



weekly worker



Esen Uslu reports from Istanbul on the brutal repression that finally saw off the Taksim Square protest

- Left Unity report
- Left Unity debate
- Italian elections
- Chris Nineham

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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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**PEOPLE'S
ASSEMBLY**

AGAINST

AUSTERITY

A rough guide

Who is behind the launch of the People's Assembly? What are the aims and methods? The personalities, politics and possibilities?

LETTERS



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

We ain't there

Ben Watson objects to this paper's criticisms of *Socialist Worker* over its coverage of Margaret Thatcher's death. "Uniquely among the left," he argues, the Socialist Workers Party "picked up the mood of the best sections of the working class".

One has to take issue, first of all, with the word "uniquely". Really? Leftwing gloating at the death of Thatcher was everywhere. Class War had been planning its 'Thatcher's dead!' party for at least a decade. Yes, many class-conscious workers exulted in the death of an old enemy, and groups like the SWP and Class War "picked up on" that mood (so, in fact, did the rest of us - we just responded differently).

The point is, surely, that first of all our job is not to passively reflect whatever happens to be in the heads of the workers - "best" or worst. The working class does not need our help, or (worse) our consent, to hate Thatcher. This hatred, however, is the residue of a historic defeat. Thatcher - and more broadly the ruling class - won the class battles of the 80s. One of the old clichés about the purpose of the party - 'the memory of the class' - is important here. The job of the organisations of the far left is to preserve and communicate historical memory, and memory of defeats above all else.

After the Thatcher street party comes the hangover, and the need for sober reflection on why we failed in our historic mission. The crime of *Socialist Worker* - a weekly which avoids self-criticism and sobriety like the plague - was to ignore this completely in pursuit of shallow publicity (and a welcome distraction from its internal difficulties). "Now get the others!" urged the front page, as if the mere fact of a frail old woman having finally expired was a hard-fought victory for the working class. (Perhaps the Grim Reaper is a PCS militant?)

Comrade Watson points out that he is hardly uncritical of the SWP, and a supporter of the International Socialist Network. Yet making an exception for this coverage is perverse - it, just like the bizarre behaviour of the leadership over the course of the SWP's crisis, precisely exemplifies the inability of the SWP to take any responsibility for its stagnation and failure. (This inability is hardly unique to the SWP, of course, which is one of the many reasons why Thatcher managed so successfully to clobber the workers' movement.)

This front page in a sense sums up everything that's wrong with *Socialist Worker*. It reads the utterly understandable bitterness of the working class about the Thatcher era just like it reads everything else - as further evidence that the working class is broiling with revolutionary energy, and only needs a little bit of confidence to move heaven and earth. This delusion sings out from every page of every issue, and none more acutely than its claiming credit for this death from natural causes. Comrades, we ain't there.

When the "best sections" are truly ready to take on capitalism, they won't be consumed by the hatred of dead enemies; kowtowing to such sentiments now actually delays any revival in class combativity.

Paul Demarty
Southwark

Unpublished

This is a letter I sent to *Socialist Worker*. It was not published - they can't take any criticism.

"Can I draw your attention to the following sentences from your

recent article: 'There have been demonstrations across the country in solidarity with those in the square and park. Many have been awash with Turkish flags, as Islamophobic nationalists have tried to inject the movement with their poison' (June 4). Are you aware how contradictory this is when the people who are protesting are Muslims themselves? The protests have clearly taken on a pro-secular agenda against a government who are the opposite of progressive and Islamic in outlook.

"If England was run by a deeply conservative party that supported Christian values and tried to move the country closer to a religious state, and anti-government forces called for different values, which they called nationalist and not religious, would they be described as 'Christianophobic', even if most of them were Christians themselves?"

"It seems to me that since the Respect popular frontism the SWP has entirely muddled thinking. At a recent National Union of Teachers conference I heard a speaker booed by an SWP group because he used the phrase 'Islamic terrorist'. The description seemed reasonable to me when acts of terror are committed in the name of Islam. This does not mean that all Muslims are terrorists. Nor does it mean the speaker was anti-Muslim.

"The so-called nationalists are in the main pro-secular workers who are against religious control, not Islamophobic. They are not spreading poison, but organising against the government. Are the SWP saying they should support the government? Are they saying that they should be fully formed socialists? The answer is obvious. Perhaps the SWP should recognise the true nature of the protests and stop spreading its distorted views."

Steve White
London

Still ignoring

Peter Manson quotes the SWP as saying it would be a mistake to "pretend there is nothing wrong and hope that by ignoring the problem it will go away" ('Offering token concessions', June 13). He comments: "Well, I am tempted to refer to that second conclusion as a breath of fresh air, although perhaps that would be overdoing things."

Indeed, I strongly feel that this would be overdoing things. While I admit that I'm not deeply into SWP affairs, if the SWP and its international sister organisations are now willing not to ignore problems, they obviously do not regard spreading lies as a problem. I'm referring to their reaction - or rather non-reaction - to the fact that they have been informed for some time that a certain Simon Assaf, a regular writer for *Socialist Worker*, stated, in order to defend the pro-rebel line on Syria, that the Lebanese Hezbollah leader, Hassan Nasrallah, had called the Syrian rebels "takfiris" and that this meant "unbelievers/apostates". This, according to Simon Assaf, meant that Hezbollah was inciting religious sectarian hatred. In my letter to the *Weekly Worker* (June 6) I pointed out that takfiris are not "unbelievers", but those Muslims who call other Muslims unbelievers. So Nasrallah in fact said the opposite of what *SW* alleges.

Everyone can, of course, make a mistake. But not only haven't I heard or seen a correction of this mistake, but shortly afterwards I found a translation of this same article on the website of the Austrian organisation, Linkswende. I wrote to them asking them to publicly correct this politically not so unimportant 'mistake' and/or delete Assaf's article from their website. The reaction? None at all. So it is no longer

a question of having made a mistake, but of lying to their readers.

These organisations are by no means the only ones inside the left camp acting like this. If the international working class bothered to take notice of them, such behaviour would certainly add to the prevailing cynicism both in regard to the bourgeoisie and their media and to the 'revolutionaries'.

Anton Holberg
Germany

Back in the USSR

I have just returned from a fifth trip in the past four years to Moscow and would like to share some thoughts and comments.

I am no great expert, but my sense is that there is no trend in Russia advocating a 'return' to the USSR. Russia - certainly in the big cities like Moscow - is very much part of a highly modern and vibrant 21st century consumer society. Most people are well educated, well fed, well dressed, and have access to the most modern forms of communication. Sure, you will see examples of people who have 'fallen below the net', but no more, and I would say less, than in western cities like London. Local shops and supermarkets are plentiful and full, and well stocked with a full range of consumer goods, both local and, disconcertingly, western 'own brands'.

Russia has recovered extremely well under the leadership of Putin and Medvedev and has largely overcome the economic, social and humanitarian disaster of the immediate post-Soviet collapse under Yeltsin. We insult and offend the Russian nation and people by failing to recognise this massive, strategic change and recovery. Moscow is today a major world capital, cosmopolitan, vibrant, exciting, individualistic, safe, green and clean.

Yes, there is a degree of nostalgia for the old Soviet Union. Yes, for many Russians, including perhaps, even especially, the younger generations, there is fairly unqualified admiration for Joseph Stalin as 'the man who won the war'. But the idea of advocating the reversal of today's modern consumer society, with its personal consumer choice and freedom to speak and write, to the image of what passed for Soviet society in the 1970s and 80s, is frankly nonsensical. It just is not going to happen and nor should it. Whilst Soviet society will be seen to have its gains and advantages, no-one today is going to opt out of the choices, freedoms and vibrancy of a modern consumer society, in favour of the limitations and basics of the 1970s and 80s.

It seems to me that modern Russia has made unbelievable and unexpected progress in re-establishing itself as a major world power and that should be welcomed by progressives and socialists as providing a powerful limiting factor for decadent, dangerous western imperialism and as providing a breathing space for modern, progressive ideas to emerge and develop in Russia.

We are Marxists, so understand that economics and technology ultimately determine the shape and diversity of human society and politics. A new socialism in Russia has to *build* from where we are now, proceeding from the existing economic and technological base - not going back two or three decades.

The idea that communists, of all people, should have been identified with people who tried to censor and restrict free speech and thinking is frankly appalling and disgusting. Future socialism in Russia - and in the UK - can never be based on empty shops or stopping people thinking or saying the 'wrong' things.

21st century socialism has to

be based on the achievement of the most modern technological advances, behaviour and attitudes, and fundamentally has to be deeply pluralistic, diverse and democratic. As we used to say, socialism has to be based on and surpass the highest achievements of capitalism. Not a reversion to the past.

Andrew Northall
Kettering

Polish link

I read your paper every week online and I find many of the topics interesting. As when you saw parallels between British and Polish "anti-sectarian sectarianism" ('Anti-sectarianism Polish style', May 23).

The UK fascist movement seems to be developing similarly to the Polish movement. As in the UK, it may evolve from some kind of moderate, parliamentary, democratic forms (like the UK Independence Party) to adopt a more radical, modern, popular style.

In Poland it is the same. On May Day there was a nationalist demonstration under the slogan, "Jobs in Poland for Poles!" (sound familiar?). There were 500 people on this demonstration, whereas the radical left could manage 200 at best.

Do you think the situation in the UK is similar to Poland in this respect? If so as Marxists we should discuss together how to fight the rise of the right.

Andrzej Brun
Warsaw

Abortion error

There was a small technical error in an otherwise very good article ('No ifs, no buts ... a woman's right to choose', June 13). It is the newly established Abortion Rights Campaign who are organising the national activists meeting on Saturday June 22 (which I will be attending as the representative from the Cork Women's Right to Choose Group).

Alan Gibson
Cork

Inept term

Comrade Michael Copestake reports that the suggestion that the term 'democratic centralism' should be abandoned, because it carries too much negative baggage, was countered by comrades who claimed: "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" ('The left must aim higher', June 13).

This counter-argument is unconvincing. The terms 'socialism' and 'communism' were indeed besmirched by Stalinism; but their true, untainted meaning is clear from classical discourse that predated Stalinism, and was upheld by anti-Stalinist socialists during the heyday of Stalinism.

Not so with 'democratic centralism'. Its authoritative interpretation and application - prohibition of factions and of open debate - cannot be blamed on the Soviet Union under Stalin, as it has been shared by many anti-Stalinist groups. Moreover, the most authoritative interpretation of this term is in the 'Theses on the role of the Communist Party in the proletarian revolution', promulgated by the second congress of the Comintern, July 1920. Although this overly authoritarian text, which predates Stalinism, is clearly addressed to the exceptional context of the civil war, it has nevertheless been taken as a blueprint by most Leninist organisations in normal times.

It seems to me that, instead of appealing to the false prestige of this tainted formula, it would be much better to explain in detail why 'horizontal decision-making' is in fact

anti-democratic (it means minority rule!); and why a federal mechanism for decision-making at a national level should be avoided (an overall minority can win majorities in a majority of federated branches!).

Moshé Machover
email

Socialist-lite

The 'anti-austerity bus tour' of England has just started and you may have already witnessed the curious spectacle of communists of the *Morning Star* variety clamouring to get on board. But what is the alternative to austerity that the bus is hawking? Keynesian economics!

In times of unemployment, Keynes said that governments must raise taxation to spend money to create jobs; in other words, governments must run a deficit. Yet if employment is high but inflation is rising, the way to deal with this, said Keynes, is that governments must make cuts and run a budget surplus, using this to pay off the national debts and lower inflation.

Yet what happened in 1976? Unemployment *and* prices were rising, but no government can run a surplus and a deficit at the same time. So the then Labour government abandoned Keynesian policies and introduced monetarism. I hope communists who read the *Weekly Worker* do not fall into the trap of thinking that Keynesian ideas are socialist, socialist-lite or somehow a necessary step towards socialism.

Steven Johnston
Stockport

Remember 1913

The Great Dublin lockout, which began on August 26 1913, pitted two powerful antagonists: Jim Larkin, leader of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union, and William Martin Murphy, leader of the Dublin Employers' Federation.

Dublin was the second city of the empire when the Act of Union came into force on January 1 1801. By 1913 the south was a rural backwater, taxed out of all proportion to its ability to pay, its industries and commerce suppressed and its peasantry reduced to subsistence living typified by the Great Famine of 1845-52.

The Dublin Lockout was different from and yet part of the great unrest that swept Britain and its Irish colony in the years before World War I. On August 26 1913, drivers and conductors abandoned their trams in protest. The employers drew up a pledge for workers to sign: "I hereby undertake to carry out all instructions given to me by or on behalf of my employers and, further, I agree to immediately resign my membership of the ITGWU ..." Those who refused to sign were sacked.

There was tremendous solidarity support in Manchester - 130 NUR rail union branches called for action. In south Wales, rail workers and dockers went on unofficial strike. But on December 9 1913 the TUC special conference met and predictably there was a sell-out and betrayal of the Dublin strikers.

The Dublin Lockout Organising Committee in London have organised an event on the August bank holiday weekend to celebrate the centenary, from Friday August 23 to Sunday August 25. The main event is an all-day conference in Conway Hall, Red Lion Square. Confirmed speakers include John McDonnell MP, Bob Crow, general secretary of the RMT trade union, Sheila Coleman, chair of the Hillsborough Justice Campaign, Cillian Gillespie of the Irish Socialist Party and Michael Holden of the Irish Republican Prisoners Support Group.

Gerry Downing
Dublin Lockout Committee

REPORT

Policy put on hold

Dave Isaacson (Milton Keynes LU) and **Michael Copestake** (Sheffield LU) report from Left Unity's first national coordinating group meeting

It is now over a month since Left Unity held its first national meeting on May 11, which voted in favour of a launch conference for a new political party to take place in November this year. That national meeting also agreed to create a national coordinating group (NCG) to plan for and organise that conference and on June 15 the NCG met for the first time. Overall the meeting was a positive one which has moved LU forward and placed it on firmer democratic footings. However, the meeting did begin with controversy and disquiet regarding the actions of a group of NCG members.

The national meeting which voted the NCG into existence had agreed that the body would be composed of one delegate elected by each LU branch (36 local groups sent delegates on June 15) and 10 members elected at the national meeting. Observers from local groups were allowed to attend the NCG meeting, but in a vote it was decided by 19 votes to 13 that they would not have speaking rights.

