second conclusion as a breath of fresh air, although perhaps that would be overdoing things. The CC normally warns only of the first 'danger' - as if debating and criticising the workings of the internal regime ought not to be perfectly normal, indeed essential, for revolutionaries; and as if such debates somehow detract from agreed actions rather than making them more effective.

Nevertheless, it is an advance that the CC seems, at least implicitly, to have acknowledged its error in "ignoring the problem" of the recent split. At last it tells the membership that "a hundred or so broke with the party to form the International Socialist Network". Up to now the CC has behaved as though no such thing had happened, even though just about every SWP member must have been following the details of the split - the internet does have its "dark side", doesn't it, in allowing the cadre to inform themselves about things they have no right to know? Despite this

tardy admission, however, there is no attempt to account for the crisis or the CC's own part in provoking it.

In fact, the CC deliberately misinforms the membership about the split. It claims that it "involved a break with our tradition" - the ISN allegedly "represents a quite different approach both to Leninism and to initiatives such as Left Unity". In reality the ISN comrades are, as far as I can see, virtually unanimous in declaring they intend to uphold the SWP's "International Socialist tradition". As for Left Unity, it is hardly surprising that a small group like the ISN would want to get involved, whereas the SWP's practice is to engage with 'united fronts' only to the extent it can control them. I do not think, unfortunately, that the ISN's positive attitude to LU represents a difference in strategy or principle in relation to 'broad parties'.

For the CC, the influence of "left reformist" and "movementist and autonomist currents" - and the "pressure they bring to bear on the party" - is to blame for the ISN split, just as it was with "the small group of comrades who left when we broke with George Galloway in Respect, or those who split along with Lindsey German and John Rees, for example". Clearly if you leave the SWP you can only be moving rightwards.

However, declares the CC, "not all differences in a revolutionary party necessitate a split". An interesting comment for a couple of reasons. Firstly, the implication is that, in the above cases, a split was indeed 'necessitated' - it was, presumably, a case of good riddance. Secondly, it implies that differences *usually* "necessitate a split".

## No factions

And that gets to the essence of the problem with the whole SWP regime. *Because* there is no legitimate way of raising such differences before the whole membership - apart from during the three-month pre-conference period, when three internal bulletins are published - comrades who feel strongly that their criticisms are correct, but cannot even be aired, may believe they have no option but to resign. When a group of comrades share that feeling, they may collectively decide that their differences "necessitate a split".

In my opinion, it can often be a better option to remain in the organisation and fight. In a group like the SWP, that will obviously mean breaking its undemocratic rules, which curtail free speech and free association - factions are only permitted in the same three-month pre-conference period. Nevertheless, oppositionists can hardly be blamed for believing they have no option but to quit.

According to the CC's perspectives document, "After the special conference, which was the culmination of weeks of internal debate and discussion in the party, there were decisive votes on a number of issues. These included overwhelming agreement that the faction that had been formed would be dissolved, as the two

factions had previously committed to do at the national conference."

Of course, that leaves out of the equation the small matter of the CC's rigging of those votes through the exclusion of large numbers of oppositionists. Using its full-time apparatus, it ensured wherever possible that the local aggregates called to elect delegates were stuffed with its own supporters, some of whom had not previously been seen for long periods, and, whenever it had a majority, used it to keep from conference everyone associated with the opposition.

The leadership of a revolutionary working class party would adopt precisely the opposite stance. It would try to ensure that all serious oppositionists could attend conference so that their views could be fully debated. It would recommend that opposition representatives be elected to leading committees too - the practice of the Bolsheviks up to and immediately after the Russian Revolution. But in the SWP monolithism reins - the leadership must be given a free hand.

The CC states: "Delegates recognised the danger of permanent factions and factionalising in the party and voted to confirm that factions should only be formed in the pre-conference period. Despite this it's obvious to many comrades across the party that in some areas a minority faction exists in everything but name."

Now an anonymous factional blog by purported SWP members has appeared online and documents posted attacking the party and decisions made by the national conferences.<sup>3</sup>

This is a reference



to *The Fault Lines*, of course, which suddenly appeared in mid-May. However, this blog seems to have very little life to it now - after an initial flurry of postings from a variety of comrades, everything has slowed down. Nevertheless, the very fact that it still carries critical articles, even from

a 'guest', is highly significant. The opposition might be buried deep underground, but it is alive and has the potential to think, plan ... and act.

But *why* do "permanent factions" pose a "danger"? According to the CC, "they give birth to entrenched divisions and prevent comrades from assessing debates on their own merits, weakening our democracy". This standard SWP 'wisdom' is in fact totally nonsensical, as anyone who thinks about it for a moment will realise. Do SWP factions operating within trade unions weaken union democracy? Do they stop the unions concerned uniting behind actions? How come the Bolsheviks were still able to make a revolution despite the operation of recognised factions?

## No debate

The CC asserts: "Contrary to the protestations of a minority, being against permanent factions does not mean there is a dead hand on debates and discussion in the party. In an active, interventionist party debates inform everything we do."

This is little more than a sick joke. What passes for "debates" in the SWP is the leadership laying down the line and everyone chipping in with comments 'proving' the CC correct. Anyone raising criticisms of the line may be listened to for a few minutes, but if those criticisms persist they will be approached by the branch secretary or local full-timer and asked to consider whether they really belong in the SWP.

Now the CC promises "the opening up of a period of debate within the organisation around a number of themes identified by the central committee". It states: "The next issue of *International Socialism* will contain an article criticising our approach to neoliberalism and its impact on the working class, and two responses to Sheila McGregor's recent article on women's oppression. In *Socialist Review* we have carried Ed Rooksby's article on Left Unity and we have invited contributions from members critical of our approach to our industrial work and Leninism for future issues."

And in the current *Socialist Review* (June) there is an article by oppositionist Ian Birchall entitled 'What does it mean to be a Leninist?'<sup>4</sup> - a response to Alex Callinicos's notorious piece, 'Is Leninism finished?', which was carried in the January issue.<sup>5</sup>

Comrade Birchall's article clearly relates to the SWP's internal regime - but only if you are in the know. Otherwise you might think it is just an interesting theoretical piece, not one that actually implies devastating criticism of the SWP leadership. Birchall states that "For revolutionaries the crucial point is not winning the vote, but winning the argument." And he goes on to explain:

"A leadership that wants to win the vote will try to ensure that as many conference places as possible go to pro-leadership delegates, that the opposition's right to argue its case is limited, so that uncommitted comrades are not confused. A leadership that wants to win the argument will allow the opposition ample time and space to put its position, and will ensure that conference delegations are balanced and that the most articulate representatives of the opposition are present. This is not from any liberal principle of 'fairness'. It is because

you can't win the argument if you don't have it. The leadership will do so because it is confident in the superiority of its positions and its ability to convince the minority."

Comrade Birchall was either prevented from specifying the SWP as an example of a leadership that tries to "win the vote", not the argument; or else he decided to write in such coded terms to comply with the need for self-censorship.

By contrast to comrade Birchall, fellow oppositionist Mike Gonzalez's own response to comrade Callinicos was not published by the SWP. The CC explains why it was rejected in its perspectives document: "For the sake of clarity, comrades should know that Mike G's article, which he published online, was thought too internal for *Socialist Review*, but he was offered the opportunity to write a critique of Alex Callinicos's article on Leninism. He did not take this up, instead putting his article online."

The first thing to say about this is that comrade Gonzalez actually began the rejected article in this way: "My starting point for this discussion paper ... was a phrase in Alex Callinicos's *Socialist Review* piece ... 'In defence of Leninism'." In other words, it was - at least in part - "a critique of Alex Callinicos's article". But, unlike Birchall, comrade Gonzalez was upfront about who and what he was criticising. He bluntly stated that the SWP central committee "is now defending its own interests against the interests of the party and the class". And he continued:

"The process towards the special conference illustrated that at its very worst. The defence of the bureaucratic and administrative methods referred time and again to constitutional rules - as if our political conduct should be governed by rules whose task is to reflect our organisational methods, rather than be laws governing them. In a formal sense, the CC won a vote across the country - but it did so by using those rules to impede debate, at the same time as mobilising a large number of comrades across the country who had not participated in the debate within the party until that point, representing the internal crisis as an attack by hostile external forces."<sup>5</sup>

Spot the difference? To be fair, comrade Gonzalez has been invited to speak at the SWP's Marxism school. But don't worry - it isn't anything "too internal". He will be telling us about 'Chávez and 21st century socialism'. Similarly, comrade Birchall's two sessions will tap into his expertise in two fields: Jean-Paul Sartre and the 'Lessons of the German revolution' (debating with John Rose).

Over and over again, the *Weekly Worker* has pointed out that nothing short of a cultural revolution within the SWP will make it fit for purpose. The current leadership cannot bring itself to admit that its internal practice has actually been antithetical to democratic centralism. Utterly incapable of changing course, it does no more than offer token concessions ●

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## Notes

1. *Party Notes* June 3.
2. www.cpgb.org.uk/home/weekly-worker/online-only/swp-party-council.
3. www.socialistreview.org.uk/article.php?articlenumber=12330.
4. www.socialistreview.org.uk/article.php?articlenumber=12210.
5. www.scribd.com/doc/141977026/Who-Will-Teach-the-Teachers-2?secret\_password=2ecnhy9zk0z2fgp8x8s.



## IRELAND

# No ifs, no buts ... a woman's right to choose

Controversy over abortion continues to reverberate throughout Irish society, writes **Anne McShane**

**A**t the time of writing, the government is due to announce details of the Protection of Life during Pregnancy Bill, which will be voted on by the Dáil in July. This proposed legislation will allow for abortion where a woman's life is at immediate risk from the pregnancy, including by suicide. Procuring an abortion will continue to be a criminal offence, punishable by up to 14 years imprisonment. This applies both to the woman and medical staff involved - including presumably the many women who now use the internet to obtain the abortion pill. To avoid a criminal conviction, a woman will need to be at substantial risk of death unless a termination is carried out. This will have to be assessed by two medical experts if the risk is physical, and three - two psychiatrists and an obstetrician - if it is that of suicide.

