

weekly worker



Charlie Kimber bumbles while opposition confidence grows. Now loyalists are calling for his head

- Gilbert Achcar's politics
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No 972 Thursday July 25 2013

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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LETTERS



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

Matriarchy myth

In tribal societies in which men monopolise ritual power, organised male violence is typically justified by means of scare stories about a primordial matriarchy. Men claim that women once terrorised the world and will do so again unless they are violently subdued. Such patriarchal myth-makers are incapable of imagining true gender equality. Anyone who defends women's right to resist is accused of advocating women's one-sided rule. As I explained in an article published in this paper only last year, the whole bizarre idea of a primordial matriarchy is "a total myth" ('World-historic defeat of women', April 19 2012).

It's amusing to hear self-styled 'Marxists' in our own patriarchal society peddling similar myths. "If an archaic society of woman-dominance can be proved to exist," rants Mike Belbin, "let those who would promote it in the present say how it is a guide to the making of a new global society. Should we isolate women from men in revolutionary organisations? Should women always be in command ...?" (Letters, July 18).

My more recent article, 'Genetic evidence is richer than the stale party line' (July 11) - the one to which Belbin objects - concerned recent genetic evidence showing that over tens of thousands of years matrilineal residence has been favoured down the generations by hunter-gatherers across Africa, the continent in which our species evolved.

Matrilineal residence doesn't mean women beating up men. It just means women living after marriage with their mother. I reminded readers that matrilineal residence sets up an automatic bias toward matrilineal (as opposed to patrilineal) descent. Sometimes termed 'mother-right', matrilineal descent means that women with their brothers share custodianship over their children, not women with their husbands.

Engels (following Morgan) argued that early human kinship conformed to this pattern. He went on to point out that such arrangements generally allow women more solidarity and power than patrilineal residence and patrilineal descent.

In my article, I provided state-of-the-science genetic evidence that Engels got this right. Only a patriarchal fantasist could possibly mix up my scientific argument on this point with those idiotic, age-old scare-stories about "an archaic society of woman-dominance".

Chris Knight

Radical Anthropology Group

Scarcely heard

Chris Knight raises some interesting questions about the relationship between Marxist theory and practice. He argues convincingly that it is not sufficient for Marxists to repeat the line of the group they are members of, even when it is politically correct. His example is Sheila McGregor's defence of Engels in the SWP's journal *International Socialism*. He asks whether McGregor is a Marxist seriously interested in science. If so, why did she not use evidence drawn from genetic studies? These prove that Engels was essentially correct to think that residence in pre-historical societies was "originally matrilineal".

How should socialist groups formulate lines in general and, in this particular case, their lines on the women's question and feminism? Surely, Marxism aspires to scientific status? Group culture should encourage

theoretical education and debate. It should encourage scientific inquiry and discovery. This would enable members to challenge incorrect lines in an informed, confident manner and assist them in developing new ones. What role should specialist intellectuals such as Knight play in this process? Should they command or just support it?

Knight calls on Marxists to "develop rather than dismiss" the most radical insights of the socialist tradition. This should be our starting point for a scientific inquiry informing the group line. He reminds us that proletarian women have been "leaders at the most crucial times". The SWP's line is opposed to feminism and this leads McGregor to ignore early forms of female solidarity and sisterhood. Knight avoids suggesting that women's struggle for control over reproduction and childcare is the rational kernel within the utopian feminist shell. In contrast, he stresses the classless, egalitarian nature of this control in prehistoric societies. He does not criticise the cross-class nature of women's struggles for control over reproduction in the present, but aims to show that the classless society of the future would place childcare centre-stage.

Perhaps his most interesting question is that of the meaning of "socialisation of reproduction". Does this mean "communal canteens and creches"? If so, why did these experiments fail? He refers to the Israeli kibbutzim. These failed to "transform human relations". He could also have mentioned communal creches and canteens in Stalinist regimes. In the 1930s, Soviet mothers dumped their babies in factory creches. They had no time to nurse them, have lunch and get back to work within the space of a normal break. In canteens they had to queue for long periods of time for food, washed dishes, and even for the use of a spoon. Food lacked nutrition and canteens were filthy and ridden with vermin.