In the week leading up to the first NCG, as documents for this meeting began to be circulated to delegates, it became apparent that the 10 members elected at the national meeting had already held two meetings. Other NCG members were not informed that these meetings were taking place, and no minutes were circulated until the week before the NCG, although various decisions of an executive nature were taken by this body. A number of us at the NCG meeting were keen to get some answers as to why and how this had happened, and reassurance that this committee within a committee would disband. Thankfully on the last point everybody, including the 10, were clear that there would be no further meetings of this nature.

Unfortunately, the agenda which we were presented with by the group of 10 provided no space to discuss these issues properly until the afternoon, when two last-minute motions on transparency (submitted by branches in response to hearing about this situation) were scheduled. Following a welcome from Doncaster LU and listening to a guest speaker from South Yorkshire Fire Brigades Union speak about cuts to the fire service, a challenge to the agenda was made by Will McMahon (Independent Socialist Network), who called for the motions on transparency to be discussed at the beginning of the meeting. Will explained that the group of 10 had no remit to make the many decisions they had taken.

The co-chair of the meeting, Tom Walker (International Socialist Network), expressed dismay that we might get bogged down in discussion of "procedure" and urged us to move on. Phil Hearse (Socialist Resistance) agreed with comrade Walker and said he was pleased that the group of 10 had got things done. Another SR member, James Youd of Cambridge LU, saw things very differently. His local branch had submitted one of the motions on transparency and he said that, while somebody had to act to convene the first NCG meeting, the group of 10 had clearly overstepped the mark. Dave Church (Walsall Democratic Labour Party) was also critical and insisted that we must learn the lessons of why other projects that have sought to bring the left together have failed if we want LU to succeed. An independent comrade remarked that, while he shared the concerns people had raised, he thought we should leave further discussion of the matter until later on the agenda.

When a vote was taken to resolve the issue, the challenge to the agenda was defeated. Comrade Church walked out of the meeting at this point, presumably in frustration.

We then moved on to a discussion of the principal task set the NCG by the May 11 national meeting - that of organising a launch conference for November this year. A draft timeline, setting out a framework for discussion between now and November and a basic outline of the nature of the conference - who can attend, what discussion will be focused on, etc - had been drafted by Kate Hudson and approved by the rest of the group of 10. Another decision that the national meeting had mandated the NCG to put in place was a call for the development of policy commissions. In Kate's draft timeline the ideas of the policy commissions and the launch conference were brought together, so that the policy commissions would be the focus of discussion leading up to the conference and they would produce motions on the various policy areas which would then be debated at conference.

There were lots of problems with this proposal. Firstly, its grand scope, with policy commissions covering almost every area that would be in a general election manifesto, was felt by many delegates to be overly ambitious and unrealistic at this stage in LU's development. Others questioned why it looked to be geared towards standing in elections, when no decision had been made to do so. An amendment from Hackney Left Unity sought to shift the focus of the conference onto deciding on a general policy statement, democratic structures, membership issues, and issues related to ongoing or imminent campaigns. While the policy commissions would still be launched, their work would be more long-term, running beyond the November conference, possibly to feed into a weekend-long policy conference in 2014. After a long discussion the Hackney amendment was passed unanimously.

As well as being more realistic, such an approach will hopefully allow us to see the wood from the trees in debating what LU stands for. While the policy commission approach would have ensured lots of issues were covered, they would all have been decided upon in isolation from each other. Amongst all the policy commission headings proposed, none would have allowed for a direct consideration of where we stand in response to the totality of capitalist rule and what alternative we advocate. Chris Strafford (Anti-Capitalist Initiative) correctly remarked that we needed to decide what sort of society we wanted before we could plot out how to get there.

Another argument against Kate Hudson's original proposal, expressed by Nick Wrack (Independent Socialist Network), was that basing conference proceedings on the output of policy commissions also lent undue bias to 'experts' and those with lots of time on their hands, as opposed to centring discussion on local branches, where there would be higher levels of participation. Comrade Hudson's proposal was rather eerily reminiscent of the way motions make their way to Labour Party conference via commissions and a national policy forum - a process consciously designed to take the agenda away from the membership and their branches and keep power in the hands of the bureaucrats.

Comrade Wrack submitted two amendments intended to make the process more democratic. Firstly,

that branches must be able to submit motions themselves, not just amendments to what emerged from the policy commissions. This was passed unanimously. Secondly, that political platforms and other groups of individual members should be able to submit motions that had the support of at least 10 members. This proved more controversial, with some arguing that this gave rights to, or encouraged, factions - which of course, is the last thing we would want! Once the dreaded f-word had been bandied about, we feared this amendment would fall on that basis alone. It was a positive sign that this fear was misplaced and the amendment was passed by 27 votes to 14. With these amendments, and other more minor ones, in place, the meeting really had moved in a productive fashion to arrive at an outline plan for a conference that was pretty much acceptable to all. The vote on the amended timeline was 37 votes for and none against, with three abstentions.

Then after listening to, and accepting, a proposal from a small production company to make a film about LU, and a lunch break, we eventually got round to discussing the motions on transparency. The first came from Cambridge LU and was moved by comrade Youd. He recalled that the May 11 national meeting had voted for the creation of *one* elected body - the NCG. The 10 took up a mandate they did not have by going off and making decisions which we were not party to, he argued. The motion stated that "all national committee members are to be treated as equal and that all national committee meetings should have their agenda circulated in advance and the minutes circulated after the meeting".

This motion was discussed together with one from Southwark LU which read: "all minutes and documents from national meetings and committees to be posted on the Left Unity website, so that everyone can have access to the articles discussed, amended and passed, and see the decisions made." Southwark's motion was moved by Nick Wrack, who also accepted an amendment that minutes from LU's various working groups also be published online. Some comrades worried that this might put sensitive information into the hands of "the enemies of Left Unity". This is little more than a red herring. The only example of an "enemy" given - by Phil Hearse - was Andrew Murray of the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain. An amendment that sought to keep minutes in a password-protected area was defeated before both the Southwark and Cambridge motions were passed with overwhelming support. This certainly marks progress and begins to put LU on a firmer democratic footing.

Finally, there was a brief discussion of how to respond to an invitation from the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition for talks. Nobody suggested that we should not meet Tusc, but some felt that we should wait until after the November conference. However, the majority thought there would be no harm in meeting earlier.

This report can only summarise the discussions and decisions made in a five-hour-long meeting. Hopefully the official minutes will soon be available on the LU website for all to examine. Further information can also be gleaned from Pete McLaren's thorough report on the Independent Socialist Network website.¹ ●

Notes

1. www.independentsocialistnetwork.org/?p=2256.

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 23, 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' (continued). Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Introduction to anthropology

Tuesday June 25, 6.15pm: 'Red stars and snowy mountains: linking folklore and archaeology'. Speaker: Fabio Silva. 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.

End child detention

Saturday June 22, 2.30pm: Workshop for asylum-seeker families and supporters, Garnethill Multicultural Centre, 21 Rose Street, Glasgow G3. Organised by the Unity Centre: www.unitycentreglasgow.org.

No bedroom tax

Tuesday June 25, 12.30pm: Lobby, Manchester Conference Centre, Weston Building, Sackville Street, Manchester M1. Organised by No Bedroom Tax: www.nobedroomtax.co.uk.

Should Britain apologise for Balfour?

Tuesday June 25, 7pm: Meeting, room 116, School of Oriental and African Studies, Thornhaugh Street, London WC1. Speaker: James Renton. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.palestinecampaign.org.

Fighting for socialism in Latin America

Wednesday June 26, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Apple Tree Pub, 45 Mount Pleasant, Clerkenwell, London WC1. Organised by Rock Around the Blockade: www.ratb.org.uk.

Woolwich and the war on terror

Thursday June 26, 7pm: Public meeting, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. 'Terrorism and wars in Muslim countries: is there any connection?' Speakers include: Ken Livingstone, Lindsey German, Joe Glenton. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk.

Ipswich against fascism

Thursday June 27, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Unite the Union office, Grimwade Street, Ipswich. Organised by Unite Against Fascism: www.uaf.org.uk.

Big NHS birthday gala

Saturday June 29, 11am: Public service celebration, Millennium Square, Leeds LS2. Organised by Socialist Health Association: www.sochealth.co.uk/events/nhs-birthday-gala.

Scotland against the bedroom tax

Saturday June 29, 12 noon: National conference, Meadowbank Stadium, 139-141 London Road, Edinburgh EH7. Organised by Scottish TUC: <http://www.stuc.org.uk>.

Left Unity Sheffield

Saturday June 29, 1pm: Public launch meeting, Central United Reformed Church, Chapel Walk, Sheffield S1. Organised by Sheffield Left Unity: www.sheffieldleftunity.blogspot.co.uk.

Stand up for asylum rights

Saturday June 29, 12.30pm: Rally and music, St Enoch's Square, Glasgow G1. Organised by the Unity Centre: www.unitycentreglasgow.org.

National Shop Stewards Network

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

Remember the International Brigade

Saturday July 6, 12.30pm: Public memorial and celebration, Jubilee Gardens, South Bank, London SE1. Organised by Lawrence and Wishart: www.lwbooks.co.uk.

Class Wargames

Sunday July 7, 1pm: Political board games. Firebox, 108 Cromer Street, London WC1. Playing of Rob Jones's, Steven Mortimore's and Simon Douglas's *A very British civil war*. Organised by Class Wargames: www.classwargames.net.

CPGB wills

Remember the CPGB and keep the struggle going. Put the CPGB's name and address, together with the amount you wish to leave, in your will. If you need further help, do not hesitate to get in contact.

LEFT UNITY

Theories of deception

The extent to which we practise transparency and democracy determines whether we can be taken seriously, argues **Mike Macnair**

The Left Unity project is now at least part-way to being up and running: local groups are already set up in several places and there have now been two national delegate meetings. It has a *chance* of making a positive difference to the situation of the left.

It has this chance firstly because the project aims for a new membership party of the left, not a federal bloc of the existing left groups. Secondly, because it stands, if so far vaguely, for a politics of hope, grassroots organising and offering an image of radical change, symbolised (if very imperfectly) by Ken Loach's film *Spirit of '45*, which captures the widespread hopes of radical change in 1945 produced by inter-war labour organising and by the wartime experience itself. And, thirdly, because at least formally, and to some extent in practice, it aims for democratic organising and open debate.

I stress *chance*, however, for two reasons. The first is that the underlying dynamic of British politics at present seems to be towards the right. The UK Independence Party, not any of the left-of-Labour attempts, is picking up the protest vote, and both Cameron and co, and Miliband and Balls are dragged rightwards. The second is that there is a significant risk that LU will wind up producing something uninspiring: yet another iteration of the British far left's attempts to get big by pretending to be the old Labour 'broad left' of the 1960s-70s, like the Socialist Labour Party, Socialist Alliance and Respect.

The report of the Doncaster LU national delegate meeting on June 15 (see p3) tells us that debates at that meeting were dominated by questions of organisation and procedure in the run-up to the intended founding conference in the autumn. These are real political issues. Running alongside this discussion, however, is another political debate: a highly opaque discussion on LU's website about 'language'. Should LU describe itself as 'socialist'? Nick Wrack has argued that it should.¹ Haringey LU supporter Joe Lo responded with a post entitled 'Let's explain what socialism is before we call ourselves socialist', mainly focused on 'out of date' (far-left) language, which has attracted numerous comments.²

Since then, Mark Perryman of *Philosophy Football* has posted on the LU site, under the title 'Mind your language',³ a link with laudatory comment to the second part of the 'Kilburn manifesto'. This is in course of production, and chapter-by-chapter publication, by the 'old *Marxism Today* hands' of the magazine *Soundings*.⁴ In fact, a number of the comments opposing 'traditional left language' are also accompanied by other symptoms of *Marxism Today* commitments.

Meanwhile, Socialist Resistance, the British section of the Mandeliste Fourth International, has been heavily involved in LU from an early stage - though this group has semi-identified itself with 'anti-group' sentiment. SR has adopted at its 2013 conference the general line of a speech by Phil Hearse defending the group's very long-standing twin-track approach of 'Build a broad left party, fight for Marxist unity'.⁵ And on the Fourth International's *International Viewpoint* webpage, SR's Alan Davies finds himself in opposition to the FI bureau in a debate in that organisation's International

Committee, on the question: should the FI aim to promote broad *anti-capitalist* parties, as the bureau argues?⁶ Or is this a leftist mistake, as Davies argues?⁷ In the same debate the bureau's approach is also criticised as rightist by Jeff Mackler for Socialist Action (US) and by Manos Skoufoglou from the Internationalist Communist Organisation of Greece (Spartakos or OKDE-S) and Gaël Quirante from the French Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste.⁸

This is, of course, the same debate which takes an Aesopian form in the discussion of 'language' on the LU website. Is it time to try to build a party which openly aims for radical change? Or should the aim be for broad unity around defence (or reconstruction) of the welfare state created after 1945 and the 'Keynesian consensus' against Tory (or neoliberal, whatever sort of capitalist-ideologue) attacks?

A related aspect of the 'language' debate, less touched on in the FI debate, is: should we be aiming to build a party of the working class - meaning people who live from wages and salaries (not including 'executive compensation', which is a distribution of profits disguised as salary) and related benefits, as opposed to small business-people? Or should the aim be something in the nature of a broad alliance against the current ideological order, as the *Soundings* writers propose (and as they proposed when they were *Marxism Today* writers ...)?

Language and history

I do not think anyone would disagree with the idea that leaflets for broad circulation, interviews on television and so on should be written or spoken in a language that the intended audience can understand. At one level it is hardly new. Go back to the 1970s, when the left was talking to lots of people: however much we in the 1970s far left wrote semi-academic theory and internal polemics in Trotskyist, only the Sparts and similar groups thought that leaflets and so on should be produced in the same style.

There is, however, a problem with limiting yourself *wholly* to 'language people can understand'.

In Eric Flint's *1632* series a small US mining town from the late 1990s is mysteriously translated to central Germany in the year 1631. In one of the more recent books in the series, *1636: the Kremlin games*, co-written by Flint, Gorg Huff and Paula Goodlett, one of the Americans, Bernie Zeppi, is hired to move to Russia. Here a Russian interlocutor is trying to deal with his explanation of plumbing: "What is a gravity feed?" Filip Pavlovich asked. "How can one make water grave and serious? Water does not flow because it is serious." The problem in the scene is that Filip Pavlovich does not have the Newtonian concept of gravity to work with, and he needs to get it in order to understand Bernie's explanation of his plans for plumbing.

You need to grasp certain explanatory concepts in order for certain choices to be possible to you. This is as true in politics and economics as it is in physics and engineering. Joe Lo's and Mark Perryman's proposed bans on certain sorts of language would deny LU and its members the *possibility* to think these concepts, like class and exploitation. It would still, of course, be possible to think in *Marxism Today* terms ...