The medical establishment is split right down the middle and doctors who support the pro-life lobby have said that abortion ought never to be allowed even to prevent suicide. They may, on the other hand, be willing to consider detention under mental health legislation in a psychiatric ward in such cases. Desperate women who have not had the money or the contacts to get an abortion abroad will be forced to endure intensive cross-examination by doctors. Anthony McCarthy, a progressive psychiatrist based at the National Maternity Hospital, has come out strongly against the government for stigmatising women. Suicidal pregnant women will be treated with suspicion, instead of compassion.

McCarthy has also argued that the idea that a pregnant woman would not kill herself is nonsense. In the past, 10% of all women who committed suicide in Ireland were pregnant. In his experience, no woman who cannot cope with a pregnancy will put herself through torturous and invasive cross-examination by doctors if she has another way out. Especially as she could find herself being committed to a psychiatric ward if the examining doctors decide that she is suicidal, yet abortion is not an 'appropriate treatment'.

This legislation will make very little practical difference to those who obtain the abortion pill illegally via the web - or to the thousands of Irish women who travel abroad every year to end their pregnancy. The ones most affected will be the desperate and vulnerable who are unable to travel. The proposed legislation is so restrictive that even Michael Martin, the hard-line anti-abortion leader of the opposition Fianna Fáil, has strongly recommended that his party vote for the bill. Martin has said that its proposals are even more limiting than the status quo - "One of the concerns was that it will lead to abortion on demand. I don't think it will do that." He held one-to-one meetings with Fianna Fáil TDs to alleviate their concerns. However, under pressure from the pro-life lobby and unable to obtain unanimity, he has now backed down and allowed a free vote.

This greatly pleased the Catholic church, which has been pushing hard for a free vote so as to make it possible to defeat the legislation. In a statement issued this week, the Catholic bishops of Ireland warned



**Pro-life lobby: setting the agenda**

that for "the first time legislation will be enacted permitting the deliberate and intentional killing of an unborn child. This represents a radical change. Every citizen, not just people of faith, should be deeply concerned."

The statement goes on to repeat the claims that abortion can never be an option for suicidal pregnant women and to call on "our priests and people to continue to pray the 'Choose life' prayer at mass and in the home that the dignity and value of all human life will continue to be upheld in this country".

The campaign against abortion, which saw 30,000 pro-life demonstrators in a march in Dublin last weekend, is growing in confidence. A well-funded advertising campaign, which depicts fetuses as cute little babies, is primed to take advantage of every opportunity to drive the message home. Government ministers have been targeted with hate mail and taoiseach Enda Kenny said he been branded a child murderer and received letters written in blood and threatening phone calls. The church is determined to whip up an atmosphere of fear.

### Step forward?

In the face of such intimidation it is perhaps understandable that some pro-choice activists see the present legislation as a step forward. I have been told on many occasions that it is expecting too much to believe that Ireland can change overnight. The Protection of Life during Pregnancy Bill will be part of an incremental approach to full choice - eventually.

I do not accept this argument. I believe that we need to fight conservative attitudes with demands that emphasise the right for a woman to exercise complete choice in respect of her own body. Recent opinion polls have shown a consistent majority in favour of extending abortion on the grounds of health, rape or sexual abuse, or unviable pregnancies. But, even more importantly, there has been a substantial minority - between 25% and 30% - who favour abortion on the grounds of choice. It is not the population of Ireland that is conservative, but the church and state. It is their power that we must challenge.

The proposed legislation would do nothing for women like Savita

Halappanavar, who died on October 28 2012 at Galway General Hospital. Savita was refused an abortion, although the fetus she was carrying was unviable. She was told she could not have a termination until the fetus had died inside her - she was informed that this was because Ireland is a Catholic country. She and her husband begged for an abortion, but she was forced to lie in agony - until such time as she went into toxic shock and died. There would be no change for such women. They would still not be allowed an abortion unless doctors were certain their lives were at risk - and then it could well be too late.

There is something wrong with a society that says a woman must be close to death before the unviable fetus she is carrying can be removed. Men never suffer such discrimination in medical treatment. There is something wrong when the Catholic church of all things, with its notorious history of abusing both women and children, has the gall to lecture Irish people on humanity. They preach from the pulpits to people who have witnessed the systematic sexual abuse of children in state-funded religious schools and orphanages. We all know about the women who were locked up in Magdalene laundries, forced to work as unpaid slaves and subjected to physical and psychological abuse.

We know too of the thousands of unmarried mothers whose children were stolen from them in the infamous mother and baby homes. These women were treated as social outcasts and humiliated - their children sent off to a 'more deserving', respectable married couple. They have yet to receive recognition of the injustice done to them by the Catholic church and state. It is quite staggering that such institutions can have the arrogance to demand that women are deprived of even the most basic rights.

### Shameful history

We need to remember the historic refusal to grant even the smallest concession. In 1983 a Fianna Gael-Labour coalition held a referendum to introduce a constitutional ban on abortion. Voters were mobilised by church and state and, in a 53% turnout, 67% voted in favour of the ban. The

eighth amendment stated that the constitution "acknowledged the right to life of the unborn, with due regard to the equal life of the mother". Irish women were told in no uncertain terms that a fetus had the legal 'right' to insist on being born. They were prisoners of their own bodies.

The 1980s was a time of intense repression for Irish women. It was the time of the 'Kerry babies' scandal, when in 1983 Joanne Hayes, a young unmarried woman, was accused of the murder of two infants. The gardai insisted that she had got rid of them after becoming pregnant simultaneously by two different men. This bizarre claim was actually taken seriously and Joanne Hayes was pilloried for her evil promiscuity. The next year Anne Lovett, a 15-year-old girl, died giving birth alone in appalling circumstances at a religious grotto in rural Longford. These cases reflected the degree of discrimination and victimisation. All the women were expected to have babies, but the unmarried women were to endure the additional burden of disgrace and the expectation that they would give their baby up for adoption. Women who refused to buckle and kept their children were often told that they would not be baptised. They were treated as social outcasts.

The church and state came under pressure in 1992 when the supreme court decided in *Attorney general v X* that abortion should be allowed where a woman's life is at risk, including by suicide. Later that year a Fianna Fáil government tried to reverse the ruling through the 12th amendment to specifically exclude suicide as a ground for abortion. This was rejected by 65% in a 68% referendum turnout, and another amendment was passed allowing the distribution of information on abortion facilities abroad. Fianna Fáil attempted to remove suicide as a ground once again in 2002, through another referendum. The 26th amendment was a carrot-and-stick approach which stated that abortion could be allowed if there was risk to life - but this could not include the threat of suicide. It also proposed extending prison sentences to 12 years for unlawful abortions. This proposal was narrowly defeated.

Such a ruling would normally have resulted in legislative change, but successive governments refused to act. In fact, Fianna Fáil attempted to see off the threat from 'X' by holding a referendum to specifically exclude suicide. In 2010 the European Court of Human Rights held that the Irish government had violated the Convention by failing to provide an accessible and effective procedure by which a woman can establish whether she qualifies for a legal abortion under current Irish law. Still the government dragged its feet and refused to act.

Clare Daly TD then introduced a private members bill to legislate for X in early 2012. Her legislation was more liberal than the current proposals. However, it did still restrict itself to allowing abortion when there was a threat to the woman's life. She argued that her aim was simply to put the issue on the agenda. She agreed that we needed a campaign to scrap the eighth amendment and provide abortion on the grounds of choice. Her proposed legislation was voted down by the government in November, with Labour TDs arguing that they wanted to wait the outcome of an expert committee. The government promised legislation.

Surely this was the right time to launch a campaign for a referendum to scrap the eighth amendment? I have been told that this would have been too radical and the right tactics are to relate to the existing legal process: ie, move forward within the law. The Catholic church does not think so. It is calling for pro-life doctors and nurses to refuse to perform abortions. It also wants a campaign of civil disobedience and has argued that the government should refuse to obey the ruling of the European Court. It is not bound by legality when it comes to maintaining women's oppression.

Why then are we hesitating? The pro-life lobby is now setting the agenda. In 2012, with the outrage over Savita's death, it seemed the tide was turning. Certainly opinion polls have borne that out. But we cannot take anything for granted. Conservative forces are out to win hearts and minds. We need to do the same.

There is a continuing debate among pro-choice activists. The Abortion Papers, a series of essays on the history of the struggle, is shortly to be published and various meetings are being held around its launch. There will also be a national meeting on June 22 at the Teachers Club in Dublin organised by Action for Choice, which is working to link up the campaigns. This will be an important opportunity to review the situation we find ourselves in. It will also provide the chance to launch a bold campaign to fight for a woman's right to choose.

I would encourage all activists in Ireland to attend and to take the opportunity to fight for real change. Women should no longer be treated as second-class citizens •

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### Notes

1. [www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/martin-backs-proposed-bill-on-abortion-232223.html](http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/martin-backs-proposed-bill-on-abortion-232223.html).
2. [www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/religion-and-beliefs/catholic-bishops-accuse-government-of-misleading-people-on-abortion-1.1424612](http://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/religion-and-beliefs/catholic-bishops-accuse-government-of-misleading-people-on-abortion-1.1424612).



## TURKEY

# In revolt against AKP dictat

Esen Uslu reports from Istanbul

Since the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government under prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan embarked on its attempt to resolve the Kurdish insurgency through a negotiated settlement, it has been screwing down the lid on the 'democracy package' it introduced in the first years of its decade-long reign. In this way the AKP has tried to balance its loss of face over Kurdistan by imposing tighter control over the opposition in the western, or 'Turkish', part of Turkey.

When the government decided on its turnabout in the longstanding policy of doggedly pursuing the dirty war against the Kurdish freedom movement, and instead tried to engage in meaningful negotiations with Kurdish leaders, it faced two adverse political consequences: losing the support it enjoyed within its Islamist power base, which it had previously assumed was safe; and causing the sudden loss of much of the tacit approval it had won among its still powerful opponents in the civilian and military bureaucracy.