Knight notes that reproduction of the next generation is a form of production. It has taken "secondary importance" to the production of material goods in class societies. The division of labour in the latter has made childcare into alienated labour. For example, the labour-power expended in creches in Stalinist regimes was unproductive of value, but unfree. It was atomised and bureaucratically controlled.

Domestic labour produces use-value. Children are not commodities, but, when labour is hired from outside, domestic work is alienated for a wage. This is typical of the bourgeois family. In contrast, the domestic labour of a proletarian spouse, partner or cohabitee is not commodified. Nevertheless, regardless of the joy children can bring, it is isolated, atomised and personally dependent on political and economic sources of revenue - most often the male 'breadwinner's' wage or the state.

The alienation of mostly female domestic labourers from more socialised forms of raising children leads to depression and exhaustion. Dependence reproduces pre-capitalist relations of master and slave between men and women and adults and children. It follows that children are easily mistreated, abused and neglected. Many grow up to be adult victims of the mental health system of oppression. A more socialised form of childcare might therefore include extended networks of primary carers who plan for, choose to bring into being, prioritise working with and remain committed to spending time with a child until she or he becomes an adult.

My criticism of Knight is that he forgets to mention the role that scarcity has on reproductive production. This

is evident in the recent history of the former Soviet Union. Stalinist forced industrialisation and collectivisation created shortages of food, housing, material goods and labour. Shortages included places in creches. In the 1930s, only 40% of women forced to work in industry had creche places. At many factories, places were limited to privileged workers and the non-working wives of managers and the political police. The nutritional content of food was poor and warm clothing in short supply. Children in creches were often ill, forcing mothers to stay off work to care for them at home. The regime responded to labour shortages by reinforcing the authoritarian aspects of the nuclear family. This included banning abortions and extolling women's 'sacred' duty to bear children.

I have lots of questions for Marxist anthropologists such as Knight. What role did scarcity play in the transition from primitive communism to patriarchal class society? Did natural scarcity destroy the egalitarian gender relations of early hunter-gather societies? Was there a scarcity of healthy women capable of giving birth to healthy children? Did malnutrition, starvation and the death of women and children in childbirth play a role in the emergence of slavery? Would slavery have not been an efficient means of generating a surplus sufficient to ensure the survival of the children and women of enslaving tribes and clans?

I am also disappointed that Knight did not mention abundance as a precondition not only for the primitive communism of the past, but the higher form of egalitarianism of the socialist future. As he knows, socialist planning presupposes abundance. Placing childcare centre-stage would be necessary for the reproduction of a planned society worldwide. It would also be freely chosen labour. Freed from alienated forms of labour, an abundance of carers would make being with children inherently enjoyable and creative. Childcare would no longer be an exhausting chore, but an activity attractive to all. Obviously, the allocation of necessary and free labour time to childcare through the plan presupposes abundance of material goods, as well as of labour time.

I look forward to broadening my knowledge of human evolution under the tutelage of Marxists from the Radical Anthropology Group. Of course, this does not preclude us from trying to reclaim and apply the categories of political economy derived from Marx in the present - nor from debating the line our groups should take on feminism and the women's question.

Paul B Smith

email

LU goer

Labour MP Tom Watson (deputy chairman of the party and now resigned as election coordinator for Ed Miliband) wrote the following on his blog recently about a meeting at Glastonbury: "Three hundred people attended an open meeting in Billy Bragg's Leftfield to discuss the left's response to austerity. Almost to a man, woman and child, the people wanted me to give them the route map back to supporting and believing in Labour. Yet I couldn't traverse the chasmic gap between the words coming out of my mouth and the voices in my head. The audience cheered my nemesis, the leftwing polemicist, Mr Owen Jones. They were polite to me, at least, but markedly unenthusiastic about what I had to say."