The 'forget the history' idea is, if anything, more foolish. It is the political equivalent of, on an individual level, seeking to get Alzheimer's, or volunteering for some sort of brain damage which wipes out both your existing memories and your ability to form new ones.

The idea that we can reach out to large numbers of 'ordinary people' if we forget the history and abandon words like 'socialism' is more immediately politically foolish: because it supposes that *our political opponents*, on the right, will consent to not talking about the history. The opposite is true. 'Talking about Russia' and Stalin is entrenched in the GCSE history curriculum and endlessly repeated by the rightwing press in response to even the slightest hint of leftwing discourse.

Nor is it to be imagined that this will wear out over time.⁹ The 14th century decay of the medieval Italian city-state republics into *signorie* (one-man dictatorships) and factional warfare, was still providing grist to the mill of pro-monarchist authors 250-300 years later in the drama of Shakespeare and his contemporaries and as late as Thomas Otway's *Venice preserv'd* (1682). These plays taught audiences that There Is No Alternative to absolute monarchy. This story only lost its political edge when the Dutch republic, after 1609, and England, after 1688, showed a better *political* alternative.¹⁰ The story of Stalinism will, similarly, be endlessly repeated and will not lose its political edge until we are able to show that we can propose something better in practice. 'Forgetting 20th century history'

is, of course, beneficial to advocates of warmed-over versions of the line of *Marxism Today*. Stuart Hall, Michael Rustin and Doreen Massey may today offer a 'new road for the left' in 'new conditions', *without* any auto-critique of their *own* policy in the 1970s-90s. But those of us who still have memories or access to *recent* history know what the real political outcome of that policy was ... Blairism. The real inheritors were not those who have clung to a sentimental leftism, but Jack Straw, Charles Clarke, John Reid ... The narrative is made clearly in John Carr's 2011 series on *Marxism Today*'s role in the development of Blairism at *ProgressOnline*.¹¹ In the light of this outcome, today's left has good reasons to say to the ex-*Marxism Today* crowd, "A period of silence on your part would be welcome" (certainly better reasons than Attlee's for his original put-down to Laski).

Mandelite debate

To turn from these arguments to the debate among the Mandelites is almost (but not quite) a relief. This debate addresses real developments, mainly in European countries, and real political choices. 'Not quite' a relief for two reasons. First, because the framing assumptions of the debate are still those of a misconception about what is meant by 'revolution' and a 'revolutionary party', which remains the Mandelites' strategic objective. Second, because the Mandelites - as they always have - use obscure diplomatic language.

The Mandelites have been pursuing the project of 'broad parties' for a long time now, since the failure of their 'turn

to industry' in 1979-83, and the initial relative success of their participation in the Brazilian Workers Party (PT). I have partly surveyed this history last year, in reviewing the collection *New parties of the left* produced by SR in 2011.¹² The present debate arises from (I think) the first meeting of the FI international committee since it became fully clear that the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste project in France had definitively failed to make the hoped-for breakthrough, and the Parti Communiste Français had been able to 'recapture' hegemony on the French left (including a large part of the former Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire) through the Front de Gauche alliance with the Parti de Gauche, led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon.

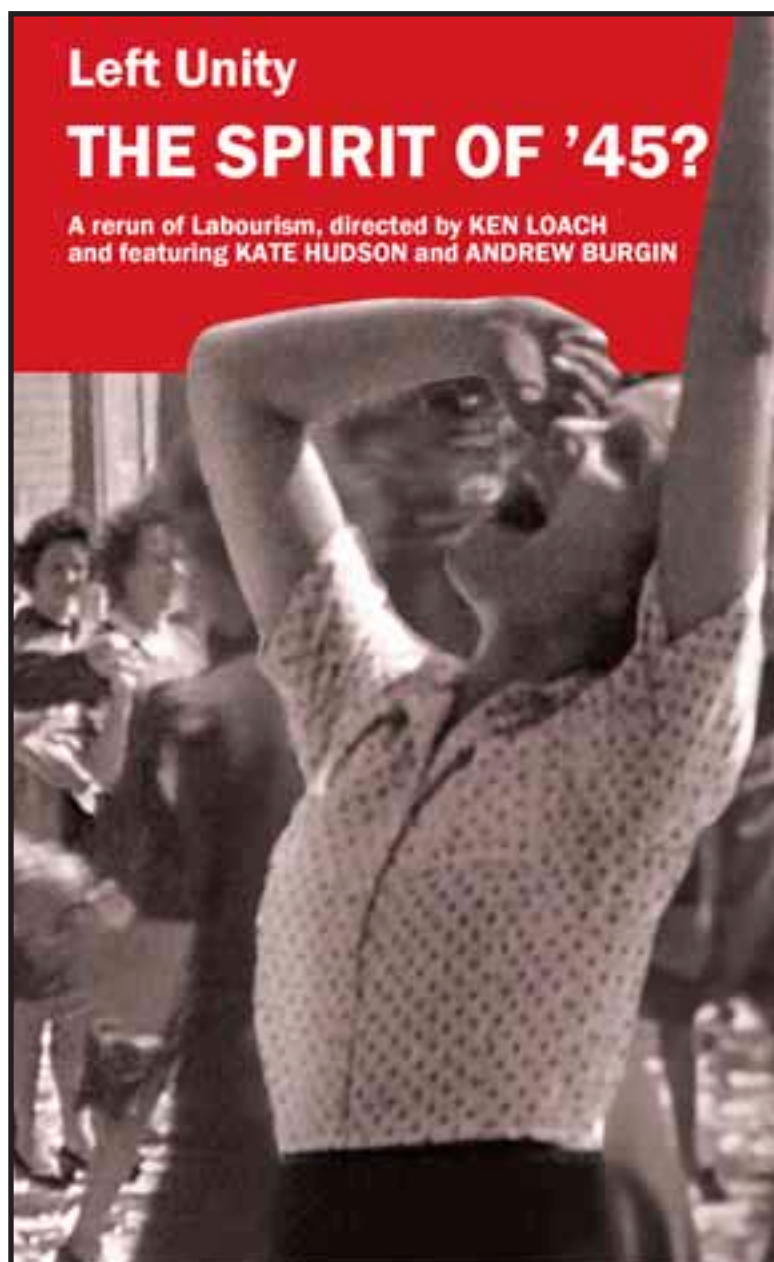
Laurent Calasso's report for the bureau is mainly a narrative. He recognises that the 'new parties' have failed. He argues that the capitalist crisis leads people to demand "immediate solutions to the social damage provoked by neoliberal policies": hence the success of Syriza and the Front de Gauche. His solution to this problem is "the building of anti-austerity fronts or coalitions bringing together the political and social forces opposed to these plans, within the framework of a policy of the united front".

But he insists that "the experiences of the last 10 years make it necessary to maintain the problematic of the last [FI] Congress [2010] of building broad anti-capitalist parties". His reasons: first, the continuing "economic, ecological and capitalist crises". Second, "the perspective of building political parties beyond the framework of our sections to organise the social struggles of the oppressed and exploited ...". Third, "The profile that we need is that of openness to other anti-capitalist organisations, but also and especially to the new generations of activists appearing in the social movements. The experiences of recent years strengthen the need to stabilise such parties by basing them on the forces of the social movements and not on parliamentary positions." Fourth, "We must also maintain our concern for the international relationships and action of anti-capitalist organisations." He comments that the FI's "efforts to have regional meetings and joint actions are clearly standing still."

The last of these points is absolutely correct. The workers' movement and the left *desperately needs* increased internationalism, even at a merely symbolic level, and increased practical coordination and action on the 'regional' or continental scale. The other points are much weaker. The first is a trivial banality.

The second is correct insofar as it says the obvious, that the sections of the Mandeliste FI are completely inadequate as forms to organise the tasks facing the left. But, as formulated, it has to be read together with the third: the specific orientation to "the new generations of activists appearing in the social movements" and "basing them on the forces of the social movements and not on parliamentary positions". This is a repetition of the tired old story of New Left anti-parliamentarism.

Already in the 1960s-70s, this represented a retreat from the understanding that the working class needs to take *political action* under capitalism - adopted by the Hague Congress of the First International in 1872, applied by the Second



International and defended by Lenin in 1920 in *Leftwing communism*. Such old lessons are not necessarily false. The course of political events in the 1970s demonstrated the uselessness of New Left anti-parliamentarism, as the anti-parliamentarists were marginalised by the ‘old left,’ including in the Portuguese revolution. If the NPA has recently had the painful experience of being marginalised by the Front de Gauche, it is partly (if only partly) because the NPA has been *insufficiently* party-political. People demand *political* alternatives and strategies, alternatives and strategies *for the society as a whole* - and this is *especially* true in times of crisis. An orientation to “the forces of the social movements” will guarantee continued marginalisation.

Critics

The critics of the bureau from the left offer different forms of standard ortho-Trotskyism. Jeff Mackler for US SA argues that the objective has to remain the building of mass Trotskyist parties in the standard sense; “Our admitted difficulties stem not from inherent programmatic deficiencies and Leninist democratic centralist norms, but from the long, perhaps longest, period of relative capitalist stability ever.” This sounds like the US SWP in the late 1960s to early 1970s.

Skoufoglou and Quirante are at the opposite end in analysis of the situation; for them, the crisis is not over, class struggles have multiplied globally and the question of power is posed; the large left formations are straightforwardly reformist and, when they are successful and it comes to the crunch, they elect to manage capitalism; this is true also of Syriza, which is moving rapidly to the right; the far right is rising. Hence, “We need national sections, parties and organisations based on class independence, independence from institutions, governments and their budgets, imperialist apparatuses - [in short] from the bourgeois state - that will aspire not only to express, but also to build, social movements and resistances substantially and from a class aspect ... We need an international that encourages unity in action, that does not deny debate and convergence with other currents, but that does not either stand for political or/and organisational fusion with reformism and Stalinism.”

The substantive policy proposed, of working class class-political independence, is sound. But the crisis-urgency-open party argument sounds like the Socialist Labour League/Workers Revolutionary Party before it went quite mad, and the answer - build the sections of the FI - is pretty obviously inadequate: why *this* Trot fragment rather than one of the others? Or, why can’t the OKDE-S comrades unite with Savas-Michael Matsas’s Workers Revolutionary Party (EEK)?

Alan Davies’s critique is, as I said, from the right. Of the idea of an ‘anti-capitalist party’ adopted by the 2010 FI congress, he says that “It is hard to see this as other than as a description of a revolutionary party, not a broad left formation”. And “The whole approach (of stressing anti-capitalist parties) was and is far too proscriptive. It fails to take into account the political realities in most European countries, where the construction of an anti-capitalist party is not at the present time on the agenda.” He argues against this aim that it was right to participate in Rifondazione Comunista, it was right to participate in the Brazilian PT, it is right to participate in Die Linke, and the FI’s organisation in Greece should participate in Syriza.

But what should they do *in* these formations? “Broad parties emerge in response to a political reality, or if they don’t they won’t last very long. The character of such parties is determined by the state of the class struggle, the political conditions at

the national level, and the history and shape of the labour movement and of the left in that particular country. We can’t determine, in advance, what the character of such parties will be - although we might (hopefully) have a certain influence.” And “We should fight within them to maximise the role they [play] and attempt to keep them in a left direction - which is exactly what the Italian comrades did (to great effect in my view) in Rifondazione.” Similarly, “Our sections should always remain organised within such parties. This allows us both to ensure that we maximise our influence on the direction of the party and to act collectively if the broad organisation moves in the wrong direction, collapses under pressure or goes into a coalition with capitalist parties.”

There is here no clear *political content* of what the FI’s sections are to fight for in the “broad parties.” And Davies’s endorsement of the Mandelita Sinistra Critica’s policy in Rifondazione is in effect an endorsement of the diplomatic, behind-the-scenes mode of ‘criticising’ Rifondazione’s leadership which left Sinistra Critica at the end of the day *unprepared politically* for the split which eventually took place. The same problem was seen (and at least in this case recognised by FI survivors) in the split in the Brazilian PT. Davies himself was a party - intimately - to a smaller-scale and caricature version of the same policy in Respect, which both helped to promote the senseless split of the Socialist Workers Party from Respect (by the absence of *open* discussion before the event), and finally left SR itself walking out of Respect on the utterly ridiculous issue of defending the rump of the Scottish Socialist Party against George Galloway standing in Scotland.

In short, Davies is at one level right that the FI’s adherents were right to participate in various broad-front parties. But he has no clear line of what they should be *fighting for these parties to do*. He advocates preserving the FI sections - but for what purpose?

Manipulative

So far I have formulated my points as specific criticisms, within the framework of the assumption that Trot groups might have some use. (My actual belief is that they are *both* part of the problem of the left *and* - potentially - part of the solution.) But it is also worth looking at the issue, as it were, from the outside. People who participated in the Socialist Alliance and Respect as independents were alienated by the manipulative operations and frontism of the major organised groups, especially the SWP.

But in this respect SR’s ‘twin-track’ line, and the Mandelita operations in Rifondazione and the PT which it imitates, are *just as* manipulative and frontist as the SWP’s operations in ‘united fronts’ and in formations like the Socialist Alliance and Respect (and, indeed, the SWP faction’s operations in the Scottish Socialist Party). The reason is that the Mandelites bloc with the centre or right in the broad front or party in order to preserve its ‘broadness’, while recruiting to their own organisation on a political basis which they are absolutely unwilling to vote for the broad party to adopt. The reality is that the SWP, which behaves similarly, learned this behaviour in the first instance *from the Mandelites*, who had been doing it long before the SWP’s creation of the Right to Work Campaign front in 1975.

The manipulative character extends to the ‘inside track’ of ‘Marxist unity’, too. Hearse’s speech says that “we should adopt the algebraic formula ‘for Marxist unity’ or ‘a united democratic revolutionary organisation’, but the arithmetic content we should for the moment advance is *a unification of the ACI, ISN and SR as a platform within the Left Unity*. A united democratic

revolutionary tendency would be a major force for opening up the path to a new broad left party and would be a permanent rebuke to the sects. It would have a powerful attraction within the far left and hopefully be much more capable of opening up a dialogue with radical youth. This is an exciting prospect: it would open up the road to a major renewal of left and revolutionary forces.”