With elections looming next year, the loss of support of the forces it thought were either secure or neutralised for the last decade became a serious threat to the viability of the government. In response it tried to win them back by reining in democracy and starting to play on the traditional items of contention between secularists and Islamists.

All this was bound to create huge tensions; however, nobody, including the most seasoned observers, expected the spark for the revolt we have seen to be the unlikely issue of the environment. So what is the background?

## Liberalising and deregulation

There is a long list of the central government's abuses of authority, but these have not been met by widespread and sustained opposition. Included on that list were moves towards dam and hydroelectricity generating schemes, destroying the ecosystem of streams and rivers, and the issuing of mining and quarrying permits within forests. These provoked vocal opposition from local groups.

The long contested issue of granting building permits for land where forests had been destroyed instead of agreeing to reforestation was brought to a head by legislation introduced to the dismay of environmentally aware people. But the legislation was welcomed by local landowners and developers, especially on the south coast, where building land is at a premium due to the expansion of the tourism industry.

But the abuse of urban planning and environmental powers did not create widespread resistance. The government removed many restrictions on property-developers as well as the legal protection enjoyed by historical monuments and environmental features. Admittedly those rules and regulations were practically toothless, but they were 'liberalised' even further in order to open the way for the construction of new gated communities and shopping centres in the green belt around Istanbul.

The same process, bereft of any democratic consultation, applied to 'urban renewal' schemes in traditional city centres. In some places it simply meant slum clearance. One such targets was the Roma district of

Istanbul within the Byzantine city walls. It achieved its twin aims: gentrifying the inner-city area and expelling the Roma to a far-flung corner of the city.

Another ongoing urban renewal project in Tarlabaşı, part of the Beyoğlu district near Taksim Square, saw the demolition of a large part of the old settlement occupied by Christian minorities. The historic avenue, İstiklal Caddesi, has also been the target of 'transformation'. Several old *art nouveau* buildings were converted into shopping centres, and one of the earliest and much loved cinemas was demolished - a 'replica' was built on the fourth floor of the new building!

In all these schemes, developers were aided by freely allocated licences kindly provided by local authorities and central government. They were met with very vocal opposition, but this was easily swept away through the liberal application of baton charges, teargas volleys and water cannons on the part of the police.

Encouraged by all this, and still feeling cornered thanks to the situation in Kurdistan, the government suddenly embarked on several grandiose building schemes that have religious as well as nationalist-cum-expansionist undertones. A new bridge over the Bosphorus for a new motorway passing through the green belt north of Istanbul; a monumental replica of a Sultan's mosque on top of the Çamlıca vantage-point overlooking the old city - one of the last recreation areas open to people from the outlying working class areas; a ship canal running parallel to the Bosphorus and gobbling up the last area of forest north-west of the city, posing a threat to the entire Black Sea ecosystem; a gargantuan new airport next to a lagoon near the Black Sea coast north of Istanbul, which would destroy the fresh-water catchment area and water courses; a new quay for cruise ships instead of the old quay along the Bosphorus; and two massive land-reclamation projects for the construction of 'demonstration spaces' off the Marmara Sea - all were introduced with great fanfare.

There were neither environmental studies on these projected developments nor any public consultation. And the cherry on the cake was the naming of the new Bosphorus bridge after Sultan Selim (nicknamed 'the Grim'), to the chagrin of the Alevis, for whom Sultan Selim was responsible for the massacre of more than 40,000 in the 16th century. However, nobody expected more than the inconsequential marches and demonstrations that took place.

## May Day tradition

The government decided to push its luck further: having succeeded in carrying out several of its controversial objectives, the time was right to fulfil the long-standing project of denying Taksim Square to the working class for the purpose of demonstrations, especially on May Day.

After many years of taking a seemingly liberal position on this question, the government changed its tune in 2013. Previously, to the surprise of many, when it needed the tacit support of working people to push back the interference and threats from the military top brass, it opened up Taksim Square for May Day rallies and even declared May Day a public holiday.

However, last year a pedestrianisation scheme was undertaken and a large part of the



No clear leadership

square was transformed into a construction site, riddled with pits and makeshift walkways. And this year, using the allegedly dangerous nature of the site as a pretext, the authorities denied the use of the square for May Day. When workers' organisations refused to toe the line, a massive police operation shut down the area on May 1 in order to prevent people gaining access. All day long, demonstrators clashed with the police.

Several proposals for permanently removing Taksim Square as a working class venue have been floated. For a while there were plans to build a grand mosque. There was talk of tearing down the Atatürk Cultural Centre on the eastern edge of the square and redeveloping the site as a convention centre. Then there was the idea of rebuilding the old artillery barracks demolished in the 1940s to make space for a park on the north side of the square. None of these proposals were firm - it was clear that they were being floated to test the waters, for the opposition was fierce.

Suddenly the central government announced its decision to redevelop the park by rebuilding the artillery barracks as a shopping centre. Not only did it brush aside the legal challenges mounted by the opposition: the government also declared that no other inner-city public space would be available for marches and demonstrations.

And at the end of May, without any notice, the cutting down of trees along the north edge of the square was begun. Environmentalists gathered to protest and Sırrı Süreyya Önder, an MP from the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), intervened by physically jumping in front of the construction machinery.

Hearing of these developments, the traditional forces of resistance in the Taksim area rushed to the park. They set up a camp, and early next morning the brutal police attack came. This, together with the intransigent proclamations of the government, set in motion the revolt. Despite the massive police operation, thousands and thousands of people came to the square and there were running battles with the police.

The ferocity of the police attacks was met with the erection of makeshift barricades and increasing mass action. In other cities, massive rallies in support of the Taksim resistance were staged, and in many working class districts of Istanbul well-established

leftwing activity centres went into action. Even opposition groups, such as anti-capitalist Muslims, were drawn in. During the crackdown, a top-class hotel opened its lobby to wounded demonstrators. Fleeing protestors also found refuge in the mosque attached to the Dolmabahçe Palace, where the prime minister's office is situated.

Suddenly a new generation of youth and students moved beyond the wall of fear, standing firm against police brutality and state authoritarianism. Even supporters of Istanbul's three principal football clubs, who have never before been involved in politics, joined the demonstrations in force. Students with IT skills arranged for streamed TV broadcasts, as well as the usual Twitter and social media channels, to expose the police brutality and rally support in the face of a media black-out. The government instructed the public broadcasting service not to publicise the demonstrations and threatened private media with loss of advertising revenue.

The liberating effects of mass action became apparent by the creativity and humour arising from among the ranks of the resistance. They have adopted the proud name, *chapulcu* (looter), following Erdoğan's attempt at denigration when he referred to the problems all being caused by "a few looters".

For a couple of days the police were withdrawn and during that short time the square enjoyed the 'direct democracy' of the occupiers. Last weekend two massive demonstrations were held and the challenge to the AKP government was obvious: the prevailing chant was that Erdoğan should resign.

## Chinks in the armour

The construction work stopped, the demonstrators had not gone away and the AKP seemed to have lost its bearings. It had resorted to its well-known practice of attempting to defeat the opposition through a combination of lies and police violence, but the cracks were most definitely beginning to show.

While a local government spokesman apologetically claimed that the proposed development was not related to the artillery barracks project, but was merely a road-widening scheme, a government statement insisted on precisely the opposite. Then the local authority

was subsequently 'disappeared' from TV screens.

In the absence of the prime minister, who despite the crisis continued with his official visit to north African countries, the president and deputy prime minister attempted to cool the situation through adopting a conciliatory stance. They declared that the police action had been wrong, that individual officers had gone beyond the call of duty, and that all abuses were to be investigated. One of the most powerful Islamist leaders, who resides in the USA, came out openly against the previous hard line, citing Koranic verses to warn against tyranny and arrogance. This line was repeated in comments critical of government policy made by AKP MPs, which was a first.

However, on his return, Erdoğan rallied his forces around the original hard line. The central apparatus now adopted cold war-type rhetoric blaming marginal leftwing extremists who wanted to hold back progress. The government also played the xenophobic Islamist-nationalist card by blaming the financiers and accusing them of manipulating the stock exchange and currency rates for profit. Erdoğan targeted those sections of finance capital with strong international links. Following his lead, state economic enterprises and public bodies started to withdraw funds from the banks of those groups. This created massive financial instability, and the state bank was told to sell its US dollar reserves to stop the downward spiral.

While Erdoğan agreed to talk to selected members of the Taksim Platform set up by the occupiers, he also initiated the brutal clearance of the square on the evening of Tuesday June 11. Once more this was met with determined resistance, which was only ended by a massive police assault. Simultaneously, resistance camps in Ankara and in the parks of many other cities were destroyed by similar police actions.

## Learn the lessons

The initial 48 hours of the revolt focused on opposition to the authoritarianism of the government, but then it started to take up the broader demand for democracy. However, the left organisations failed to put forward a programme based on such democratic demands and, despite their heroism on the barricades, they failed to imbue the message of democracy amongst the ranks of the protestors.

The forces of resistance were incapable of electing a representative body to promote their joint aims. A disdain for democratic organisation, the trademark of petty bourgeois anarchism, is apparent, and the left is unable to take the lead.

Among the opposition there are fault lines over both the national question and religious sectarianism. As for the Kurdish freedom movement, it failed to act in a timely manner in support of the demonstration until its jailed leader, Abdullah Öcalan, intervened. Its hesitation may be understandable in the face of the tentative peace process and nationalist attempts to undermine it. However, eventually the realisation dawned that the call for democracy raised by the revolt is actually one that favours Kurdistan.

In the southern provinces, the government attempted to provoke divisions between Alevi and Sunni demonstrators, and clashes were only prevented thanks to massive efforts on the part of other forces among the demonstrators ●



# Battle for secularism

Opposition to creeping Islamisation is not confined to the protestors in Taksim Square and elsewhere, argues **Eddie Ford**. The army is also deeply disgruntled with the AKP

Events in Turkey are highly volatile. As the *Weekly Worker* goes to press, Taksim Square - at least for the time being - has been cleared of anti-government demonstrators. Late on June 11, the riot police deployed teargas, water cannon and rubber bullets to regain control. Protestors fought back as best they could with fireworks, fire bombs, stones and other makeshift weapons. At one stage, more than 50 lawyers were dragged onto buses by police after staging a sit-in to support the protests. By dawn though, bulldozers had moved into the square to clear away the barricades and tents. Many protestors have regrouped in nearby Gezi Park to ponder their next move.