I don't know how he will resolve his personal dilemma, but such a comment from a senior Labour figure and ally of Ed Miliband, together with the surge of support for Left Unity and the People's Assembly, must point to a widespread

disillusionment with Labour when it is still evolving to the right. There is an audience to be won, or lost. How should Marxists address this phenomenon?

Much of the left has plunged uncritically into the People's Assembly, hailing it as a left Ukup, yet it should be clear that the project is broadly aimed at tying the various anti-austerity campaigns to a perspective of shifting Labour to the left. The Socialist Workers Party has been fairly explicit about this and it sits alongside their insistence that the trade unions can be pressured into leading effective struggles. The SWP approach has been to treat the new faces in the People's Assemblies as foot soldiers for existing campaigns, while running away from anything so abstract (their term) as challenging Labour and the unions politically.

While assembling periodically to be re-inspired, the People's Assembly movement does nothing to challenge the feeble role of the unions, which have led campaigns only to the extent they need to keep control and dissipate discontent in protest gestures. No surprise, as the unions played a large role in setting up the PA. Moreover, there is little said about the global nature of the crisis, leaving supporters to assume that there are solutions available based on the national economy rather than the international perspective of class struggle. Nothing about the military conflicts that the crisis is fuelling, which is odd, since some leading figures came to fame in anti-war movements. The whole project seems designed to provide a political base for some union leaders; ideal compost for growing illusions in Labour. Perhaps a way back to "believing in" Labour again, a route map for Tom Watson if Miliband does not shut the door entirely.

Left Unity is responding to the same moods as PA and was initiated earlier, but differs in that it envisages standing candidates against Labour. This ostensibly puts it in opposition to PA, despite some overlap in leading personnel - a contradiction that should become evident as the next election draws near.

It has attracted the attention of 'revolutionary left' groups, some of whom see opportunities for regroupment (reshuffling the pack) - Socialist Resistance, loosely linked to the once-upon-a-time Trotskyist Unified Secretariat of the Fourth International, nowadays a centrist swamp. A major section in France has already dissolved into a non-Trotskyist (ie, non-Marxist) formation and SR has announced its willingness to do the same. It is holding talks on unity with the International Socialist Network (recent escapees from the SWP who as yet do not have a policy platform), Anti-Capitalist Initiative (recent departures from Workers Power, the latter excluded from the talks). The common ground appears to be an orientation to activist social movements and the trade unions. Together these forces would view Left Unity as a broad movement to provide day-to-day leadership of struggles (do the work), while the revolutionaries have the long term aim of ending capitalism (thinking).

The strategy is essentially that of the Pablo/Mandel school, looking for left-moving fragments of the old organisations, or radical non-working class movements, to fuse with. The formula has been flogged to death many times. It seems that the actual (not wannabe) leaders of Left Unity have a similar approach, with Loach, Hudson and Achcar flagging up Die Linke as a model for what LU could be. Would it be indelicate to mention that Die Linke - the German Left Party - is top-heavy with old Stalinist apparatchiks of the former ruling party of East Germany,

the political masters of the Stasi who spied on the workers? Despite some left noises in opposition, Die Linke has joined coalitions and administered cuts, and has accommodated itself quite well to the foreign and security policies of the state. Not quite the 'bottom-up' approach currently popular.

So the question remains: how should Marxists address the Left Unity project? It is necessary to recognise that the old organisations have failed and, at present, the working class in Britain and internationally does not have a political voice. The old leaderships are tied by a thousand strands to the ruling class. It is also necessary to point out that the dominant outlook in the labour/trade union movement, including most of what passes for the left, is Keynesian of sorts. Basically, it says that the national economy requires a stimulus aimed at marginally increasing demand and starting a cycle of growth. From Labour's 'austerity lite', it shades into a slightly larger stimulus, argued for by Owen Jones. Both are premised on rescuing capitalism. Bleating about greedy bankers avoids discussion about the causes of the crisis.