Why just the Anti-Capitalist Initiative and International Socialist Network, not other groups? Hearse’s answer is: “It is obvious that there is an objective convergence going on, with the ACI and the ISN saying a lot of the same things that we are about revolutionary organisation today”; and: “It’s true that many of the things said by the ACI and ISN have been themes in our politics for a long time - internal democracy, feminism, a less sectarian attitude to the rest of the left - in fact going back to the Fourth International documents on women’s liberation and socialist democracy at the 1979 world congress. But other comrades, particularly crystallised in the book by Luke Cooper and Simon Hardy,¹³ have deepened this critique and allowed us to see the crisis of the sect formation in a new and more profound way.” How have they ‘deepened’ it? The speech does not tell us.

Here is another place where memory comes in. I personally remember Phil making an extremely similar speech about convergence, and the possibilities opened up by fusion, at the time of the creation of the International Socialist Group in 1987 - the ISG was a fusion of Trotskyist groups which had in common their principled commitment to ... *entry in the Labour Party*. But, four years later, most of those who did not come from the old International Marxist Group were gone (although some leaders of the old Socialist Group round Alan Thornett and John Lister stayed on board, most of their membership left). Because ... the Mandelites’ commitment to entry was in reality superficial and soon after the fusion they were rapidly shifting towards the Chesterfield ‘Socialist Conferences’ as an alternative arena for activity.

More recently, there seems to have been an equally ephemeral fusion between the ISG and some of the ex-SWPers who were on the Galloway side of the split in Respect, though I certainly do not know the details. But the underlying problem is the same: the Mandelites, at least in Britain, are all tactics and no stable principles. Which is reflected in the emptiness of Davies’s perspective for *political* action in the ‘broad parties’.

We need to talk about capitalism

All of this, so far, is negative critique. What can be said positively? I am going to outline something very limited about goals and their implications for means.

I start with a negative. It is a common illusion of the large majority of the left that the rightward shift of Labour (a) means that this party no longer represents the working class, and (b) creates political space where Labour used to be. Hence, as one of the posters on the LU site puts it, the “real choice” is between “the mixed economy” and “unfettered neoliberalism”.

This is a mistake. The International Monetary Fund has called for a shift away from ‘austerity’, yes, but towards ‘structural reform’: that is, more privatisations and attacks on trade unions, wages and conditions. Utterly trivial left rhetoric from Hollande in France evoked a minor flight of capital or ‘capitalists’ strike’. Until the most recent speeches on welfare, ‘Red Ed’ stories about Ed Miliband were a staple of the press

(and no doubt they will continue to be). Capitalist policy could today be summed up as a slogan: ‘No return to the 70s!’ In spite of panic in 2008-09, 2008 has not changed this.

In other words, a return to the ‘mixed economy’ is not on the table under current conditions. ‘Neoliberalism’ is merely ‘progress’ towards the *normal capitalism* which existed down to the Russian Revolution. The (very large) welfarist/‘full employment’/‘mixed economy’ concessions of 1945 and after resulted from the combination of the geopolitics of Soviet troops on the Elbe with western working classes massively armed. They will not return until capitalist *power* is under threat.

It is utterly senseless to suggest, as Joe Lo does, that the word ‘capitalism’ is an obsolete 19th-20th century idea which separates the left from ‘ordinary people’. It is in absolutely routine current use in the mainstream media. Precisely the discussions which call neoliberalism into question are discussions of the future of ... *capitalism*.

The crash of 2008 is not a story of nasty bankers and CEOs ripping us off. It is true that they *are* thieving shop managers with their hands in the till. But that is not what caused the bubble or the crash, or the polarisation of rich and poor.

The underlying problem is that *human productive activity* round the globe is linked in a global division of labour. We cannot retreat from this global linkage without megadeaths from starvation. This productive activity is coordinated - very imperfectly - through the money mechanism. It is this inherent imperfection which produces both polarisation of rich and poor, and recurring crises: the ‘east Asian crisis’, the ‘dot-com crash’, the ‘credit crunch’ and a series of periodic crashes going back to the 1760s.

At the same time, the scale of monetary transactions in capitalism requires ‘credit money’ (there is not enough gold and silver), which requires central banks and financial markets, which requires states backed by *particular groups* of capitals (our own British state founders in 1688 were funded by drug dealers - sugar, tobacco, alcohol - and people-traffickers known as slave traders). States are in competition with each other: talk of ‘British competitiveness’ describes a real truth *under capitalism*. Proxy competition, and the need to show that ‘our gang’ is the biggest on the street, produces wars in the third world on an escalating scale of destruction. Eventually, this proxy competition will issue in great-power war, as it has repeatedly since the dawn of capitalism.

All of this crap grows out of infernal *imperatives* which are created by coordinating production through the money mechanism, and which impact on *all* market actors, large and small. It is as much the demand of millions of small savers from the middle class for higher returns as the decisions of speculators in the financial markets that drives market bubbles and crashes.

Another world is possible

To break these infernal imperatives, we need to *consciously* and openly coordinate our productive activities: to create a cooperative commonwealth, as it was put in the Erfurt programme in the 1890s.

Such a social order would have to set human development and the human metabolic interaction with nature as its central goals - as opposed to either profitability or improved productivity or savings. Collective decisions on work which is *necessarily* coordinated can and could free space for individual choices about what is

not necessarily coordinated.

But it requires two features which may, from the standpoint of the present, look uncomfortable.

The first is that we will have to - as it were - live with our clothes off. There can be no right to privacy, because it is the millions of *private* decisions which create the infernal imperatives of capitalism. The world is tending this way - libertarian Silicon Valley businessman Scott McNealy said in 1999: “You have zero privacy anyway. Get over it.”

It remains a problem that *the left* has not begun to get over it, in spite of the fact that cooperative coordination of our productive work requires the end of privacy. The reality is that this lack of transparency is a present problem with the functioning of LU (as witnessed by our reports of its meetings). It is also a problem which SR *shares* with the SWP, although the SR leadership’s privacy takes the form of diplomacy in public, rather than of ridiculous pseudo-clandestinity (SWP conferences) and censorship.

The second is that, though there will always be some unpleasant jobs to be done, and some jobs which involve someone giving orders to coordinate activities, no-one should get landed with doing an unpleasant job, or taking orders, all their life. But there is a reverse side to this, which is the ‘uncomfortable’ side: no-one gets to do a job they love, or to give orders, all their life.

This problem is actually a big part of the predicament facing the left as a whole. Too many people are too unwilling to accept *being in a minority* and acting nonetheless in a disciplined way, and hence they walk out; and leaders act pre-emptively to bar the possibility that minorities might become majorities and force them to stand down from their leading roles, thereby triggering splits.

The aim of the cooperative commonwealth - socialism - can be an inspiring alternative to ‘capitalist realism’. What *cannot* be an inspiring alternative is a regime of permanent leaders and permanent followers, which is also a regime of secrets and lies (or, in other words, rerunning Stalinism). How we act now in these respects deeply affects whether we can be taken seriously ●

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Notes

1. May 21: <http://leftunity.org/socialism-or-something-less>.
2. May 21: <http://leftunity.org/saying-revolutionary-less-wont-make-us-less-revolutionary>.
3. June 13: <http://leftunity.org/mind-your-language>.
4. www.lwbooks.co.uk/journals/soundings/manifesto.html. The editors are Stuart Hall, Michael Rustin and Doreen Massey, with contributions in addition from Bea Campbell, Ben Little and Alan O’Shea. For the *Marxism Today* link, see www.lwbooks.co.uk/journals/soundings/about.html.
5. <http://socialistresistance.org/5110/build-a-broad-left-party-fight-for-marxist-unity>. I say *very* long-standing because it goes all the way back to the International Marxist Group of the 1960s, the paper *The Week* and the Institute for Workers’ Control.
6. Laurent Carasso (for the bureau), ‘To continue the debate on broad parties’: www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article3002.
7. A Davies, ‘A contribution to the broad parties debate’: www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article3003.
8. J Mackler, ‘The debate on broad parties’: www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article3004; M Skoufoglou and G Quirante, “‘Anti-austerity governments’ are not a solution: for a militant and revolutionary international”: www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article3005.
9. As, for example, in the 2012 FI IC ‘Report on the international political situation’ (www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article2568).
10. I stress *political* because it is the creation of a more stable form of capitalist rule, rather than *economic* innovations, which made the 17th century Netherlands and 18th century England appear superior to the Italian city-states.
11. www.progressionline.org.uk/author/john-carr.
12. D Bensaid and others *New parties of the left* London 2011; review: *Weekly Worker* June 7 and June 14 2012.
13. L Cooper and S Hardy *Beyond capitalism? The future of radical politics* London 2013. For a considerably more jaundiced view of the book as reasserting an *old* politics see Harley Philbin’s review in this paper, January 24 2013.

IRAN

Not a victory fo

A massive protest vote humiliated the conservative candidates. But paradoxically the election of a centrist can



Celebrating Rowhani's election: a combination of mass protest and manipulation

On Friday June 14, Iranians voted in large numbers for ayatollah Hassan Rowhani, a regime insider who was elected as Iran's president with 50.71% of the vote. A centrist, not a 'reformist', he became the candidate of an unofficial coalition between 'reformists' and 'centrists' forged three days before the vote, after green leader and former president Mohammad

Khatami asked the 'reformist' candidate, Mohammad Reza Aref, to withdraw from the elections.

Rowhani won not because of who he is, but as a result of a massive protest vote against the candidates associated with various 'principlist' factions of Iran's Islamic regime. Iranians opted once more to use the electoral system to show their hatred for the conservatives and principlists

who have been in power for the last eight years. These groups promised 'social justice' and a clampdown on corruption in 2005 and 2009, yet the gap between the rich and the poor is far wider than when they took office and corruption now engulfs every institution of the state. Nor is it surprising that the people blame them for the sanctions and Iran's disastrous economic position.

This was a vote for the least worst candidate. And in desperation the supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, is now ready to compromise with the centrist factions of the Islamic regime. Last week former 'reformist' president Hashemi Rafsanjani, who was not accepted as a candidate this time round, warned that Khamenei must wake up to the realities of Iran's current situation. Whether because of this, or out of a concern that after a lacklustre electoral campaign turnout would be low, Khamenei intervened forcefully to encourage people to vote. Even those who "do not support the Islamic system" should come out and vote for the sake of the country, he said. That was an historic first - Iran's top religious leader has never previously addressed opponents of the Islamic Republic in this manner.

In the last week of the campaign

Khamenei went out of his way to emphasise that no-one around him knew his personal choice and, as far as he was concerned, all six candidates on the ballot paper were acceptable. Saeed Jalili, and to a certain extent Ali Akbar Velayati, had been touted as the leader's favourites by their respective campaign offices. Khamenei's statement meant that no cleric could whisper at a religious meeting or in a mosque that, although this was a 'free vote', the supreme leader had a particular candidate in mind. On election day itself, at many voting stations outside Iran in consulates or offices set up by the government, women were allowed to vote without wearing the compulsory headscarf. Even inside the country some women wearing only symbolic head cover rather than a proper hijab were allowed into voting stations.

However, the question on everyone's mind is if the supreme leader and his close advisors were going to allow a centrist president, why was Rafsanjani barred from standing? One explanation is that he would have presented more of a challenge to the supreme leader, while Rowhani is less of a threat.

Then there is the issue of the vote itself. One thing is clear: the

conservatives were so confident that at least one conservative would get into the second round that they refused to rally around a single candidate. Iranians have taught them a lesson and the recriminations have only just started.

Suspicious

Having said that, the way the results were announced by the ministry of interior raised questions. A psephologist or polling statistician would have been seriously concerned. The share of the vote for each candidate remained more or less static from the announcement of the first result in the morning through to the final declaration in the evening. Rowhani was standing at between 50.01% and 50.9%, while the tally for Mohammad Qalibaf in second place hovered between 15.77% and 15.9%. There was a similar standard deviation for the other five candidates.¹ Yet the results were declared region by region, some from rural areas, others from cities. It was highly suspicious that there was so little variation - surely the percentage after each announcement should have vacillated far more, especially following the early results. I am sure that if any of the conservatives had

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For progressives

boost the regime, argues Yassamine Mather

won the ‘reformists’ would have accused the ministry of interior of cheating on the basis of these virtually unchanging percentages. That is what they did after the re-election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2009.

I asked a reputed mathematician what he thought. “You don’t need to be an expert”, he told me, “to see that such stable figures stink. I have never seen anything like this in real elections. This is very unlikely, since I am pretty certain that the later sample is from a different part of the country, with a different political profile, than the earlier sample. If all the samples, early and late, came from areas with a similar profile, then the figures would be more believable.”

Let me emphasise that I am not saying Rowhani would not have won and that he would not have finished well above the runner-up, Qalibaf, who lost a lot of support after the final pre-election debate. However, a fraction over 50% is very convenient for the supreme leader. This way the country is seen as divided 50-50 between principlists and centrists/‘reformists’, the authorities are happy and the people are ecstatic - indeed there were major celebrations, under the slogan, “We have taken back our vote”. This is a reference to the disputed 2009 elections, when ‘reformist’ Mir-Hossein Moussavi was thought to be well ahead, yet Ahmadinejad was declared the winner.

If this was referendum on the state’s intransigence regarding the nuclear issue and the economic consequences that followed, then there is little doubt that the conservatives lost. Most significantly, demonstrators celebrating in the streets of Tehran and other major cities saw this as a victory against the supreme leader. Slogans ranged from “Death to the dictator” and “Free all political prisoners” to “Bye bye, Ahmadi” and “Martyred brother, martyred sister, we got back your vote”. This was a reference not just to disputed elections of 2009, but to the repression that followed, when hundreds were killed in the streets or in prison.²

These slogans demonstrated a level of maturity. For example, the chant, “Rowhani, we will guide you”, spoke volumes. Large sections of the population do not trust the centrists or ‘reformists’ and, given the little breathing space they have gained, they are expressing the widely held view that factions of the regime are only pro-reform because the population, in its opposition to the entire regime, pushes them in that direction.

This election was a major setback for exile groups of the left and the right who had not expected the regime to be able to assert itself in such a skilful way. Many had pinned their hopes on western funds for regime change, and ‘Marxists’ have been among those who have accepted financial support from the US as well as rightwing governments in Canada and the Netherlands. Clearly, for all their efforts in organising the Iran Tribunal, ‘human rights’ commissions and so on, they seem to have been outmanoeuvred, thanks to a small concession from the supreme leader. Ironically the jubilation following the election of a centrist lacking the imprimatur

of the supreme leader is being used to demonstrate the regime’s adaptability.