Speaking in Ankara as the police operation unfolded, prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan warned that he would not show "any more tolerance" and called for an "immediate end" to all demonstrations and protests. Erdoğan has repeatedly asserted that the anti-government movement has been "hijacked" by "terror groups" and "Marxist-Leninists" out to harm Turkey, explicitly linking the protests with an attack in February on the US embassy carried out by the banned Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front.

For good measure, Erdoğan blasted the international media for waging a "comprehensive campaign" aimed at "sully" Turkey's image - a week before he had been denouncing the "gangrene" and "menace" of Twitter. Very modern. Not to be outdone, on June 6 Turkey's European Union minister, Egemen Bağış, told a press conference that the BBC had "encouraged" the protestors to commit acts of "vandalism". On the other hand, Turkey's pro-Erdoğan TV channels failed for days to mention the protests at all. According to Reporters without Borders, Turkey ranks 154th in terms of press freedom.<sup>1</sup> For instance, in 2008 the courts banned internet users from viewing the official website of Richard Dawkins after objections from Muslim creationists.

Four people, including one policeman, have been killed so far. Some 5,000 protestors have been treated for injuries or the effects of tear gas, while officials say 600 police have also been injured. Various trade unions have come out in support of the protestors, including the Confederation of Revolutionary Trade Unions (DİSK), which historically is more a political extension of 'official communism' than a 'normal' trade union grouping like the British TUC. In the optimistic words of DİSK's director of international relations, Kıvanç Eliaçık, "Some people are fighting, others are dancing. Some are lashing out drunk; others are collecting garbage and treating stray animals. I do not know what is going to happen tomorrow. But today is a new day and we are all new people."<sup>2</sup>

## Islamisation

As most people know, the demonstrations initially began as an environmental/ecological protest against the 'redevelopment' of Gezi Park. Despite being one of the very last remaining green spaces in Istanbul, the original plan was to build a shopping mall, clearly showing the AKP's commitment to spiritual development, and also a replica of an old Ottoman military barracks. It seems that the shopping mall has been dropped - a victory of sorts - but the barracks are to go ahead.



Many viewpoints

Yet it is the barracks scheme, far more than the mall, that has infuriated millions of Turks, because it is symbolic of the *creeping Islamisation* of society by the AKP - even if it is still formally committed to secularism, albeit within the confines of "conservative democracy"<sup>3</sup>. Hardly surprising, however, given that the core of the party was formed from the 'reformist' faction of the Virtue Party, banned in 2001, and dissident members of the highly conservative (but legal) Motherland Party. This salami-style Islamisation has manifested itself in various ways. Most visibly, of course, are the huge number of mosques - which are *everywhere*, thanks to a decade-long building programme, generously backed by Saudi Arabia. Indeed, Turkey now has 82,693 mosques - 3,113 of which are in Istanbul alone.<sup>4</sup>

Almost inevitably, women have been increasingly lectured about the importance of 'traditional' values - how they should have more children, dress in a certain way, not flaunt themselves too much, etc. Perhaps most upsetting of all the very many secularist Turks are the increasing restrictions on alcohol - regarded as Sharia law through the back door. One of the latest edicts bans the sale of alcohol within 100 metres of any mosque or school and on June 11 the president, Abdullah Gül - also an AKP member - finally approved a bill declaring that retailers will no longer be allowed to sell alcoholic beverages between 10pm and 6am. Therefore a very large number of drinking places will have to close down and nightclub life was severely curtailed.

But for secular Turks the Taksim military barracks are a heinous emblem of everything they reject and fear. Originally built in 1806 during the reign of the Ottoman sultan Selim III, the barracks are notorious for being the launch pad for the 'March 31 Incident/1909 counter-coup' - a reactionary, Islamist-inspired, revolt against the *constitutional* monarchical system that had taken hold after the

1908 Young Turk revolution. The plotters dreamed of putting an end to the nascent constitutional era and restoring Abdul Hamid II as the absolute monarch/sultan. The sultan's bid for a return to power gained a certain traction when he promised to restore the caliphate, eliminate secular policies and reintroduce the sharia-based legal system. Now the AKP effectively want to build a monument to this counterrevolutionary cause.

Needless to say, the revolt was forcibly crushed and as a consequence the barracks building suffered considerable damage - never being repaired. Its internal courtyard was later transformed into the Taksim Stadium in 1921 and became the first ever football stadium in Turkey, something the Islamists always hated.

Bit by bit, slice by slice, Turkey under the AKP is becoming less secularist and more authoritarian. No wonder the US state department is urging "restraint" on Erdoğan, concerned that he might upset the apple-cart at exactly the wrong moment in view of the instability over the entire Middle East, not least Syria. After all, the AKP is about to sign a peace deal with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) - much to the disgruntlement of the Turkish army - and the very last thing the US wants is for that to be sabotaged by an excessively authoritarian crackdown by Erdoğan.

## De Gaulle or Putin?

Predictably enough, a great deal of commentary around the latest developments in Turkey has been profoundly uninformative - ranging from the asinine to the vacuous. Tiresomely, a lot of it has focused on the so-called 'middle class' nature of the revolt; the definition of which seems to include anyone who has a job or knows how to use a smartphone.

But it does have to be said, in all fairness, that the Socialist Workers Party has attempted to rival such coverage for inanity. Bluntly, the SWP

position is based purely on opportunist political expediency. Hence *Socialist Worker* rambles on in its usual anarchistic fashion about how "rage" and "spontaneous protest" broke out throughout Turkey. True enough, up to a point, but what are the actual *politics* involved, comrades? The ludicrous answer is that the "opposition which found an echo with millions of people across Turkey is not in any way against the government's alleged 'Islamism'" - rather, would you believe it, Turkey's "uprising" is "against neoliberalism" and the bosses (June 4). Just like back home in the UK, reassuringly. Creating a Taksim Square of their own ideological imagination, *Socialist Worker* tells us when ordinary people began to return home or to work, uglier forces began to appear" - that is, "people carrying Turkish flags" and shouting, "We are Atatürk's troops". From this, *Socialist Worker* draws the conclusion that "many of the nationalists want to see the army overthrow the elected government and carry out an Islamophobic purge".

Pathetically, the SWP is in a state of total denial. According to the comrades, the greatest threat comes from an "Islamophobic purge" - not the very real and advancing Islamist agenda of the AKP. It cannot see, because it does not want to, that if anything the reverse is true - ie, the anger of the protestors has been directed more against Islamism than against corruption, cuts, unemployment, neoliberalism, etc. But, of course, our SWP comrades cannot bear to utter that dreaded word, *secularism* - the shibboleth that must never be mentioned. Even though Respect is a dead project, the SWP are still hankering for an unpopular popular front with 'Muslim radicals'.

As if responding to the SWP, Ben Judah, in the *Financial Times*, urged us to "forget Arab spring analogies", instead arguing that Turkey is "having its 1968" and hence now "needs its de Gaulle" (June 6). Meaning that Erdoğan should recognise his time is over and announce plans to resign, in

the same way that Charles de Gaulle - after decisively defeating the French left in the June 1968 elections - still resigned the next year because he recognised that he divided the nation. "For the sake of national unity and the future of the AKP", a party which for Judah has "unquestionably been good for Turkish democracy and is on the brink of peace with the Kurds", Erdoğan should "echo the greatness" of de Gaulle and stand down.

But Judah worries that Erdoğan is becoming more like Vladimir Putin than de Gaulle. In other words, he writes, Erdoğan wants to rule until 2024 and his politics has "become about securing this above all else" - a new constitution would allow him to return triumphant in 2014 into an "empowered" presidency for two five-year terms. At the same time he is mounting a draconian crackdown on the opposition and democratic rights in general. Judah strongly advises the US to "nudge" Erdoğan in the "right direction", perhaps by hinting that Turkey might not be able to participate in the EU-US trade pact, the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. In that way, says Judah, the White House could make it clear to Turkey's leadership that doing a Putin makes this "impossible".

Then again, in the last analysis, Judah's analysis does not really work. Erdoğan is no de Gaulle or Putin. Unlike either, Erdoğan cannot rely on the army for support if the chips are down. The Turkish military is deeply disgruntled with Erdoğan, if not actively hostile to the AKP. Numerous army officers are awaiting trial and some have been imprisoned - Erdoğan's determination to clip the army's wing has earned him a relatively high degree of popularity among some sections of Turkish society.

Yet here we have an army that has carried out four coups and is committed to *its version* of secularism - authoritarian and top-down. And here we have an AKP which contains forces (ie, the Virtue Party) that in the relatively recent past had been outlawed for their Islamist agitation and are doing 'treacherous' deals with the PKK 'terrorists', responsible for the deaths of very many Turkish soldiers (ironically, but with a certain degree of logic, the PKK has not been particularly enthusiastic about the protests, as they might scupper its deal with the AKP).

Therefore if there were a military coup, more likely than not, though it would be designed to restore 'order', it would be directed *against* the government - an inconceivable scenario in Russia or France.

The situation in Turkey is highly complex and contradictory. Society as a whole is divided, torn by 'culture wars', and the AKP could split if the pressure intensifies. But, the workers' movement and the left is hopelessly divided and still misdirected by the influences of 'official communism', Stalinism, social democracy and nationalism - whether Kurdish or greater Turkish ●

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## Notes

1. <http://en.rsf.org/press-freedom-in-dex-2013,1054.html>.
2. <http://www.dissentmagazine.org/blog/opening-taksim-square>.
3. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Justice\\_and\\_Development\\_Party\\_\(Turkey\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Justice_and_Development_Party_(Turkey)).
4. <http://en.trend.az/regions/met/turkey/2126410.html>.