Is LU challenging these views of the crisis presented in the People's Assembly? The objective needs of the working class call for much more than a mere stimulus to growth to address poverty, jobs, housing, education, infrastructure and environment, and should be financed by attacking the bloated banking sector. Not 'solving the crisis', but sharpening class contradictions. This alone calls for an international struggle, seeking allies among workers who are also breaking with the old organisations.

Left Unity has some things going for it, in that the SWP has so far largely preferred to honour People's Assembly with its attention rather than LU, while LU itself is still in discussion mode, with commissions set up to draft policy. Marxists should intervene with a clear programme and perspective. I suggest that meetings be convened nationally to debate these issues.

Mike Martin

Sheffield Marxist Discussion Group

Cult fetish

I agree with Andrew Kliman's claim (Letters, July 14) that Raya Dunayevskaya (1910-87) "did not run an obedience cult during her lifetime" and that it would be wrong to describe the US Marxist Humanists organisation as a cult. However, I would point out, to both him and Paul Demarty, that there is no longer anything called the US Marxist Humanists organisation.

But there is an International Marxist-Humanist Organisation, with members in many other places aside from the US, whose recently adopted democratic constitution was specifically written to avoid ending up with a cultish organisation that "in practice require[s] 'obedience' - to its leaders". Readers of the *Weekly Worker*, especially those tired of the fetish of 'democratic centralism' (how can democracy *not* be centralist?), may like to compare the IMHO constitution - published online at www.internationalmarxisthumanist.org/about - with that of Kliman's Marxist-Humanist Initiative (www.marxisthumanistinitiative.org/philosophyorganization/by-laws-of-marxist-humanist-initiative) and that of *News and Letters*, the organisation that Kliman, myself and many others broke from in 2008 (www.newsandletters.org/constitution.htm).

David Black

London

No coup

I wish to comment on your article, 'Not the next stage of the revolution' (July 4). What happened in Egypt was not a

coup d’etat, as you allege.

We must recognise that the government of the Muslim Brotherhood lost the legitimacy it had previously gained at the ballot box. It had sold the Sinai peninsula to Hamas and failed in its negotiations with Ethiopia over pumping water from the Nile. The government clamped down on the people, depriving them of their rights and freedoms. In view of this loss of legitimacy, the millions who had taken to the streets called on the military to end the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood.

If this was a military coup, why is there a civilian government under Hazer Al Beblawi?

Safouene Jenhani
email

Cursory

Nick Rogers clings to the dogma that Marx and Engels did not put forward multiple examples of crises with different causes (Letters, July 18). Yet a reading of the three volumes of *Capital* will demonstrate that they did precisely that. But then it seems that Nick has a problem with even a cursory reading of anything. He claims that I said, in my previous letter (July 11), “Marx made a ‘huge mistake’ in not predicting the shift from unskilled to skilled labour ...”

A cursory reading of the letter shows I did no such thing. The mistake that Marx made, in relation to the falling rate of profit, was in confusing concrete and abstract labour! Marx states that there are only 24 hours in a day, so even if a worker could live on air the maximum one worker could produce, in terms of surplus value, is 24 hours. So 24 workers, producing only one hour of surplus value, generate more than one worker producing 23 hours. But the trouble is that, though there are only 24 hours of some concrete labour in a day, say of a machine minder, there may be 48, 72, 144 or whatever number of hours of abstract hours of labour-time in the brain surgeon’s day, because the labour of a brain surgeon is complex labour, and may produce a value several times that of the machine minder’s labour.

Nick then claims: “I rather suspect that the average worker of the past was more skilled than today’s workers ...” Really? So you think that the average worker of 100 years ago, who could barely read or write, was more skilled than today’s numerate, literate, computer-savvy teenager? Do you really think that capitalism has invested tens of millions in developing universities and colleges to churn out more highly productive, highly valuable workers for absolutely no reason?