As I have said time and time again to former comrades deluded by western contributions to their NGOs, for all its talk of ‘human rights’, ‘women’s rights’ and latterly even ‘workers’ rights’, imperialism’s first choice in Iran will always be to reach a solution with the existing regime. If this election has one consequence, it will be a period of renewed ‘negotiations’ and a substantial reduction in regime change funds at least for the next few years, and that in itself is not a bad outcome. On the negative side it is easy to predict how, like Khatami and Rafsanjani, Rowhani will act like the grand old Duke of York, failing to live up to any of his promises, while buying time for the Islamic regime.

Who is Rowhani?

Unlike Khatami, Iran’s last ‘reformist’ president, Rowhani is very much an insider of the regime who has held crucial posts since 1979, including membership of the Assembly of Experts (the body which selects and oversees the role of the supreme leader) since 1999, the Expediency Council (the administrative assembly appointed by the supreme leader) since 1991, and the Supreme National Security Council since 1989. Throughout the last 21 years he has also held a semi-academic post as head of the Centre for Strategic Research.

After attending a religious seminary, he studied law at the University of Tehran, continuing his studies later in Glasgow Caledonian University where in 1995 he gained an MPhil (his thesis was entitled ‘The Islamic legislative power with reference to the Iranian experience’), and in 1999 a PhD. In Tehran there are rumours that he speaks English with a Scottish accent - one young blogger has been ending his posts with the phrase, “Beam me up, Scotty”.

Rowhani’s alleged involvement in Irangate during the Iran-Iraq war came about because he was a member of the Supreme Defence Council (1982-88) and deputy commander of the war (1983-85), a close ally of Rafsanjani and already part of a faction later labelled ‘moderates’. During the second term of Khatami’s presidency, Rowhani was Iran’s chief nuclear negotiator, so it was no surprise that in an election campaign dominated by foreign policy, sanctions and their effect on the economy, he boasted about his skills as a negotiator. In one TV debate he said: “In my time we held talks with presidents and ministers” - it was Rowhani who invited Jack Straw to visit Iran, for instance. By comparison, his rival, Jalili, was reduced to talking to ‘managers’ and low-ranking officials.

Other candidates pointed out that, for all his desire for accommodation with the US, soon after he and Khatami supported western efforts in the Afghan war the Bush administration labelled Iran one of the axes of evil. During this time he was given the nickname, ‘diplomatic sheikh’, and he wrote his memoirs of the period in a book entitled *National security and nuclear diplomacy*. He will need all his diplomatic training to deal

with the conservative-dominated majles (Islamic parliament) and the supreme leader.

Campaign

The presidential elections started badly. Iran’s supreme leader had fallen out with his chosen president, Ahmadinejad, in the first months of his second term and had considered abolishing the post of president altogether. However, he was advised against this, as such a move would produce constitutional complications, so Khamenei’s initial reaction was to reduce the importance of the post.

Those who watched with dismay the TV quiz show style of the first round of presidential debates could not help thinking this was a deliberate act to make a mockery of the elections. The first debate between the eight vetted candidates who had been given the nod by the Guardian Council was compared to a kindergarten game. The presidential hopefuls were asked to answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to complicated questions about the economy and foreign policy. Many refused, and the whole thing descended into farce. The second debate was no better and it was only in the last debate, just days before the vote, that candidates were allowed to challenge their opponents directly. Clearly by that time the regime was trying to inject some life into the process and by all accounts Rowhani was the winner of that third TV debate. He opposed the regime’s intransigent stance on its nuclear industry and advocated negotiations to lift sanctions and improve the economy.

At a time of economic hardship and political isolation, slogans such as “Save Iran’s economy” and “Reconciliation with the world” made him a popular figure. Then there was: “I have always been against radicalism. I have always followed moderation”; and “I have never acted as if in a garrison”; and the slightly more obscure: “Centrifuges should spin, but so should industries and people’s livelihoods.”

He was not the only one mocking the approach of Iran’s nuclear negotiator, Jalili, to the 5+1 talks. Velayati, Qalibaf and Rezaei expressed similar views. Following the elections, Rowhani said that the nuclear enrichment programme would continue. However, there were “many ways to build trust” with the west, and it was important for Iran to show that “its activities fall within the framework of international rules”.

International reaction

Rowhani’s election has been cautiously welcomed by European countries, by the G8 and by most Middle Eastern countries with the exception of Israel. US president Barack Obama summed up the US position on June 18: “We may be able to move forward on a dialogue that allows us to resolve the problems with Iran’s nuclear programme.”

Having said that, any serious negotiation will face major obstacles. To start with, the current US-Iran conflict has two parties, so conciliatory noises from Iran alone will not lead to a resolution. At a time of economic crisis, the continuation of conflict with Iran has political as well as economic benefits for any US administration.

Powerful voices in Washington, as well as in the pro-Israeli lobby, still want complete regime change, even a partition of Iran.

In addition there is the issue of Syria. Hours after the results were announced, the Syrian National Coalition called on Rowhani to review Iran’s support for the Assad regime. The “Coalition believes that it is its duty to call on the new president of Iran to rectify the mistakes made by the Iranian leadership.”

Rowhani is unlikely to oblige. Like the rest of the Shia clergy, he considers defending the current Syrian regime and Hezbollah an integral part of Iran’s foreign policy. While warning western powers against intervention, Iran has, of course intervened. Rowhani will face popular opposition over this, however. During Saturday’s celebrations crowds in Tehran and Kermanshah were shouting: “Leave Syria alone - deal with our problems”.

Coincidentally, on June 18, four days after the elections, Iran’s national football team defeated South Korea to qualify for the World Cup in 2014. This prompted further celebrations which quickly turned political in major cities. One of the main slogans was a call for the release of all political prisoners and an end to the house arrest of Moussavi and Karroubi. However, even if we accept claims made by some that Iran’s football win was linked to Rowhani’s victory, he will need to perform bigger miracles to get all Iran’s politician prisoners released.

On hearing the results of Iran’s elections, comrade Mike Macnair

commented that after decades of repression and the terrible situation of the last few years, this could have the effect of a “crack in the dam”: ie, a trickle of concessions could lead to a flood. Revolutionary forces in Iran will certainly hope he is right, but the fear is that once more false hope generated by the promises of the centrist-‘reformist’ coalition will actually lengthen the life of the Islamic dictatorship. While there might be some relaxation in the interference of the religious state in the private lives of Iranians, poverty, unemployment, exploitation, the absence of basic workers’ rights, political repression - all look set to continue for the foreseeable future.

We are still a very long way from a resolution of the nuclear conflict and sanctions look likely to continue. Even if they were lifted tomorrow, it would take months, if not years, for the economy to return to some sort of normality. In the meantime, prices remain high and there is a serious shortage of basic foodstuffs and medicines.

The Iranian workers’ and democratic movement will continue to need international working class solidarity and we in Hands Off the People of Iran will do our utmost to show how this can be achieved ●

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Notes

1. All data from Iran’s ministry of information, reported at www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/06/15/309098/rohani-far-ahead-in-poll-results-so-far.
2. www.rahekar.de 18 June 2013.

Summer Offensive How do you do that?

There are no pyrotechnics or tales of Marxist derring-do to report in this week’s update on the Summer Offensive, our annual fundraising drive - this year set at an ambitious £30k, to be achieved by August 18, the last day of our Communist University annual school.

Not surprising really: we did jump this year’s start date forward by two weeks. This will have wrong-footed some comrades, even members who were bracing themselves for the campaign. So it’s been a modest week, but solid enough - the details are at the end.

It’s kind of chastening to realise that this is our 28th Summer Offensive. We initiated the campaign (drawing not simply on the work of our comrades from Turkey, around the *İşçinin Sesi* newspaper, but campaigns run by the Bolsheviks and newspapers edited by Marx) in 1985. This was in the aftermath of the qualitative upgrade of our work demanded by the miners’ Great Strike of 1984-85. It actually caused a split in ranks - we are proud to say, in hindsight.

I spoke to a Turkish comrade, a veteran of the *İşçinin Sesi* wing of the Communist Party of Turkey, from we took inspiration for our Summer Offensives. He told me: “When you are ideologically committed, you make sacrifices, and you fight. The money raised

in a Summer Offensive is a secondary issue in some senses. We are communists, we are creative people - we can always generate something as mundane as money. What was inspiring about our SOs was that when people saw how serious we were about our politics, how committed we were to what we were saying, and building an organisation that could say it - they gravitated towards us. The PKK (the mass Kurdish nationalist organisation) would say, ‘We are so much bigger than you - how do you do *that*?’”

This week we have added a robust £1,008 to our target, taking our running total to £1,832. Thanks in particular to MM and AM, whose donations to the *Weekly Worker* (£75 and £50 respectively) helped bump up the total. There were also smaller donations (via PayPal) from one or two of our 9,420 online readers.

We have barely got going, however. Comrades are confident that we will reach our ambitious target and go beyond - watch this space. We are going to do *that* and so much more ...

Mark Fischer

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

TURKEY

Istanbul revolt suppressed

Esen Uslu reports from Istanbul on the brutal repression that finally saw off the rearguard action of the protestors

'Order prevails in Berlin!' You foolish lackeys! Your 'order' is built on sand. Tomorrow the revolution will 'rise up again, clashing its weapons', and to your horror it will proclaim with trumpets blazing: *I was, I am, I shall be!*

- Rosa Luxemburg *Die Rote Fahne* January 14 1919

It is now time to prepare for the next step by learning the lessons. The police first cleared Taksim Square, and then the demonstrators were forced out of the adjacent Gezi Park, finally ending the revolt.

Compared to what the Turkish police and security forces are capable of, generally a controlled level of force was used before the international media. However, when the clashes continued in the narrow side streets away from the cameras, the true face of police brutality became more apparent.

Here I can almost hear readers' objections: 'What are you talking, man? We have seen in the social media the level of violence used against demonstrators.' That is indeed true, but what I am pointing out is that even our readers could not imagine what the police and gendarmerie, and the special army units waiting behind the scene, are capable of when they are ordered to put down a revolt. Even in Turkey up to a couple of days ago, only the Kurds living in Kurdistan could truly understand that, since they have been fighting against it day in and day out for the last 30 years.

The new generation of young students and professionals who led the revolt has not had any previous direct experience of state repression. The personal anecdotes of the years under the fascist junta were just the tales of old has-beens to most of them, and Kurdistan was far, far away from their world.

The repression they saw when the revolt was put down was their first direct experience of state violence. This baptism of fire will inevitably have sent some of them back into their own world, but it will have tempered the resolve of the best of them - those prepared to carry the torch forward. They took on the role of leading the revolt without asking for or expecting to be given such responsibility, and did their best to resist and carry on fighting.

However, their naivety and lack of political experience was apparent. When their resistance to the initial police action forced a hasty retreat,

an opportunity was created to win massive support amongst large sections of the population. But, unsurprisingly, the youth were unable to develop anything approaching a political programme to embrace all the democratic demands of the disaffected sections of society. Despite their realisation that the problem was not just a few trees or a park, but the entire system of state repression, the core of the revolt was not equipped to act accordingly.

They were unable to unify the diverse political forces within a common front. They did not know how to stop the state inserting its ideological and political wedges into the fault lines dividing them. But it goes without saying that to expect such a gargantuan leap from them would have been totally unrealistic. A momentary spark caught the attention of the whole country, but clearly it was beyond their capabilities to overcome such political odds in the current complex world climate in order to lead the country towards a democratic revolution.

Yet it seemed as though everybody within the small organisations of the left was expecting - unrealistically or fantastically - miracles. The leftwing groups failed dismally in the tasks before them: bringing to bear the lessons of historical experience, providing theoretical assistance in terms of a political programme, and extending the organisational capacity of the revolt to withstand the coming onslaught. Despite its value in providing brave fighters on the barricades, the left's theoretical and organisational impact did not extend beyond adding some steel to the revolt and assisting in tactical operations.

Kurdish tensions

After the initial success, the core of the revolt reverted to an introvert stance, limiting their demands to those of an ecological, judicial and administrative nature relating to Gezi Park. By doing so they lost the chance of expanding the bridgehead they had gained.

Unable to envisage a broader democratic programme, they were unable to rally to their ranks forces yet to join the revolt. Indeed some of their potential allies were alienated. The only force that has a clearly developed programme which includes democratic demands for local autonomy is the Kurdish freedom movement.

But the lack of any meeting of minds contributed to the appearance of cracks in the support gained

movement has to oversee a carefully staged withdrawal of armed forces as well as preparations for four large conferences. It was not ready to rock the boat through the embrace of a new, uncertain force.

It was overcautious in its response, wary of alienating this first open revolt against the regime by putting forward a programme that may have been construed as divisive or particularistic. However, by failing to do so it missed the first serious opportunity to become a party with answers for the whole of Turkey by popularising the democratic autonomy programme envisaged by Abdullah Öcalan, leader of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), and possibly affecting the outcome of the revolt.

The PKK was also quite slow to appreciate the importance and potential of the revolt, despite the fact that this had been pointed out by leftwing MPs elected with the support of the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), who even acted as a catalyst for the initial resistance. The Kurdish youth of Istanbul immediately responded to the revolt when it engaged in resistance to the police, joining in the demonstrations and supporting the camp in Gezi Park. This movement from below eventually pushed the upper echelons of the BDP to act. But very valuable time was lost and the initiative could not be regained.

Nationalists and junta fans

The revolt also saw the nationalist-socialist ex-Maoists and other nationalist/racist/xenophobic political groups rushing to the scene. Some openly called for the military to topple the government, and suddenly their calls for the resignation of the prime minister and government seemed to dominate the political agenda in the absence of a democratic programme.

These groups brought with them their divisive opinions oriented against not just the peace process, but the Kurds and the Kurdish freedom movement. There were several physical attacks on Kurdish participants in the revolt in Istanbul and elsewhere. They also brought with them their distinguishing mark: the Turkish flag adorned with an image of Kemal Atatürk, the 'founding father' of modern Turkey. At almost every demonstration they raised objections to the carrying

demonstrations. The CHP leaders paid lip service to the limited demands of the revolt, but failed to take any further action. Their anti-Kurdish stance and their instinct for defending the state were apparent.

The leading core of the revolt did its best to prevent the spread of open divisions and clashes within the ranks of the movement, and several times physically intervened to prevent attacks on Kurdish demonstrators or fights breaking out. However, they failed to act against the nationalist agenda, and Turkish flags dominated the demonstrations held in various parts of Istanbul and other cities.

On the last day those leading the Gezi Park action decided to take down all party banners, and BDP MPs persuaded the Kurdish youth to remove their flags and Öcalan posters from their tents. Other political parties and groups were also asked to remove their banners. However, no-one even considered removing the Turkish flags. Having cleared the Taksim Square, the police immediately hung two giant Turkish flags and a large Atatürk poster to the facade of the adjacent culture centre. They chanted nationalist slogans while removing the banners and placards of the revolt.