## AGGREGATE

# The left must aim higher

The weekend aggregate meeting of CPGB members saw debates on democratic centralism and the new Left Unity initiative. **Michael Copestake** reports

**T**he question of democratic centralism has assumed renewed relevance since the beginning of the Socialist Workers Party crisis and the June 8 CPGB members' aggregate discussed its continuing significance. We also debated our approach to the Left Unity project and looked forward to the forthcoming CPGB summer school, Communist University, and our annual fundraiser, the Summer Offensive.

John Bridge led off on the question of democratic centralism. The crisis in the SWP, he noted, has exposed profound political differences on the question of organisation not only within the SWP, but also on the wider left. Indeed, he added, the consensus appears to be coming down against what is seen as the 'outdated' practice of democratic centralism, or 'Leninism' - the two terms often being used interchangeably.

The SWP leadership had done absolutely nothing to help itself by publishing Alex Callinicos's awful article on the subject, 'Is Leninism finished?', which has been pulled apart recently by veteran SWP member Ian Birchall, amongst others. Comrade Callinicos had repeated several myths regarding Leninism, such as the claim that the SWP's version of democratic centralism - in reality *bureaucratic* centralism - is modelled on that of the Bolsheviks pre-1917; and that left organisations that have allowed factions have eventually split and collapsed as a direct result.

On the first claim, the comrade made reference to the invaluable work of Lars T Lih on the history of Leninism and the Bolsheviks. So does the SWP work like the RSDLP did? 'No' was the definitive (and obvious) answer. Contrasting Lenin's open, *public* polemics - against *named* opponents - within his organisation, comrade Bridge noted that the SWP took the opposite approach, refusing to publish Mike Gonzalez's contribution in *Socialist Review* because, at bottom, he specified his polemical target - the SWP central committee itself - whereas the leadership of the SWP agreed to publish Ian Birchall's article on the basis that comrade Birchall was written in sufficiently Aesopian, circumspect language to make it past the party censor. The opposite of the genuine Bolshevik approach, where differences within the CC, the wider party, and between organisations were debated openly and in public.

This turning upside-down of genuine Bolshevism by the SWP manifests itself not only in such censorship, but also extends to the way that conferences are run and the SWP itself is organised, the comrade went on. For example, in one of Lenin's own write-ups of an early RSDLP conference, he gives detailed information on all the different factions present and their politics, all of the disagreements, and all of the hammering out of compromises between different groupings to get their resolutions through. Moreover, he recommends to the reader that, rather simply take his word for it, they check the official minutes for themselves. And this was under conditions of illegality. By contrast, the SWP practice is to avoid mention of internal differences as far as possible.

Another myth relied upon in the standard SWP history of Bolshevism is that the Bolsheviks were a tiny, highly centralised group that managed to mushroom out of nowhere in 1917.



**Secrets: for insiders only**

In fact, as comrade Bridge noted, unlike the SWP today, the RSDLP had a mass character from 1905 onwards, with the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks having 70,000-80,000 members apiece and deep social roots. Though necessarily a minority in a peasant-dominated society, amongst the working class the Bolsheviks' RSDLP managed to win every seat in the 1912 дума elections allocated to the working class curia. Nevertheless, he disagreed with comrade Birchall's implied claim that the Bolsheviks became a majority with the 1917 revolution. Yes, the Bolsheviks won a majority in the workers' and soldiers' soviets. But their 'majority', the legitimacy they needed to form a government, relied on the split in the Socialist Revolutionary Party and the formation of the Left SRs. With its bloc in the peasants' soviet there was indeed a majority for the overthrow of the provisional government and soviet power.

The comrade also added 'Lenin, the elitist intellectual' to the list of myths which somehow persist in SWP world. The other side of this is that, in reaction to the SWP's parodic Leninism, you get people advocating organisations without leaders at all, thus throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

Turning to centralism, comrade Bridge pointed out that much of the left is infatuated with 'broad parties' of the Syriza type. But the RSDLP - the

real RSDLP, that is, not the caricature - was, despite its relatively free-wheeling political culture, nonetheless a centralised party based on a Marxist programme. Not on mobilising for the next demo or rally, but on a positive proposition for society.

The message of the CPGB to the rest of the left concerns the need for internal democracy *and* a coherent political party that can act. We say that you can have *both*.

In the debate that followed Mike Macnair made the interesting point that the portrayal of Marxism as coming "from the outside" of the workers' movement is two-sided. On the one hand, it is the case in fact that the idea that the working class should seize power predates Marx, originating in left Chartism, and thus in that sense does not come from outside the movement at all. On the other hand, Kautsky and then in turn Lenin, though not taking an elitist approach to workers on the subject of programme and theory, did represent Marxism as coming from beyond the immediate economic struggle. Comrade Macnair said it was ironic that Tim Nelson of the International Socialist Network characterised Marxist ideas as being elitist and introduced from without in his recent article,<sup>1</sup> as these are in fact the same arguments that the right wing of the German trade union bureaucracy used against the

Marxists in the Social Democratic Party of Germany, saying that the politics of revolution and working class power were alien to 'ordinary workers' and had been introduced by devious intellectuals.

A guest at the aggregate, Moshé Machover, stated that the term 'democratic centralism' should be abandoned as carrying too much negative baggage. Others disagreed - using that argument, one may as well stop talking about 'socialism', 'communism' and so on - these are terms that had also been misused and are associated with the Soviet Union under Stalin.

## Left Unity

Mike Macnair began the session on the Left Unity initiative. The direction of travel being pushed by most LU far-left partisans is to aim for a 'broad' party, within which elements - the Anti-Capitalist Initiative, International Socialist Network and Socialist Resistance - will cooperate and perhaps come to some kind of regroupment.

So far Left Unity appears to be run on the basis of extreme privacy of information. Nothing from the steering group in the way of proposals or decisions has been circulated apart from the draft statement of principles written by Kate Hudson, which in the end was not adopted by the first national delegate meeting. Comrade Macnair noted that the statement itself contained no positive propositions and consisted entirely of 'anti' politics - what we are against, not what we are for. Restricting yourself to opposition to austerity and suchlike means being able to avoid raising political differences. On this basis, comrade Macnair fears that LU could have a short life on the grounds that people will resort to procedural disputes in the absence of open political conflict and discussion.

In spite of this, it is clear that Left Unity will pull in a few hundred people in a new, membership-based organisation, as opposed to an electoral lash-up or federal approach. The CPGB will therefore participate in this process on the basis that we too want a party (albeit a specifically Marxist one). Indeed CPGB comrades have an obligation to engage with their local Left Unity groups in a comradely and helpful manner (a resolution to this effect was passed). We will also seek to work with those who make up what can broadly be characterised as the left of Left Unity - those like Nick Wrack and whoever is open to Marxist ideas.

Picking up on a recent debate within Left Unity on the argument that LU should not talk about socialism, the working class and so on, on the grounds that many of the people 'out there' will consider this to be jargon and be put off, comrade Macnair noted that there is a real issue underlying this, in that the ongoing, precipitous decline of the left means that our terminology becomes marginal alongside us. This argument is itself part of the larger idea that we should basically just junk our history, in the hope that this will free us from unwanted baggage.

The issue with the argument that 'We can't give people history lessons' is twofold. In the first place the only history that many of the groups provide are *false* histories, so we have a duty not to leave our history and our language to them. Secondly,

it is utterly illusory to suppose that we can in fact escape these issues: our political opponents, as well as 'ordinary people', are not stupid and we will have to account for the Soviet Union and so on. Given that the only mention of communism in the school history curriculum is in relation to Stalin and the USSR, we are obliged to have our explanations and historical accounts ready.

Changing tack, comrade Macnair commented that the choice facing us, according to much of the left, is between a Keynesian mixed economy and unfettered neoliberalism. It sees 'realistic politics' as fighting for a return to the 1950s-60s and unrealistic politics as fighting for socialism. As comrade Macnair noted, the conditions that created the mixed-economy welfare model of that period arose out of the material conditions created by two world wars and Stalinism. Would we want a repeat of that?

This is why we need to talk about *capitalism*. Just talking about 'neoliberalism' is senseless. And in order to get beyond capitalism you have to pose the question of *how*. Therefore, we need to discuss and implement a system of political organisation and decision-making, which poses the question of political ordering. This implies transparency about our aims and methods, and in our collective decision-making. But, as comrade Macnair reiterated, Left Unity does not embody a transparent approach at this time - for example, there have not even been published minutes for meetings.

In the debate that followed, comrades agreed that it was necessary to intervene positively in Left Unity, but with the understanding that this was a political formation on a lower level than many previous unity attempts, such as the Socialist Alliance, and that there is a very high chance that it will not end well.

## CU and SO

Namina Drew updated comrades on the preparations for the August 12-18 Communist University. Most speakers - some new, some returning - have now confirmed, but there are still one or two vacant slots. Many people have expressed an interest in attending and we are expecting a good turnout at our south London venue.

CPGB national organiser Mark Fischer got the ball rolling for the start of this year's Summer Offensive by placing it in the current political context. He noted that the left continues to decline, though the present period had a certain fluidity, but the problem is that political fluidity does not lead to a fluidity of funds! Indeed, this year's SO must by necessity aim higher than in recent years, with a target of £30,000.

As always, comrades are encouraged to find creative ways to up our income - through engagement with the wider left, our closer periphery, readers of the *Weekly Worker* and so on. The SO is, after all, a political as well as a financial endeavour. In the discussion that followed, there was an agreed need to emphasise the collective nature of fundraising - something that should not be seen as in contradiction to individual pledges, but part of the same process ●

## Notes

1. 'Illusion is the first of all pleasures' *Weekly Worker* May 30.



## SUMMER OFFENSIVE

# Opportunities to grasp



The left: meltdown continues

All in all, it has not been a bad start to this year's Summer Offensive - the CPGB's annual (our 28th, actually) fundraising drive. Given that we jump-started the campaign early this year - as Robbie Rix reported last week, the leadership of our organisation proposed bringing its launch date forward by two weeks and bumping up our minimum collective target by £5k to £30,000, to be raised by August 18 - comrades have responded well.