But it’s clear Nick does not understand the difference between the value of labour-power and the value created by labour. He demonstrates that his understanding is back at the level of Adam Smith. So he says: “As for the productivity of David Beckham’s labour, the fact that he can still earn a fortune now that he has hung up his football boots is a strong indication that his earning power was at least as strongly linked to his brand as his footballing skills.”

But I said nothing about Beckham’s wages, which would be a reflection of the value of his labour-power. I only spoke about the value produced by his labour, as complex labour. Nick says: “The value produced by complex, skilled labour is not measurable in any absolute sense.”

So he wants to ignore it, which is rather different to his attitude towards the idea that the global rate of profit can’t be accurately measured. But he is quite obviously wrong anyway. Marx says we can measure the value of the product of complex labour. It is what consumers are prepared to pay for that product, and that obviously is measurable. As for Beckham, Nick’s argument makes no sense. Even if

his earnings are to be explained as some form of rent, the question he has to answer is from what fund is this rent paid? Where did the value come from that enables this rent to be paid? Why would someone pay rent to Beckham, for his labour, unless it produced a value not only equal to that rent, but also made a handsome profit for themselves? The idea that Beckham and other such workers’ position is comparable to that of a CEO is nonsense. Does Nick believe that football fans pay hundreds of pounds for their tickets in order to enjoy the product of the ground staff, or that of the players?

That misunderstanding is also behind his comment: “An average hour of socially necessary labour in any given year (or reproduction cycle) is as productive of value as an average hour of socially necessary labour in any other year - regardless of whether the comparison is 2013 with 2012 or 2013 with 1850.”

It’s true that an hour’s abstract labour time has the value of an hour’s abstract labour time, but the issue here was that all labour is in fact concrete, not abstract. Concrete labour has to be reduced to abstract labour to measure it, and in the process it becomes obvious that an hour’s labour by a brain surgeon creates more value than an hour’s labour by a machine minder. But his argument above is in any case clearly wrong, and Marx says so: “The labour time socially necessary is that required to produce an article under the normal conditions of production, and with the average degree of skill and intensity prevalent at the time. The introduction of power looms into England probably reduced by one-half the labour required to weave a given quantity of yarn into cloth. The hand-loom weavers, as a matter of fact, continued to require the same time as before; but for all that, the product of one hour of their labour represented after the change only half an hour’s social labour, and consequently fell to one-half its former value” (*Capital* Vol 1, chapter 1).

So never mind an hour’s average social labour time of 1850 having the same value as an average hour of social labour time today - here is Marx saying that an hour of average social labour time has been slashed in value by half overnight as a result of a change in productivity! That is obvious on a fairly cursory reading and understanding of Marx’s theory. The point is that what constituted an hour’s socially necessary labour time in 1850 would today constitute maybe five minutes of socially necessary labour time, at best.

Consider the following: a society has two departments. One produces means of consumption; the other produces entertainment, in the form of music halls spread around the country. Department A has 10 million workers working one billion hours, producing a value of £10 billion. £9 billion of this is traded internally within department A; the other £1 billion is traded with department B. Department B comprises one million workers working 100 million hours with a value of £1 billion, which they trade with department A, in return for their consumption needs.

As a consequence of technological development, the music halls are replaced by TV studios, which now employ just 100,000 workers. All of this output is traded with department A in place of the former music hall entertainment. So 100,000 workers in department B now produce the same £1 billion value as formerly one million workers produced. The complex labour of these workers now has 10 times the value of their predecessors. In fact, because the TV studios would likely require less constant capital than all of the music halls, the rate of profit would rise. It would certainly rise if department B

workers obtained a smaller share of the higher value they now produce. But a look at any advanced economy shows that this kind of development is characteristic.

As for Apple and Microsoft, 90% of the value of Apple products is generated in the US, not in China or other manufacturing locations. But for the rate of profit to fall Nick needed to have shown that workers were replaced by constant capital. Instead he points to the employment of large numbers of workers! The materials that go into an iPhone are minor compared to the materials that went into a 1980s phone, let alone all of the other devices it now replaces. In terms of Microsoft, very little of its product, other than for hardware, requires even a physical production process. Even the churning out of CDs and DVDs has been replaced by downloadable versions of the software.