The weekend rallies of the AKP were also marked by the fact that there were numerous Turkish flags on display. It was apparent that the AKP government was assuming the mantle of nationalism. We will see whether or not the core of the revolt is capable of drawing the necessary lessons from that fact.

And the AKP is not only using the flag to enhance its nationalist credentials. It is also attempting to assert its authority over the army by clearly indicating its intention to use the military against the revolt under the pretext of maintaining the national unity. Despite having sufficient police at its disposal, the government brought gendarmerie riot units onto the streets of Istanbul. Its spokesmen gave forceful speeches praising the preparedness of the army and emphasising their intention to use it if and when required.

Such drastic action may be deemed necessary to maintain civilian control over the army: that is, to prevent the possible formation of another junta. It may also be required to strengthen the position of the army top brass in the impending round of promotions and retirements due at the end of August.

In any case, it is clear that the AKP is aiming to steal the symbols of the nationalists. This, of course, bears ill omens in regards to both the peace process in Kurdistan and policy in relation to Syria and the changing international agenda.

Islamophobia

Many political analysts have put great emphasis on the Islamism of the AKP government in their attempts to fathom the causes of the revolt, which they interpret as a battle for secularism. Indeed the nationalist-racist forces that attempted to hijack the revolt were renowned for their hostility towards Islamists, while supporting the repressive Kemalist 'secularism' which was in reality a means of maintaining state control over religious affairs.

However, they never gained the upper hand. The core of the leaders of the revolt firmly, but resolutely sidestepped such traps. The headscarf

was accepted as a personal lifestyle choice by the leading forces in the revolt. Consequently women wearing the hijab felt completely free to take part in camp activities as well as in the demonstrations. They clearly showed that not every woman wearing the hijab is a supporter of the AKP government.

Furthermore, there were anti-capitalist Muslims taking part. They organised two Friday prayers in the park, where *hutbe* (sermons) were read out charging the government with hypocrisy and betrayal of the basic tenets of Islam. Those Friday prayers were protected by a ring of pickets, which included leftwing militants. The Night of Ascension to Heaven (*Lailat al Miraj*), an Islamic holiday, was observed by the Muslims in the Park and again there was an atmosphere of comradeship, solidarity and respect.

During one of the police attacks a group of people sought refuge in one of the mosques and called on the *muezzin* (who recites the call to prayer) to open the gates. The AKP government tried to use this to denigrate the demonstrators, claiming they had entered the mosque still wearing their shoes (a great disrespect) and that they drunk alcohol while they were inside (even worse). There are various video recordings proving both allegations to be false - the only alcohol available was used to treat the wounded, but the rumour mill provided by the AKP's pet media continued. After the *muezzin* concerned came forward to refute these allegations, within a day he was forced to take annual leave, and most probably will be punished on his return.

Perhaps the core leadership of the revolt should be criticised for failing to accept a clear secular agenda, however - such a move would have opened up the prospect of incorporating the diverse demands of the religious minorities, which would have been an important step towards developing a democratic programme. For example, the core leadership did not consider issuing a call to the Christian communities or other minorities to join in, despite the fact that part of Gezi Park was built on the site of an Armenian ancient cemetery. The monument erected in 1919 to commemorate the victims of the 1915 Armenian massacre was secretly but deliberately removed in 1922.

However, the core leadership was learning from the experience. June 15 was the anniversary of the execution of 20 comrades from the Social Democrat Hunchakian Party in 1915. For the first time, this year a commemoration was held at the site of the execution and a ceremony was held in Gezi Park, where a member of the SDHP addressed the demonstrators.

Resistance continued for some time in the side streets of Istanbul, as well as in districts renowned for rebellions, especially Alevis neighbourhoods such as Gazi, Sultanbeyli and Kartal. However, the dismal performance of the organised working class was indicated by the reaction to the "general strike" called for Monday June 17 by the DISK and KESK trade union centres.

But things will not end there. We have been forced to retreat, but preparation for a new leap forward is the order of the day. And, as Rosa Luxemburg said nearly a century ago, we will return with a vengeance ●



Left: no strategic answers

ITALY

Populists in disarray

Why do some on the British left see Beppe Grillo's party as a kind of model? Toby Abse reports on the fallout following Italy's local elections

The centre-left coalition dominated by the Partito Democratico (PD) won all 11 of the second-round run-off mayoral ballots held on June 9-10 in the provincial capitals where no candidate had got over 50% in the first ballot two weeks earlier. Since the centre-left won five such cities outright on the first ballot, this gives it an overall score of 16-0 against the centre-right.

Six of these cities, including Rome, had previously been held by the centre-right, so the outcome clearly represents a defeat for Silvio Berlusconi's Popolo della Libertà (PdL) and for Roberto Maroni's Lega Nord, which had held the Venetian city of Treviso for 19 years. The centre-right also did badly in the first round of the Sicilian elections - also held on June 9-10 - with the PdL candidate only obtaining 36.6% in Catania, far behind the victorious Enzo Bianco of the ex-'official communist'-dominated PD. This poor showing probably heralds further fragmentation in the PdL and has unleashed more internecine strife in the Lega - phenomena which will be discussed below.

The local elections also marked a very serious defeat for Beppe Grillo's Movimento Cinque Stelle (M5S), which, as I pointed out in my last article,¹ did not get into a single one of the run-offs in the major population centres on the Italian mainland. In the event it only won two very minor municipalities on the second ballot. In the Sicilian local elections M5S again saw its vote collapse in all four the major cities being contested - for example, in Catania it fell from 31.9% in last year's regional election to 4% in the municipal contest, while in Syracuse and Messina the drop was worse still. Even in Ragusa the M5S list vote fell from 39.3% to 10.3%, although the M5S mayoral candidate, Federico Piccitto, who got a personal vote of 15.6%, did make it to the second round.

M5S 'transparency'

Grillo's June 7 rant, in which he described parliament as "a stinking tomb" which "we will bury" - a blog posting which many on both the centre-left and centre-right immediately compared with some of Mussolini's speeches, with one PdL politician even drawing parallels with Hitler and the Reichstag fire - probably made a major contribution to this further defeat in Sicily. Whilst Grillo's latest attack on parliament based itself on the fact that the Pig Law (Porcellum) - the electoral system enacted by Berlusconi's coalition in 2005 - had recently been declared unconstitutional by the courts, far from being an isolated outburst, it fitted neatly into a previous pattern of four stridently anti-parliamentary pronouncements between May 9 and June 1, whose highlights were quoted in *La Repubblica* on June 8.

After the Sicilian result, M5S senator Adele Gambaro told Sky's Italian television channel: "We are paying for the tone and communication of Grillo, his threatening posts, above all those against parliament ... I invite him to write less and observe more. The Movimento's problem is Beppe Grillo." Within hours Grillo had put a post on his blog inciting M5S supporters against Gambaro and then, without waiting for the outcome of the 'referendum' he called on her to



Beppe Grillo: bury parliament

withdraw her remarks and demanded her summary expulsion in a second post.

As a result, a joint session of the M5S parliamentary groups (Senate and Chamber of Deputies) met within days and voted to expel Gambaro by 79 votes to 42, with nine abstentions.² This closed session had been preceded by a discussion of the Senate group with live streaming, which *La Repubblica* (June 18) described as "an inquisition". Doubtless aware of the appalling impression they were making on the viewing public, Gambaro's persecutors gained a 12-vote majority for a motion to hold the final showdown behind closed doors - and in the absence of the accused, who was told to leave after she had made an opening statement. So much for M5S's concern for transparency.

This expulsion comes soon after the decision of the two Taranto M5S parliamentarians, Alessandro Furnari and Vincenza Labriola, to leave the movement over differences regarding the line on the Ilva steel works in their own city. This led to them being denounced by Grillo and his hardcore loyalists as chronic absentees from parliamentary sessions who were primarily concerned with getting round M5S rules on parliamentary salaries and expenses. This witch-hunt aroused the distaste of the more independently minded members of M5S's parliamentary groups, who felt that, whether or not they agreed with their politics, the two dissidents were quite hard-working and sincere.

It is worth emphasising that Gambaro was not the first M5S parliamentarian to be expelled. The first parliamentary expulsion was that of the Marino Mastrangeli - merely for participating in television talk shows rather than for any specific view expressed in the media.³ There is every likelihood that the defections and expulsions from M5S will increase, as the more rational section of its parliamentary delegation becomes increasingly aware that the totally intransigent line adopted by Grillo and his internet guru and close advisor, Gianroberto Casaleggio, are alienating most of those who voted for M5S in February; no doubt Grillo and Casaleggio will respond by increasing the dose of authoritarianism rather

than listening to any criticism and modifying the line accordingly. In the light of the total lack of internal democracy within M5S, it is hard to understand why sections of the British left involved within Left Unity see it as any kind of model.⁴

Far-right rumbles

In the most significant of the recent contests, in Rome, the PD's Ignazio Marino, who is a bit of a maverick on the left of the party, gained an overwhelming victory over the sitting mayor, the PdL's Gianni Alemanno. Alemanno, already notorious five years ago because of his youthful involvement with the most extreme wing of the neo-fascist Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI), had alienated the middle ground by a series of appointments to council jobs of manifestly incompetent or unqualified candidates, often with a background in neo-fascist terrorism or at least low-level thuggery.

Here, as elsewhere, the turnout was low - 45.5% compared with the already low 52.8% in the first round.⁵ Nonetheless, despite Marino's call for restraint in victory, his supporters - in particular those in or close to the soft-left Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà (SEL) - went to the Campodoglio and sang the partisan anthem, 'Bella ciao', in an effort to wipe out the memory of the occasion five years earlier in precisely the same location. In 2008 Alemanno had been accorded numerous Roman salutes by a crowd of his supporters, who were only too eager to chant fascist slogans in a notorious scene that was picked up by newspapers and television channels all over the world.

Alemanno and his political associates seem to blame his defeat on the submersion of the political tradition originating in the old MSI within Berlusconi's PdL. On June 11, just a day after the great defeat, there was a gathering of a number of important figures who had been former members of the 'post-fascist' Alleanza Nazionale and in most instances, earlier on in their careers, of the neo-fascist MSI in the offices of a foundation called Della Libertà Per il Bene Comune (Liberty for the Common Good), organised by the former minister Altero Matteoli. Apart from Alemanno, this assembly

even included the 'most faithful' Berlusconi, Maurizio Gasparri. Whilst some were saying it was too early to decide whether to leave the PdL, Ignazio La Russa, who had already deserted the PdL for the Fratelli d'Italia⁶ before the general election, is clearly trying to unite the 'post-fascist' right outside the PdL.

Whilst La Russa, striking an intellectual pose that ill accords with his street-fighting past, referred to "the cultural model of Italian thought",⁷ others rather more pragmatically claimed the project was aimed at the moderate Catholic electorate who had become disillusioned with Grillo. There seem to be some contact between this group and both the more unrepentant neo-fascist, Francesco Storace, and, somewhat strangely, Giulio Tremonti, Berlusconi's former finance minister. Tremonti was previously closer to the Lega Nord than to the 'post-fascists', but is increasingly autarkic in his economic outlook and on very bad terms with his former boss as a result of disagreements on economic policy in 2011.

As for the Lega Nord, it has been plunged into internecine feuding by its poor results, particularly the disaster in Treviso. It is now clear that the Lega's next national (or, as it prefers to call it, 'federal') congress will take place rather earlier than originally anticipated: the date has now been set for February 2014. Former leader Umberto Bossi is threatening to challenge the incumbent, Roberto Maroni, and attempt to regain the top job. In practice this seems unlikely, given Bossi's age, poor health and the discredit into which he fell as a result of his involvement in financial scandals. Flavio Tosi, the mayor of Verona and secretary of the Lega Veneta,⁸ is facing calls for his resignation as a result of the Treviso result, but has counter-attacked by stressing the equally poor results attained in the last year of Bossi's dominance of the organisation.

Trials

Berlusconi is obviously far from pleased with the election results. Whilst his most ardent flatterers tell him that the low vote for the PdL was a product of his own lack of involvement in the day-to-day running of the campaign, it is doubtful that even he really believes that. There is much talk of abandoning the unsuccessful fusion involved in the PdL, dumping most of the remaining 'post-fascists' and returning to the old name of Forza Italia, a brand that the tycoon associates with his early electoral successes.

However, Berlusconi's principal preoccupation is not with electoral politics, but with the outcome of his own trials. Here things seem to be looking bleak: a verdict is expected on June 24 in the 'Ruby case' about his alleged involvement with an under-age prostitute; and before that, on June 19, a judgement from the constitutional court is likely concerning the fraud case for which he has already been convicted. This will rule on whether the magistrates' decision to reject some of Berlusconi's attempts at seeking postponements by claiming a "legitimate impediment" due to his prime ministerial or parliamentarian duties were an indication of bias against him.

His presumption is that, if the

constitutional court decides against him on this rather technical issue, the supreme court is unlikely to reverse the verdict in the fraud case when it comes before them - most probably in the autumn. Whilst in practice he is unlikely to have to serve the prison sentence upheld by the lower courts, the possibility of disqualification from public office is a lot more worrying.

Moreover, on June 26, there will be a parliamentary debate about whether he is ineligible for elected office. In fact he is obviously ineligible under Law 361 passed in 1957 long before his rise to economic, let alone political, prominence. This bars anybody whose business enjoys state contracts or concessions granted by the state from parliament. Since the state granted him his rights to the television frequencies his channels enjoy, he ought to be covered by it. However, the matter has come up in parliament on a number of occasions since 1994 and each time the issue has been decided in his favour. In the past he succeeded in claiming he was no longer in control of Fininvest/Mediaset media empire, but the reasoning behind the recent court verdicts in the fraud case has, rightly, treated this as absurd.

Nonetheless, it is unlikely that the PD as a whole, as distinct from some individual PD parliamentarians, will suddenly turn on him: the episode involving the 101 traitors who refused to vote for Prodi in a secret ballot during the presidential contest in April should serve as an indication of how many private supporters he has in the PD's ranks.

Parliamentary office is a useful protection against any risk of immediate incarceration and therefore Berlusconi is anxious to hold onto it. At one stage, he seemed hopeful of gaining permanent judicial immunity by being appointed a life senator, but president Giorgio Napolitano has recently let it be known that his intention is to fill the two vacant life senator slots with non-political appointees, reverting in effect to the original purpose of this office.