Our June 8 aggregate of party members ratified this leadership proposal and CPGBers (broadly defined) have been quick off the mark to pledge £13,050. In fact £824 had actually been donated by the time these lines were being written, bang up against our paper's deadline. This year's SO is likely to be tough, but should not be regarded as daunting. Actually, if the organisation approaches it correctly it could be quite a valuable one for us in political terms.

This is not to minimise the monetary problems. The vast majority of Communist Party members and supporters, plus our periphery, are working class - people who actually feel the impact of a global capitalist crisis in a rather raw and personal way. That is a given.

But, for the SO, the bigger problem is its *political* context. It is clear that mainstream society is lurching quite dramatically to the right. That affects the left, particularly given its seemingly congenital inability to articulate independent working class politics. True, we have seen a degree of fluidity over the past period - but it is really a question of the direction of the flow. There were plenty of historical 'ice breaking up' metaphors flying around at the time of the squalid death throes of 'official communism'; but what has it produced that is positive? The meltdown continues, this time on the level of Socialist Workers Party-scale ice cubes, compared to the continental ice shelves of Stalinism. The dominant motif remains depressingly similar, whatever the relevant dimensions. The left in the UK and internationally continues to decay. This forms the backdrop to our work and underlines how important it is that we take ourselves seriously - theoretically *and* organisationally.

With this in mind, when I introduced the SO item at the aggregate I reminded comrades that this year's £30k target was actually taking us back to the sort

of totals we regularly achieved in the 1980s, the 90s and even into the very early noughties. SO veterans of those days recall with crusty nostalgia how energetic street work could account for a large chunk of your personal target; for our younger comrades, judging from their puzzled facial expressions, these anecdotes must seem akin to recounting tales of manual typewriters or the Eric and Ernie Christmas specials.

On the up side, our organisation is now receiving a steady trickle of membership applications - particularly since the revamp of our site last year. Unsurprisingly, it is hard to integrate these new comrades into the existing cultural and organisational norms of the CPGB. The SO dramatises the difficulties and suggests some solutions. What are the problems?

- First and foremost, our extremely flimsy national infrastructure and the anaemic state of the left's presence across the country. Practically, we can arm comrades with the *Weekly Worker*, but where can they be sent to argue ideas, to debate and interact with other traditions and thus *learn politics*? The left is more petrified forest than lush political jungle.

- The new comrades' general inexperience of the organised left. This means that they often lack the confidence to take initiatives that could gather others round them.

- The loss of historical memory that is inevitable, given the long decay of the left in the 20th century and the accelerated from it has taken from the 1980s onwards. Our SO is solidly in the traditions of the Marxist movement, a tradition that needs fought for for and reclaimed.

This last bullet point is worth emphasising as an illustration of the one of the key problems we face - the loss of historical memory. There is a long and honourable history of campaigns such as the SO. In the German revolution of 1848-49 the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, published by the Marx-Engels team, found that their middle class backers deserted them *en masse* from the first issue. Democratic revolution and direct confrontation with the Prussian autocracy terrified them. The "organ of European democracy" therefore had to rely on the ingenuity of party members and the hard-earned contributions that came from the paper's small but dedicated circle of proletarian readers. Daily circulation hovered at around

7,000. Marx himself frequently had to put aside his role as editor in order to organise financial drives.

The SO is also inspired by the communist subbotniks - first organised at their own initiative by workers in revolutionary Russia. On May 7 1919 communist railway workers and their sympathisers on the Moscow-Kazan line decided to extend their day by an hour and "put in six extra hours" on Saturdays (unanimously agreed resolution, quoted in VI Lenin *CW* Vol 29, Moscow 1977, p412). Labour productivity soared by 270%. The revolution was in dire danger from Kolchak and the forces of internal and international reaction. Others emulated the railworkers. Lenin called the subbotniks "one of the cells of the new socialist society" and demanded that the "greatest attention be paid to them".

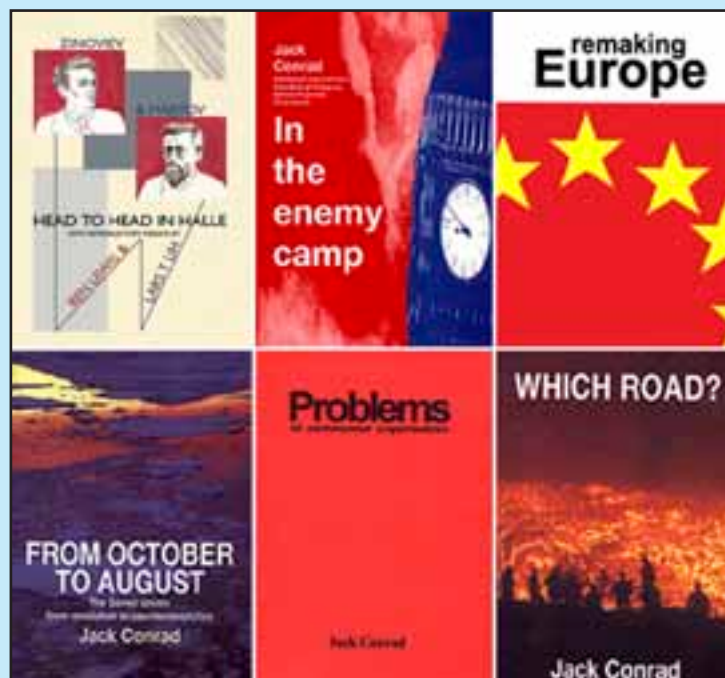
Part of Lenin's genius was his ability to formulate concrete solutions that always fitted enormously complex historical situations. So, rather more modestly, what should be our communist collective's approach to this year's SO? My take is that we should: 1. Take the opportunity to draw new layers of supporters and sympathisers that we have around us into financial support for the party and, in order to focus minds on why they should support (a) the paper and, crucially, (b) the website at the centre of the fundraising.

2. Try to inculcate in these comrades the importance of education, of political clarification in addition to more narrowly defined 'activity'. 3. Convince such comrades that the main medium for this - our web presence - is not simply a free add-on. Our website is the place where most people access the *Weekly Worker*, the production of which is very costly. We will soon be splitting the site into two separate entities - *Weekly Worker* and CPGB. This 'divorce' is both something we need to do because of external strictures and impositions; it is also an opportunity to up the quality and range of our web presence in general.

The left is in crisis, comrades. No serious partisan of the workers' movement wants it to be terminal. Supporting the *Weekly Worker* - and a financial campaign that puts its survival, its growth and its online development at the centre of a political and cultural renaissance of the left - deserves your full support ●

Mark Fischer

## Communist Party Books



### ■ Zinoviev and Martov: Head to head in Halle

Would the German Independent Social Democracy, with its 700,000 members, opt for the Third International or remain a halfway house, floating uneasily between communism and official social democracy? Lars T Lih and Ben Lewis make this key debate at the 1920 Halle congress available in English for the first time.

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**ECONOMY**

# From finance capital to



**Money, money. money: but what to do with it?**

While economic growth is proving elusive, there are clear signs of stagnation and disintegration, argues *Critique* editor **Hillel Ticktin**

**F**ollowing the late 1970s, with the era of Reagan and Thatcher, the bourgeoisie effectively decided to switch to finance capital. This meant deindustrialisation, exporting industry to places like China. They downgraded the relative importance of industry and promoted finance, which became dominant once again (I stress 'once again', because it had been so before World War II).

The result was that money was subtracted from the rest of the economy and found itself in banks or various kinds of finance houses, which involved - along with the official banking system - the so-called 'shadow banking system'. It meant that industry was subordinated to the ever more pressing demands of finance capital, which built up huge sums. And that was the problem. After a period of time, there was effectively too much money - particularly, of course, in the United States - and it became ever more difficult to find an area of profitable investment. This was the cause of the various bubbles - the south-east Asian bubble, the long-term capital management bubble and the dot-com bubble. This period lasted from the late 1970s to the year 2000.

In March 2000 the stock exchanges turned down. The subsequent period might well have been the beginning of the period of crisis we are now living in. After all, there was a downturn,

but this downturn was offset - partly because of 9/11, but much more because of the war on Iraq, which required sufficient investment to allow the economy to revive somewhat. Particularly in the US and Britain, by 2005-07 we saw an economy where there was a huge shift to phenomena such as credit default swaps, which quickly grew from something like \$1 trillion in value to something like \$63 trillion. The same thing applied to various other derivatives. By 2008, the total level of derivatives shot up to something like \$670 trillion. It was obvious that there would be a crash. After all, where was the money to go? If it was not going to go to industry, then where? As I said, there were a series of crashes.

## **Cannibalistic forms**

One area in which it could invest was finance capital itself, which is effectively what happened. It became cannibalistic. Investment went into what Marxists call the unproductive sector - loans for housing, commercial real estate and simple derivatives themselves. While this may have appeared to be some kind of virtuous circle, it obviously could not last. It had to explode, because in the last analysis it was based on nothing. Once that happened, the whole system

began to topple.

That is where we are now - not much has changed. There is still a huge surplus of money, such as the \$27 trillion held under administration by one single bank, the New York Bank Mellon - a figure I have quoted on several occasions. Or the \$21 trillion or so apparently held offshore in various havens to evade tax. When we start to think of these huge sums, we have to actually ask what is going to happen to them. After all, if they are simply held in accounts where the owners have to actually pay for the privilege rather than receive any interest, then that money will be lost. So, of course, they want to find a way out of that.

However - and this is the crucial point - they do not want to invest. They do not want to go into industry. So what is going to happen? That is the issue and it is not at all clear what the answer is. All we can see is that there is a deadlock, because, after all, these vast amounts of money came about as a direct decision to move out of industry. The logic would be that, if the capitalist class wanted to preserve the money, then it would have to find a way of moving back into the productive sector - back into industry. But that does not appear to be on the cards, although the possibility still hangs in the air, as it were. We shall return to this question.