Berlusconi's dream of escaping from his dilemma by bringing down the coalition, calling a general election, being returned as prime minister and daring the courts to do their worst seems less credible after the local elections, even if opinion polls give the PdL a somewhat higher score in a hypothetical general election than it managed to obtain in the real local ones ●

Notes

1. 'Grillo's populism exposed' *Weekly Worker* June 6.
2. There were also 30 absentees, some of whom had been present at the start, but appear to have walked out of the meeting.
3. This had a precedent in the earlier summary expulsion of the former M5S Bologna councillor, Federica Salsi, also for appearing on a television talk show.
4. See, for instance, Dave Kellaway's article in the latest issue of *Socialist Resistance*: <http://socialistresistance.org/5127/what-we-can-learn-from-beppe-grillo-and-what-we-cant>.
5. This suggests that the claim by some commentators, that the poor first-round turnout resulted from the distraction of a local derby between the capital's two football teams, Lazio and Roma, was ill-founded. Moreover, given the extreme rightwing and anti-Semitic inclinations of the two teams' most fervent football supporters, the so-called Ultras, who recently mounted a joint attack on visiting Tottenham fans, one might have expected a greater turnout for Alemanno in the second round, had the match really led them to abstain on the first occasion.
6. A party formed by those who split from the PdL with the tacit approval of Berlusconi.
7. *La Repubblica* June 12.
8. The use of 'Lega' rather than 'Lega' consciously stresses the difference between the Venetian dialect and the Lombard one.

PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY

A rough guide

Who is behind the launch of the People's Assembly? What are the aims and methods? **Peter Manson** looks at the personalities, politics and possibilities

This weekend's People's Assembly Against Austerity is surely being anticipated with pride by John Rees and his Counterfire comrades. The June 22 event, held in Central Hall, Westminster (not to mention the street outside), enjoys the sponsorship of a breadth of organisations and individuals that comrade Rees's former group, the Socialist Workers Party, can now only dream of.

According to its website, the People's Assembly is "organised by" eight major trade unions, plus a whole number of campaigns and pressure groups, ranging from War on Want and the Institute of Employment Rights to Black People Rising Against the Cuts and the National Pensioners Convention. The Coalition of Resistance, comrade Rees's first attempt to build a "united front against austerity", is also modestly listed among the sponsors, along with the People's Charter and the political groups most associated with those two campaigns - Counterfire and the *Morning Star*'s Communist Party of Britain respectively. The only other political group named as an 'organiser' is that number one fan of 'broadness', Socialist Resistance.

The assembly is not only sponsored by Britain's biggest unions: it is personally endorsed by Len McCluskey, Mark Serwotka, Billy Hayes, Bob Crow, Dave Prentis, Matt Wrack, etc, etc; and by left Labour MPs John McDonnell, Jeremy Corbyn and Kate Clark, plus Green MP Caroline Lucas. The list of original sponsors reads like a *Who's who?* of the mainstream British left: Owen Jones, Tariq Ali, John Pilger, Hilary Wainwright, John Hendy QC, Imran Khan, Ken Loach, Andrew Burgin, Kate Hudson and Bruce Kent. In addition to comrade Rees himself, there is also Green Party leader Natalie Bennett, and three leading lights in the CPB: general secretary Robert Griffiths, chair Bill Greenshields and *Star* editor Richard Bagley. Oh - and Fred Leplat of Socialist Resistance.

While the PA is undoubtedly the brainchild of comrade Rees and co, it has been taken up with enthusiasm by the CPB - the *Star* has been breathlessly plugging it for weeks, and every day has been displaying the latest figure for those who have registered to attend at the top of page 2 under the PA logo. As I write, well over 3,500 have signed up. According to John Haylett, the PA, "with its clear, non-sectarian vision of an alternative to austerity, has seized the imagination of trade unionists and anti-cuts campaigners in a way that no other organisation has proved capable of".¹

So what is the PA's purpose? To bring all those opposed to austerity and the cuts together - simple as that. Just like comrade Rees's previous prominent 'united front', the Stop the War Coalition, sought to pull in everyone who was against war. Of course, it is an excellent thing that we unite our forces - but the problem arises when we try to give them some political coherence. The likes of Counterfire and the SWP get round this problem in a straightforward way: they do not even try to bring about political coherence - in fact they strongly oppose any

attempt to do so, as this would be "sectarian" and would see a huge loss of support. 'Breadth' is everything; political clarity nothing. Unless, of course, the political programme being touted is that of mainstream, reformist Labourism.

Although Rees and co promise that the assembly will allow time for the expression of different viewpoints, it is difficult to see that this will be a participatory event. Sandwiched between the opening and closing plenaries will be three batches of five parallel sessions, lasting an hour and a quarter each. In other words, the whole event will in reality be made up of a series of larger or smaller rallies. Of course, rallies have their place, but it is where they lead that is important.

Fairer capitalism

And where they lead in this case is pretty clear. In addition to sessions on the NHS, "Welfare, not warfare", "Immigration not to blame", education and climate change, there will also be opportunities to listen to speakers discussing "tactics for the anti-austerity movement", the effects of cuts locally, the importance of local PAs and "re-unionising the UK". Interestingly there will be a session on democracy and "our broken political system", but the session that comes closest to outlining an alternative *politics* will undoubtedly be that on the "economics of anti-austerity".

This alternative politics takes the form of proposing a *Britain's road to socialism*-type government, implementing more 'sensible' policies for a 'fairer' capitalism. No wonder the CPB is so keen. As the PA draft statement says, "We have a plain and simple goal: to make government abandon its austerity programme. If it will not, it must be replaced with one that will."

The draft statement will be put to the final plenary for adoption. No amendments will be taken, but don't worry - if you set up a local PA you will be able to draft those for presentation to the recall People's Assembly next spring. The key paragraph in the draft statement is:

"The government's austerity programme does not work; it is unjust, immoral and undemocratic. Alternatives exist. Debts can be dropped. Privatisation can be reversed and common ownership embraced. A living wage can begin to combat poverty. Strong trade unions can help redistribute profit. The vast wealth held by corporations and the trillions held by the super-rich

in tax havens can be tapped. Green technology, alternatives to the arms industries, a rebuilt infrastructure, including growth in manufacturing, are all desperately needed."²

The obvious question is, where will the alternative government able to implement such a programme of Keynesian left Labourism come from? Once again, do not expect that to be discussed on Saturday. A debate between those advocating 'reclaim Labour' and 'set up a Labour Party mark two' would be just too divisive. And, as for a programme for working class power and socialism ... don't be silly.

Admittedly the statement does contain supportable elements, particularly this paragraph: "We therefore choose to resist. We refuse to be divided against ourselves by stories of those on 'golden pensions', or of 'scroungers', or the 'undeserving poor'. We do not blame our neighbours, whatever race or religion they may be. We are not joining the race to the bottom. We stand with the movement of resistance across Europe."

The statement also proposes the following:

- The organisation of local Peoples Assemblies "in towns and cities across

our nations [!], bringing all those fighting the cuts together into a broad, democratic alliance on a local basis".

- A "recalled National Assembly", partly organised by local PAs, to "review our work in the early spring of 2014".

- Consultations with "leading experts", not to mention "friendly think tanks", in order to develop "an alternative programme for a new anti-austerity government".

- A "national day of civil disobedience and direct action against austerity" and a "day of coordinated local demonstrations". The PA will work with "the trade unions and others" for a national demonstration in November.

The statement claims: "We do not seek to replace any organisations fighting cuts. All are necessary." But of the national anti-cuts campaigns only COR and the People's Charter are specified - the SWP's Unite the Resistance and the National Shop Stewards Network's Anti-Cuts Campaign (controlled by the Socialist Party in England and Wales) do not get a look in. To be fair, comrades from the SWP and SPEW will be there on Saturday, but clearly Counterfire and COR have stolen a march on them in winning so many to the aim of establishing the "single, united national movement" to "challenge more effectively a nationally led government austerity programme".

Of course, comrade Rees and co have been here before when they were in the leadership of the SWP. He, Lindsey German and Chris Nineham occupied key positions in the Stop the War Coalition. Now they have decamped and formed Counterfire, they are considered 'safe' by many on the soft left. There is an interesting exchange on this question in *Red Pepper* in the form of an interview with Owen Jones.

Comrade Jones was asked: "In some ways, the People's Assembly feels like a conscious attempt to replicate the Stop the War Coalition. Although that was very successful in organising big set-piece national demonstrations, some activists were frustrated about the lack of internal democracy. What will make the leadership of this movement any more accountable and legitimate in the eyes of activists on the ground?"

To which comrade Jones replied: "Stop the War was dominated from the beginning by the Socialist Workers Party, who at that time were by far the biggest group on the far left, and had thousands of activists who could be mobilised to dominate key decision-making. There isn't an equivalent with the People's Assembly. You might point out some individuals still involved, but the fact is this is something driven above all by the trade unions. There isn't any group with the resources or personnel to dominate this at all."

He continued: "There is a provisional steering committee with representatives of lots of different groups - from the Greens to Disabled People Against the Cuts. I really wouldn't have time for anything I thought could be turned into a front for any Leninist sect."³

As for comrade Rees himself, he states in a *Morning Star* article: "... this is not a statement written for the left ... It's a statement issued in the name of an assembly that is already broader than the existing left, aimed at hundreds of thousands of working people not in the left or the anti-austerity movement in any organised way."⁴

Does that remind you of anything? Comrade Rees, then leader of the SWP, said something similar about Respect at the time of its formation back in 2004. Looking back at the debates at the end of the founding conference, he said: "We ... voted against the things we believed in, because, while the people here are important, they are not as important as the millions out there. We are reaching to the people locked out of politics. We voted for what *they* want."⁵

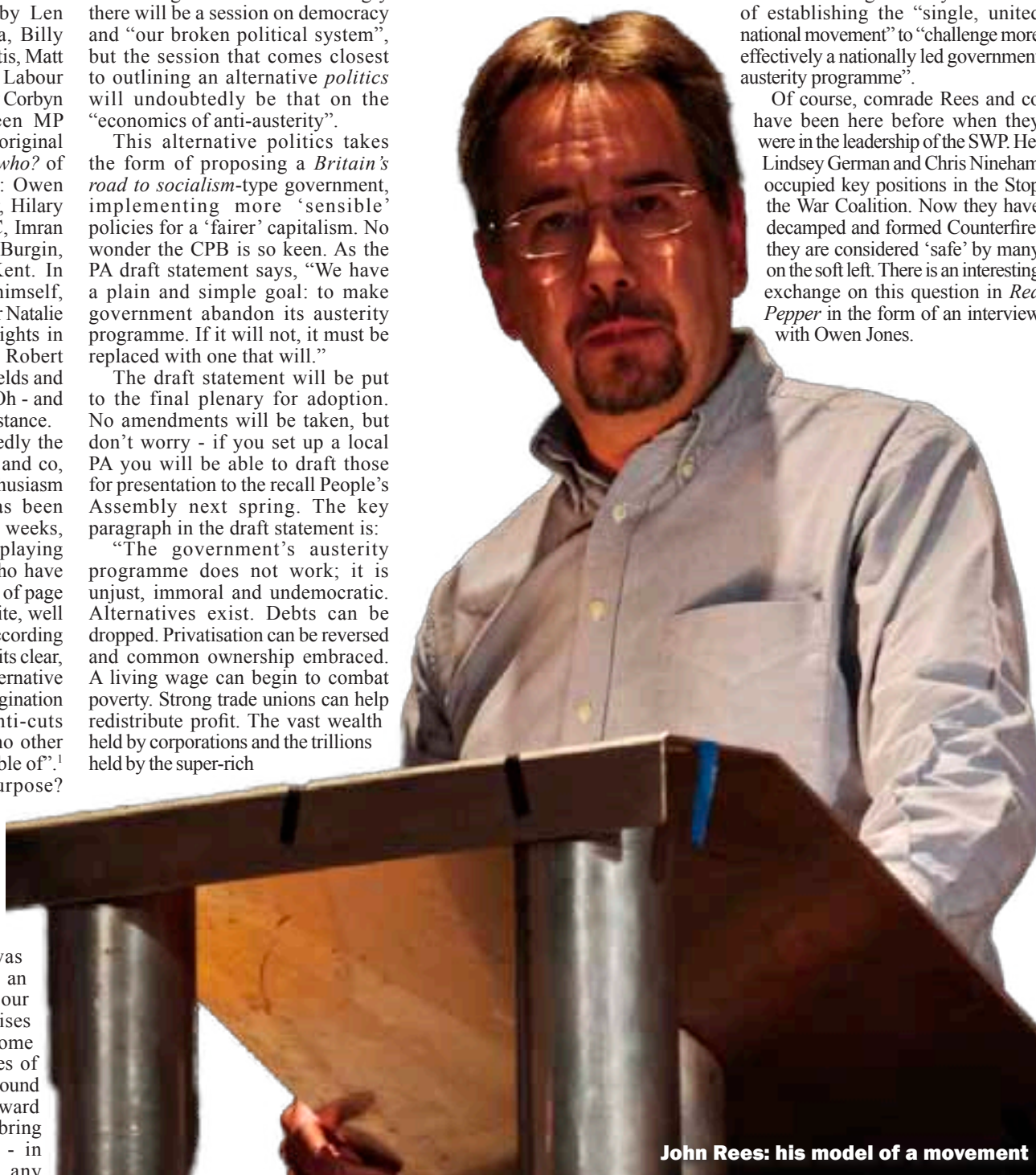
That epitomises comrade Rees's political method, which he still upholds today. We cannot win the masses to a principled working class programme, so why bother even attempting to do so? The difference now is that all those union leaders and Labourite personalities have nothing to fear from SWP-style control-freakery. Comrade Rees may not have mended his ways when it comes to wanting a "front for a Leninist sect". It is just that his current sect is too tiny to be able to control anything much at all.

Clearly many genuine leftwingers and working class partisans will actively support the launch of the People's Assembly, along with the formation of local PAs. But, unlike comrade Rees, they should fight within them for a *genuine* alternative politics. A politics based on working class power, not an impossible return to a Keynesian consensus ●

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Notes

1. *Morning Star* June 8-9.
2. <http://thepeoplesassembly.org.uk/draft-statement>.
3. www.redpepper.org.uk/the-peoples-assembly-making-a-movement.
4. *Morning Star* June 8-9.
5. Reported in *Weekly Worker* January 29 2004.