In the meantime, we see capital looking for somewhere to invest. It may go into hedge funds, simply a cannibalistic form, or it may simply be held in banks, or it may be used for speculation on the stock exchange. We can see that the stock exchange has been going up and down - commentators have made the precise point that what we now have is a huge wall of potential investment which is looking for an outlet but has been holding back. When it looked like there was an opportunity to invest and make money on the stock exchange, money poured into it. We may expect that to happen again and again. Equally we may also expect money to be withdrawn, which is precisely what has happened in the last two weeks: various indexes, such as the Dow Jones and the British FTSE, have gone up and back down, although not the whole way back until now. In the US, the Dow Jones index has actually remained at its highest level ever, although this is not actually true in light of inflation. Yet we do see a certain gyration on the stock market, reflecting the fact that there are huge amounts of money which need somewhere to go. In fact this money is not going anywhere.

In contrast, we see a world economy which is bumping along the bottom. At one point it was thought that the third-world economies would

grow at a rapid pace and help to pull the rest of the world out of the mire. Not only has this not occurred, but these economies themselves are also going down. One can now read article after article about how Brazil is in trouble, how its rate of growth is low (around 1%) and so forth. Russia, of course, is suffering from an outflow of capital, and in any case it is hard to imagine anything happening in Russia that could save the world economy, given that attempts to tackle the 'rust belt', which is the basis of the Russian economy, have got nowhere. Russia remains dependent on oil and the export of raw materials.

## **Chinese downturn**

The one hope that the economists of London and New York had - ie, that China would turn up - has proved an illusion: China has turned down. It was surely obvious that this would be the case, even if much of the left seemed to be completely oblivious to this fact.

China has turned down for the obvious reason that its growth was effectively dependent on free labour - ie, labour that is free of an actual attachment to industry. In this sense I am using the term 'free labour' in a completely different way to which it is usually used: to denote non-attached or non-slave labour. I am using it in the sense that Chinese



# austerity muddle

labour, which has come from the villages, and which has limited skills, is free of any attachments, although not of all controls, and is relatively low-skilled. Such a labour force can easily be directed from one point to another; industry can be developed by educating this labour force on the job and moving it from one town to another.

The Chinese regime has control over this surplus labour and can reinvest it fairly easily in parts of the economy, including areas of shortage, giving a very high rate of growth. Yet this period has been an extremely limited one, and is coming to an end. It is true that there are still millions - maybe half of China's population - working in agriculture, but the relative shortage of labour today has allowed rising real incomes and wages and, consequently, a lower surplus product. Now from the point of view of the majority in China, there is no question that this is a step forward: they are better off. Nonetheless, we have to say that the high growth rates will have to come down.

Another reason why growth will come down is that it was not necessarily clear, given the nature of the economy and given what I have just been describing, where the investments would go. In fact, as in the former Soviet Union, the Chinese invested substantially in infrastructure. Unfortunately, a considerable part of this was in roads, blocks of apartments and so on in areas where nobody went. A considerable part of that surplus product was therefore effectively wasted, although over time they will clearly be brought into use. There is, however, clearly a limit to this type of investment. One also has to ask whether such investment should actually be included in gross national product figures. In fact, economic figures from China are often questioned: the actual rates of growth were probably lower than they appeared. The Chinese themselves are saying that the rate of growth has gone down and will go down further.

So it is highly unlikely that China could pull the world out of downturn. This is even more obvious if we think about the role of Chinese exports. As we all know, China's high rate of growth was dependent on its exports - particularly to Europe and the United States. Since Europe is effectively in a considerable downturn and American growth is relatively stagnant, imports from China are well down. The result is that the Chinese rate of growth would have gone down, regardless of the factors that I have just mentioned.

Far from assisting world economic growth, China may actually be acting as a drag on it: we do not know enough as to how the Chinese bureaucracy will act. Insofar as this bureaucracy has the levers of state control, it is in fact in a better position than in the west, where one simply sees stagnation all round - in the private sector and in the public sector. The Chinese may have more control and may therefore be able to mitigate what could amount to a very difficult period for growth in China.

## Little change

Today we are effectively in no better a position than we were before 2007. Even the banking sector remains in trouble, as the newspapers constantly report. This is particularly the case in Europe. Apparently, the US has to a large extent cleaned up its act - smaller banks have either gone bankrupt or merged, bigger banks

have been assisted, so as to allow them to continue, and because the US economy did actually grow (in contrast to the European economy) the banks were further assisted.

But it remains the case that banks are still in trouble in Europe. They need much more money in order to deal with the bad debts that they hold and they need a higher ratio of cash-type assets in relation to their total loans, so as to ensure that they do not get into further difficulty. The banking sector remains a source of trouble in Britain too.

The question, then, is where things go from here. In a crisis, it becomes obvious that the different poles pull apart. We have seen how finance and industry, which were already pulling apart before the crisis, pulled apart even further. We have seen the way protectionism is now spreading and intensifying. So far, protectionism has occurred on a relatively low scale, when compared with the great depression. It is nonetheless hotting up. The fight between China and Europe over solar panels is somewhat ridiculous when looked at from afar, but it reflects a discontent concerning competition with European producers.

Clearly, big German car manufacturers will not be asking for protection - except in certain circumstances, such big firms do not need protection (if they do then they will find ways of letting it be known in due course). At the present time, however, it is primarily the lower sections of the bourgeoisie - what might have been called the petty bourgeoisie, except they are wealthier, own firms and so on - which are asking for help. These firms are in debt and mainly depend on the larger firms, which attempt to buy at the lowest possible price and therefore will turn to outside their own immediate sphere, outside their particular country and so forth. So you would expect this lower section of the bourgeoisie to be highly discontented and to ask for protection. Their grievances will not only express themselves in the demand for protection, but in a series of other demands too.

In Britain, one of these demands is that Britain leave the European Union. If Britain does that then the British government could introduce a series of protectionist reforms in order to build up industry. That is the way they would look at it, and that is the way things are going. The tremendous demand for a referendum on EU membership expresses this group's interest above all. There are similar interest groups in other countries, with similar protectionist aims. As standards of living continue to fall and this section of the bourgeoisie finds itself forced down, one would expect these calls for protectionism to go even further. One would also expect this section of the bourgeoisie to seek common cause with a section of the workers in asking for such protection.

We are seeing forms of disintegration, as opposed to the forms of integration which had occurred during the period of colonial expansion. It is not a coincidence that various minorities within several states, including Britain, want to declare themselves independent - Catalonia sees itself as a richer area within a country it has to subsidise. We should expect this tendency to continue.

## Europe

So how stable is the European Union in this climate of disintegration? Rather interestingly, in a June 10

article in the *Financial Times*, Wolfgang Münchau<sup>1</sup> takes up the cry of the International Monetary Fund that the attitude of the EU bureaucrats towards Greece was wrong when, three years ago, they began to put it under pressure. It clearly was wrong: not simply from the point of view that what they were doing was brutal and cruel, but also because what they were doing did not have a hope in hell of being successful. Münchau points out that still to this day the settlement that was reached - modified and amended all the way - cannot work and will never work. That is undoubtedly true.

That is a reflection of what is happening within the euro zone itself. Obviously, if the Greeks were to leave the EU, then many of them would lose out: there would be an immediate devaluation of the currency and the imports which they previously made would, in effect, cost a small fortune, with living standards dropping catastrophically. On the other hand, what Münchau is really pointing out is that the pressure still being applied to Greece is such that they may say 'Enough is enough' and leave. That is entirely possible.

The euro zone does not work. No measures have been introduced in order to make it work. In any economic union of the kind that was being envisaged, it is obvious that there will be some areas that are richer and some that are poorer. There will be some areas that import more from the richer areas and vice versa. You will consequently find an economic balance that will reflect itself in a series of economic data. Unless the richer areas are prepared to accept that, as in the US, the centre must in some way or other assist parts of its union - with the richer areas in effect subsidising the poorer areas - then it simply cannot work. This is all rather obvious and many people have been making this point for some time.

Yet so far there has been no movement whatsoever in this direction. If that continues to be the case, then it simply cannot hold. It is not just that Germany will effectively find itself in trouble in relation to the rest of the EU - France is already in conflict with Germany and there are real differences between them, not simply at the level of philosophy or outlook. But it is hard to see how the euro zone can actually hold together. Of course, it is possible that there could be a change in the coming election, with the Social Democrats actually moving to the left and putting across a version of the viewpoint that I just explained and bringing about a series of measures which will dampen down the problems.

However, at the present time it does not look like it. We are therefore in for a long period of instability in Europe. Given that Europe has a bigger population than the US, that it is a highly developed part of the world that is critical to the world economy, it is hard to see how much can change within the context of the overall global depression. However, it is not just Europe - there are problems in every country.

This is also true of the US. It enjoys a positive rate of growth, but when you consider the influx of young people into the labour force and add up the figures, what you find is that US GDP basically enjoys no growth at all. It is growing precisely because more people are joining the labour force and more people are working. Yet the percentages of those

actually working may be static or it may go down - crucially, the number of people entering the workforce continues to rise. Consequently, the GDP per person in the labour force is relatively static.

The reality, of course, is also that the number of unemployed remains very high. It is almost certainly at least twice as high as the figure that is usually announced. There is also a deadlock within Congress, which makes it hard to pump in enough money or decide upon projects which would actually raise living standards and lead to growth. Barack Obama spoke of the 77,000 bridges that needed to be repaired in the US this year and in his first term spoke of introducing high-speed rail across America. That would have helped ensure growth. Yet this is, of course, not happening.

## Divided bourgeoisie

I would like to finish on a more general point. We live in a world which is in depression. We live in a world in which the parts are disintegrating. We also live in a world in which the bourgeoisie is fighting itself. It has taken a number of different viewpoints: some want austerity, some want growth and others have views which are variations of these two. We have seen the IMF speak of growth, something which almost certainly reflects the viewpoint of the US, as opposed to that of Germany or Britain.

We are not just dealing with governments here: we are talking about sections of the bourgeoisie. They are divided. But they are more than divided, because if you probe one or the other side, you see that they are not able to provide a coherent explanation of where they are and why they are there. Generally, they produce a series of propaganda statements, many of which are untrue and do not apply. This is particularly true of the Conservative-led government in Britain, whose talk of the need to save money and reduce the deficit is a nonsense. The US economist, Paul Krugman, is absolutely right to deem this approach "the economics of the madhouse". There is no truth to what they are saying - particularly if one thinks of the crazy situation where the Bank of England is buying government bonds and holds something like a third of these bonds. This means that the British debt is a third less than what is claimed, which makes it wholly acceptable (in numerical terms).

That simple fact, which can never be fully articulated, shows how it is possible to expand. This leads one to conclude that there is, of course, another agenda: austerity.<sup>2</sup> They want something else: they want a small public sector and to change the whole nature of the economy. While such a view might not be held by every advocate of austerity, it is nonetheless present.

The overall result of these differing viewpoints amongst the bourgeoisie is a muddle. Whereas it is actually possible to get out of the present downturn, that will not happen, because ultimately this would be tantamount to suicide on the part of the capitalist class ●

## Notes

1. W Münchau, 'Hail the outbreak of honesty about Greece's bailout' *Financial Times* June 10.
2. The subject of another podcast from comrade Tickin, which is available to download at [www.critiquejournal.net/28may.wma](http://www.critiquejournal.net/28may.wma).

# 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.**



# weekly Worker

The internet  
is in enemy  
hands

## Militarisation of cyberspace gathers speed

Tensions between China and the US over cyber-security are a reminder of the hidden dangers of the information age, writes Paul Demarty

By all accounts, Chinese premier Xi Jinping's recent visit to the United States went swimmingly. He and Barack Obama met in California, and seem to be seeing eye to eye on numerous contentious areas in Sino-American relations - North Korea, climate change targets and trade issues.

There was one matter, however, on which cordial agreement could not be reached, it seems. Obama and the US are concerned about cyber-security. Specifically, US officials complain that Chinese hackers routinely steal trade secrets for companies and sensitive information from US government agencies, with obvious advantages to Chinese business and intelligence. It appears that agreements can be reached on everything from the rogue state on the Chinese border to sabre-rattling in the Pacific, but not on that newest of battlefields: the internet and modern communications infrastructure.

Xi has hit back, claiming (no doubt accurately) that the US has been caught red-handed targeting foreign officials for cyber-attacks by US intelligence agencies. It is scarcely conceivable that there were no Chinese names on that list; however mutually profitable the relationship between China and the US may be, tensions constantly bubble under the surface. Where there is tension, there is work for the CIA.

The Chinese government is making diplomatic noises on this point. "Cyber security should not become the cause of mutual suspicion; rather it should be a new bright spot in our cooperation," said senior foreign policy advisor Yang Jiechi.<sup>1</sup>

Yet the activities of hackers are hardly the only flashpoint in Chinese relations with the west at this point. In recent months, the Chinese telecoms and electronics giant, Huawei, has come under close scrutiny, as, through deals with BT, it stands to do a job of work on large parts of British telecommunications infrastructure. Like any Chinese company of its size, Huawei enjoys close links with the Stalinist state apparatus; slightly too close for the comfort of the Commons security and intelligence committee, whose members were "staggered" to learn that the company was to do all its security testing in-house. The rattled MPs, led by Tory goblin Malcolm Rifkind, recommended that the tests should be conducted by the UK government communications spy centre, GCHQ, instead.<sup>2</sup>

### Shady business

Chinese-western tensions over this are simply the latest iteration of a longer-standing phenomenon - the emergence of cyberspace as a significant battleground for the competition between states. It has been a recurrent trope of science fiction dating back to William Gibson's *Neuromancer*, and appears in more spectacular form as the conceit behind films like *Terminator* and *The matrix*.

In the last few years, life has begun catching up with art. Internet connection speeds have increased to the point where it is trivial to bring down the average website with a 'distributed denial of service' (DDoS) attack - which consists essentially in

organising enough computers to try to load the same web page in a short enough space of time to completely overload the web server's capacity.

The hacker collective, Anonymous, for example, distributes simple programs to its sympathisers that allow the latter to participate in coordinated DDoS attacks with little technical knowledge. Not all attackers are as cuddly as the Guy Fawkes-masked hacktivists, though - the self-styled Syrian Electronic Army recently scored a number of high-profile strikes on US media outlets (including, bizarrely, *The Onion*) in retaliation for bias against the Assad regime. As for China, there are widespread suspicions that the regime is complicit in this kind of crude attack (the Marxist Internet Archive, for example, was taken down more than once by a DDoS attack apparently originating in China).

At the opposite end of the scale, there are malware attacks, such as the 2010 Stuxnet worm - a highly sophisticated piece of programming developed by US and possibly Israeli agents, which was targeted at a very specific combination of industrial equipment used in the Iranian nuclear programme.

Yet the merger of information technology and state power is not all about industrial sabotage or trifling attacks on troublesome websites - there is a *positive* dimension, too. This week saw the leak of solid documentary evidence that the US secret state is systematically hoarding phone records with the active complicity of major telecoms companies. This stuff is not easily interpreted, in its raw form, by the wilful minds of actual humans; the US is building a \$2 billion supercomputer - the Utah Data Center - for the sole purpose of identifying suspicious patterns of communication. Whether or not this is actually *legal*, even in the post-Patriot Act era, is hotly disputed - it will continue regardless.

### Utopia and dystopia

Since its earliest incarnations, there has been an odd contradiction at the heart of the internet, reflective of the more

general culture of computer science.

On the one hand, the ideology of the hacker is traditionally fiercely libertarian. The internet, in one sense, embodies a utopia - the dream of open access to all human culture, the shrinking of physical distance to almost nothing. The boffins who built it - and the general computing infrastructure - self-conceive as frontiersmen (the pre-eminent pressure group of such people is called the Electronic Frontier Foundation). Despite the best efforts of the state and IT corporations, the idea of the net as exhilaratingly anarchic has tenaciously resisted most attempts at cooptation.

On the other, these people - and the marvels that they built - were coopted from the get go. Computer science as an academic discipline is, like most applied sciences, deeply imbricated both with big capital and the military-industrial complex; it is these grey men, inimical to hacker libertarianism, that provided the research grants, the material infrastructure and so on that enabled the dream to achieve its current, tenuous reality.

The concrete result is a *partial* downward levelling within cyberspace. It is *possible* for 'hacktivists' - be they Anonymous left-libertarians or pro-Assad crazies - to stun the mainstream media with a frontal assault on some electronic symbol of power, in a way that is far more difficult to achieve in 'real life'. It is also much easier - with a little knowledge and common sense - to get away with it.

The same is true to a point between states. It is indubitable that the USA is better placed than any other country on earth to conduct its grubby affairs through clandestine, electronic means; but the threshold for 'mutually assured destruction' is considerably lower on this new military front. China can build a \$2 billion supercomputer too; it can find among its 1.4 billion people enough with the skills and motivation to turn to the digital dark arts.

The levelling effect, however, is only partial. Anonymous may be able

to take down a website for a few hours to make a point, but it cannot make a Stuxnet. Sophisticated industrial espionage requires the resources only a state machine can offer. Between states, too, inequalities in the general political-economic structure are reproduced. The global infrastructure of the internet is, beneath the 'horizontal' veneer, utterly reliant on the US, which could *in principle* simply cut off an entire country.

### Decline of the web

It is often thought of as proof positive of capitalism's continuing vitality, of its undiminished ability to melt solid matter into air. Yet it is clear that the internet and modern mass communication technology is yet another index of the *decline* of capitalism as a system. Here is something that could never have been produced according to the law of value, utterly reliant on the state from the get-go. Those basic laws of capital have never fully taken hold. Since the internet spawned the web, monetising the latter has proven remarkably difficult - perhaps especially so since its mass uptake in the early 2000s.

A few enormous companies make a fat profit out of the internet - Google, Amazon and so on - but the money (with the exception of an ecommerce giant like Amazon) does not come primarily from the production or sale of material goods, but rather a monopolistic ability to extort rent from companies further down the pecking order. Those bright-eyed app developer start-ups on Silicon Roundabout in Shoreditch, which George Osborne fancifully imagines will add up to an economic recovery, are to all intents and purposes in a relationship of serfdom with Google, Apple & co, who take a fat cut of everything they make for what amounts to a trivial web-hosting service. This is not capitalism in rude health - it is capitalism in decay.

That is also what the various murky actions of state power add up to here. The cyber-warriors of the

US and China (or even Syria) simply extend into the digital world the most ominous tendency of declining capitalism - the transformation of the means of production into means of destruction.

The US National Security Agency's ultra high-tech spying operations speak to the inability of capital and the state to ensure effective consent on a satisfactorily large scale; while the 'dead tree' free press was largely (never completely) coopted with considerable speed, digital communications present enormous practical difficulties for censors, blackmailers and bureaucrats (the extravagance of the Utah Data Center demonstrates the problem of *scale*, for one).

These are difficulties, at the end of the day, not absolute barriers. The libertarian-left exaltation of the freedom of the net is drastically overstated. It is in enemy hands; albeit the enemy's grasp is weaker than on the 'old' communications infrastructure. Like most achievements of this society, there is a nugget of emancipatory potential buried deep within it - the further erosion of state borders, the speed and depth of communication possible.

Yet all around that potential lurk dangers. The possibility of low-level (or even high-level) electronic warfare is worrying. No, we will not end up vaporised in nuclear armageddon, as in *Terminator*. But the very interconnectedness of technology made possible by the net makes it easier than ever to inflict damage, misfortune and death on an enemy population at effectively zero risk to the aggressors. The barbarity of US drone warfare should convince anyone that this is not a safe world to be in ●

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### Notes

1. *The Independent* on Sunday June 9.
2. [www.theregister.co.uk/2013/06/06/huawei\\_threat\\_to\\_uk\\_national\\_security](http://www.theregister.co.uk/2013/06/06/huawei_threat_to_uk_national_security).

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