John Rees: his model of a movement

REVIEW

How the triumvirate marched all the way to failure

Chris Nineham **The people v Tony Blair: politics, the media and the anti-war movement** Zero Books, 2012, pp87, £6.99

In this pamphlet, written to mark the 10th anniversary of the invasion of Iraq earlier this year, Chris Nineham sets out to “underline, in very dangerous times, the power of mass, popular protest” (p5). According to comrade Nineham, while such protest did not quite succeed in stopping the Iraq war, “We are living in a world in which anti-war mobilisation has helped weaken empire, and limited our rulers’ room for manoeuvre” (p78).

It goes without saying that in Britain the main body responsible for such a tremendous achievement was the Stop the War Coalition, set up on the initiative of the Socialist Workers Party and effectively run by a triumvirate of SWP members: John Rees, Lindsey German and comrade Nineham himself. Deposed from the SWP leadership in 2008, the three resigned their membership in 2010 and went on to form Counterfire, the organisation that was the original driving force behind the People’s Assembly Against Austerity.

During the last year of their SWP membership, comrades Rees, German and Nineham insisted that the SWP ought to take the lead in initiating a “united front against the recession” along the lines of STWC, and it is undoubtedly true that the People’s Assembly is envisaged as a kind of Stop the Cuts Coalition. After all, it worked so well last time ...

Rightly, Nineham rejects the explanations of the US-UK invasion that are centred around the power of the Israeli lobby or the need to secure oil supplies. His assertion that “the British ruling class regards [the ‘special relationship’] as the centrepiece of foreign policy” (p16) is accurate and this explains the fact that Tony Blair was the most reliable and enthusiastic advocate of the US-led invasion. Comrade Nineham points out that “a huge number of people had rightly drawn the conclusion that Bush and Blair were pursuing their own imperialist agendas in Iraq” (p27). However, he does not really take on the arguments of those who believed that Iraq was invaded in order for the west to gain access to the country’s oil.

Obviously it is important to critically approach the dominant perspectives within the movement if your aim is to understand and engage with it, so some criticism of the argument that ‘the invasion was for access to oil’ is required. As Hillel Ticktin has pointed out, it is not in fact necessary for US oil companies to own oil in order to control its distribution and these companies were already making high profits at the time of the attack, making it less likely that they would push for such a risky approach.¹

Comrade Nineham gives an enthusiastic account of the massive protests that took place across the globe in the run-up to military action. This is framed as part of the growing importance of protest, with levels of public participation in demonstrations correlating to a rising distrust of the political establishment and political parties (on the latter, not much else is said). Given the failure of movements based on protest in the west over the last two decades (including the ongoing failure of the anti-austerity



Blair went, but war did not

protests), is it not time to acknowledge the limits of protest rather than marvelling in awe at its “power”?

Divisions and debates within the anti-war movement are briefly touched on, with Nineham explaining the “argument for focus” in relation to the political positions adopted by STWC. That “focus” meant sidelining the critique of global capitalism as this necessarily would eventually lead the movement into a dead end. The ‘principles’ actually adopted - linking pacifistic and economic opposition to war with defence of civil liberties and a campaign against Islamophobia - were advantageous according to Nineham. Why? Because, in the words of the then chair of STWC, Andrew Murray of

the *Morning Star*’s Communist Party of Britain, “within that framework people could interpret the war in any way they wanted to” (p42).

The idea, of course, was to attract the largest numbers possible. However, what that meant in reality was avoiding taking on the arguments of the right of the movement and thus allowing liberal anti-war narratives to dominate. If the revolutionary left keeps quiet about its politics and perspectives, then it might be able to win temporary allies for a particular demonstration or campaign, but it is surely obvious that, even if the majority of people held Bush and Blair in contempt, there was no immediate prospect of winning them to a global view based on the power

of the working class. If the beginning and end of the movement is simply to ‘stop the war’, then it should surprise no-one that support for that movement will rapidly fall away once it becomes clear that it has failed in its aim.

That is why comrade Nineham is forced to look at the past through rose-tinted spectacles when he claims the movement “helped weaken empire and limited our rulers’ room for manoeuvre”. He argues that war has become harder for western governments to wage from an electoral point of view. This is true, but it is important not to exaggerate. After all, where was the large-scale, active opposition to the intervention in Libya, the drone attacks on Somalia and Yemen, the French invasion of Mali and the drive for more direct imperialist involvement in Syria?

Revolutionaries, of course, oppose all imperialist military adventures from an internationalist, class-based standpoint (which also means siding with the workers of the countries subject to imperialist attack, and against their own oppressive governments). “Empire” might be weakened (specifically US hegemony in the Middle East), but this is due to the catastrophic failure of the occupation of Iraq itself and to the decline of the US hegemon, which comrade Nineham himself describes in the pamphlet.

Not that comrade Nineham is wrong when he claims that the movement against war on Iraq has contributed to a supposed swelling of the left. He draws a not unreasonable link between the activity of STWC and trends in public opinion. We are told that the left (in terms of individuals self-identifying as such) has increased from 4.8 million in 1981 to over seven million in 2006, whilst 750,000 now place themselves on the “far left”. Nineham concludes: “The Stop the War campaign has not just reflected this trend: it has helped create it” (p37).

Leaving aside the problems with polls such as the British Social Attitudes Survey he quotes, where people are asked to self-identify (what does “far left” mean for the respondents?), let us ask what has happened to these people. Certainly they have not flooded into the existing far left as presently organised. After all the membership of all the left groups combined numbers no more than 10,000. Surely this is an argument for the organised left not to pat itself on the back, but to urgently address its fragmentation and failure to attract these individuals.

Surely then comrade Nineham ought to feel obliged to go in for a little self-criticism. After all, John Rees, Lindsey German and himself took the lead in forming Respect. A popular front disaster waiting to explode - and explode it duly did.

But comrade Nineham wants only to celebrate the power and breadth of the anti-war movement. He is, it seems, unable to face the fact that ultimately the whole thing ended in political failure ●

Callum Williamson

Notes

1. H Ticktin, ‘The US war on Iraq and the world economy’ *Critique* Vol 32, No35.

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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weekly Worker

**Positioning
themselves
ahead of general
election**

Safe pair of Eds

By promising to keep within Tory spending plans, writes **Eddie Ford**, Ed Miliband and Ed Balls are trying to show that Labour would be a 'responsible party of government'

We now have a glimpse of what a future Labour government will be like. After months of careful planning, Ed Miliband and Ed Balls in recent weeks delivered choreographed speeches pledging that Labour will work within the coalition government's spending plans for 2015-16. Austerity is here to stay no matter who you vote for, so get used to it.

One trigger for the reconfiguration of Labour's policy is the imminent June 26 governmental spending review, the day on which Osborne outlines where the next £11.5 billion in cuts will exactly land, and, of course, the general election - a mere 100 weeks away, with the polls nowhere near as good as they should be. The two Eds therefore decided that a firm message had to be sent out saying that capitalism would be safe in their hands. They have, in fact, fully accepted the logic and limits of austerity, as laid down by George Osborne (but not the capitalist class as a whole). A Labour administration would reverse neither the cuts nor the fall in working-class incomes. There will be no 'crisis of expectations' as nobody in their right mind will expect anything.

Iron discipline

In his June 3 speech denouncing the government for "failing catastrophically" on jobs and deficit reduction, Balls promised to impose "iron discipline" at the treasury and introduce a "tough deficit reduction programme". Given the likely "bleak" state of public finances by the time Labour comes to office, he said, it would be "completely irresponsible" for Labour to pledge higher spending in that year or beyond.

There were some clearly identified areas for cuts, Balls stated. Like the "shake-up" of police commissioners, merging the High Speed 2 project into Network Rail and cancelling the planned 'Titan' super-prison. His principal proposal though, or so it seemed, was for the abolition of winter fuel payments for the "rich" 600,000 pensioners over 61 who pay higher and top income tax rates. By ending the £200 or £300 payments to these relatively better-off individuals, Balls will save about £100 million - or a whopping 0.5% of the welfare budget. In that sense, the move would be utterly insignificant. Small beer. But scrapping the benefit would have a highly totemic value, especially seeing that only five months ago Miliband grandly declared that universal benefits were "part of the badge of citizenship", whereas means-testing creates "problems of unfairness". Labour is now signalling that it is not a defender of universal benefits.

Then, in his follow-up June 14 speech to the Fabian Society, the shadow chancellor was if anything even more explicit about his plan to win back "public trust" - ie, win over sections of the bourgeoisie and its media. Firstly, and most crucially, Balls made no bones about endorsing Osborne's public-sector pay freeze. It was "inevitable" that public-sector 'pay restraint' would

have to "continue for longer" in this parliament - Labour "cannot duck that reality". It was a clear choice: either increase public-sector pay or tackle rising unemployment - you cannot do both. Labour had to offer an economic alternative that would boost growth now and deliver "responsible capitalism" over the longer term.

Indeed, Balls went on to argue, the cuts may need to continue "beyond" the end of the current parliament. In fact Labour could not and would not make "any commitments" before the next election to reverse the coalition government's austerity policies. Why? Because, apparently, "we don't know how bad things will be on jobs, growth and the deficit". Hang on: is that not the kind of argument George Osborne made on becoming chancellor - once he realised just how bad the public finances really were, he had no choice but to inflict greater cuts than originally planned? In other words, if capitalism took another downward dive Balls would wield the knife. The incumbent government's austerity has produced a double dip recession and expectations of long term stagnation, in the process decimating public revenue and the tax base. Therefore, reasons Balls, Labour should commit itself to ... continued austerity. Economics of the madhouse.

Naturally, Balls added that he would not have taken the "same approach" as the coalition to tackling the deficit as the coalition - hey, we're *Labour*, remember? Instead, it almost goes without saying, his hypothetical Labour government would have cut *slightly* less deep and fast and, of course, the next Labour government - we can hardly wait - would also have to "deliver social justice" and fairness. In between, that is, the cuts and attacks on the working class.

Laser focus

Of course, Ed Miliband had staked out the same territory in his June 6 address

to "business and community leaders". Acting the statesman, he announced that his party would introduce a welfare cap. For instance, Labour would retain the cuts to child benefit - it had spent "too much" on incapacity benefit between 1997 and 2010.

Miliband even felt compelled to include in his speech an insistence that he would not tolerate "worklessness passed from generation to generation" - probably a response to Iain Duncan Smith's complaint about families in which "three generations have never worked". Incidentally, a survey by the Rowntree Foundation comprehensively blew that hoary myth out of the water. It discovered that only 0.1% of households have two generations that have never worked and they were unable to find a single one in which three generations have never worked. Yet regardless of objective reality, the war against generational worthlessness must be fought. After all, it makes a good *Daily Mail* headline.

Under a Labour government, Miliband pledged, state benefits would rise by less than inflation each year. Up until the Newham speech, Labour had suggested it would restore the link between benefits and inflation if it regained power. Hence it voted against breaking the link in April, when the coalition pegged the annual uprating to 1% for the next three financial years up to 2015-16. Obviously, breaking the inflation link for most benefits would leave millions of claimants with an effective benefit cut.

Noticeably, the Labour leader declined to give too many concrete details in his speech - even if the line of march was more than clear. But Miliband has denied that the welfare cap would mean cutting benefits for individual claimants. For example, some of the £24 billion a year spent on housing benefit would be switched to house building by allowing councils to

"negotiate" with landlords on behalf of social housing tenants, which he argued would help bring down rents and in turn reduce housing benefit bills. In this way, Labour claims the savings could allow local authorities to build 200,000 homes over four years.

As the two Eds' recent road shows confirm, there no fundamental difference between Labour and its coalition opponents on the big policy issues. The Tory press has taken delight, naturally, in suggesting that the recent speeches amount to a declaration of surrender - austerity has won. Mark Steel too has mocked the two Eds in the pages of *The Independent*: "To show how responsible we have become, we promise that if we win the election, for the first two years we'll let the Tories carry on as the government" (June 6).

New regimes

Meanwhile, George Osborne on June 12 effectively sacked Stephen Hester as boss of the Royal Bank of Scotland, which is 81% government-owned. Only 48 hours after Hester's shock departure, Paul Tucker - the deputy governor of the Bank of England - announced that he too is going in the autumn. He failed to secure the governorship after losing out to Mark Carney, a former governor of the Bank of Canada - who formally replaces Sir Mervyn King on July 1.

This means that very shortly there will be new regimes at both the RBS and the BoE. Leading the *Financial Times* to speculate, with quite a large degree of justification, that Osborne is seeking to "reshape Britain's financial landscape" in preparation for the next general election (June 14). In the opinion of the *FT*, the chancellor's "focus is now expected to be on growth" - with Carney's investiture marking a "renewed emphasis on monetary activism". A "transition" that comes at a time when Hester's replacement will "accelerate RBS's reincarnation as a UK-focused

commercial bank pumping credit into the economy". How fortuitous. Although there were few policy differences between Tucker and the treasury, notes the *FT*, his departure will remove from the BoE's monetary policy committee a dissenting voice against greater monetary stimulus.

If so, then we could be presented with a weird and perverse situation within the next 100 weeks. It is not entirely impossible that in the lead-up to the election Ed Balls and Labour will be arguing *for* "iron discipline", whilst Osborne and the Tories - desperate for every vote with the United Kingdom Independence Party breathing down their neck - are making noises to the effect that austerity has done its job and it is now time to put the foot on the accelerator.

All of which poses an extremely awkward, but unavoidable question for the People's Assembly, about to hold its official launch on June 22. Fronted by John Rees, the PA is essentially an alliance between Counterfire, the Communist Party of Britain/*Morning Star* and the left of the trade-union and labour bureaucracy. Here is the rub. PA is predicated on either forcing the existing government to reverse its austerity programme or, failing that, replacing it with one that will. Come the next election one would expect Katy Clark, the CPB and PA-sponsoring unions such as Unite, CWU and Unison to actively campaign for a Labour vote. And what is an anti-austerity government anyway? A cross-class popular front committed to a fair and decent capitalism? That is certainly what the Green Party and its one MP want. So the problem with the PA is that it knows what it is against, but is incapable of delivering what is realistic, positive and necessary - a government of the working class and socialism ●

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Address _____

Post code _____

Email _____ Tel. _____

Send a cheque or postal order payable to 'Weekly Worker' to:
Weekly Worker, Box 928, London WC1N 3XX, UK.

To _____ Bank plc _____

Branch Address _____

Post code _____

Re Account Name _____

Sort code _____ Account No _____

Please pay to **Weekly Worker**, Lloyds TSB A/C No 00744310
sort code 30-99-64, the sum of £ _____ every month*/3 months*
until further notice, commencing on _____

This replaces any previous order from this account. (*delete)

Signed _____ Name (PRINT) _____

Date _____ Address _____