With all of this uncertainty, it’s no wonder that Nick is confused about the role of the rate of profit, and its relation to crises. None of the estimates of the rate of profit are accurate, because they miss out the most important element of the value of output: circulating constant capital. Moreover, as I’ve demonstrated recently (<http://boffyblogger.blogspot.co.uk/2013/07/the-rates-of-profit-interest-and-12.html>), if you adjust even the US ‘rate of profit’ for the effect of productivity on the rate of capital turnover today, you obtain three times the unadjusted rate compared to 1950.

Those that argue that the rate of profit has not risen have to explain where all the capital came from that created massive new economies in China and elsewhere, that created whole new industries around new technology and communications, and yet at the same time had sufficient surplus value left over to produce huge money hoards on corporate balance sheets, in sovereign wealth funds, and which has driven global interest rates ever downwards for the last 30 years.

If Nick wants a clue as to how that happens, he should read Engels’ description of the 1847 crisis (www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch25.htm), which occurred under pretty identical conditions of huge prosperity, and sharply higher rates and volumes of profit. What was the cause of the crisis that broke out with this rising rate of profit? Crop failures in England and Ireland, and mistaken bank legislation that caused a credit crunch.

Arthur Bough
email

Kafkaland

Organisations are usually a mix of being norm-bound or rule-bound. One advantage of rules is transparency - everyone can see what they are. New organisations, like mine, the International Socialist Network, set up in mid-March, have few rules, and most norms are tacit, as we have had hardly any political discussions from which a political culture can emerge.

So it came as quite a shock when I was suspended on Monday July 22. I had exercised my responsibility as a socialist to speak my mind, and in posts on the ISN website (July 19-21) warned of what I saw as unnecessary centralising moves within the ISN, violating our implicit values of transparency of proceedings, accountability of office-holders, and the widest participation in decision-making.

So much for the ISN’s pluralism. So much for scrutinising decision-makers. So much for transparency and accountability. I haven’t even been told what I am supposed to have done, what I am supposed to have violated, how long my suspension is for, and whether I can appeal and to whom. ISN land becomes Kafkaland.

Jara Handala

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 July 28, 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 16: ‘Absolute and relative surplus value’ (continued).

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

Justice in meltdown

Wednesday July 24, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Chatham station, Railway Street, Chatham, Kent. Speakers: Steve Gillan (POA) and Nick Smith (NAPO).

Event page: www.facebook.com/events/1401030916776182.

Defend benefits

Friday July 26, 10am start: Day of action and protest, Clock Tower, West Street, Brighton.

Organised by Brighton Benefits Campaign:

www.facebook.com/BriBenCam.

Justice for Trayvon

Saturday July 27, 2pm: March to Downing Street for justice for Trayvon Martin.

Organised by Black Activists Rising Against the Cuts:

www.blackactivistsrisingagainstcuts.blogspot.co.uk

Stop the cuts

Saturday July 27, 1pm: March and rally, Assembly Stanley Road, Bootle (near Falstaff Street) for march to Liverpool city centre.

Speakers include Bob Crow.

Organised by Stand Up In Bootle: www.standupinbootle.com.

People’s Assembly

Saturday July 27, 1pm: Public meeting, Central Hall, Oldham Street, Manchester M1. Speakers include Owen Jones.

Organised by People’s Assembly: manchesterpaaa@gmail.com.

Oppose the EVF

Saturday July 27, 11am: Demonstration against the English Volunteer Force, a breakaway from the EDL.

Lunar House, 40 Wellesley Road, Croydon.

Organised by Unite Against Fascism: www.uaf.org.uk.

LGBT trade unionists

Monday July 29, 6pm: Meeting, TUC Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1. Speaker: London-based community artist Jacob V Joyce. All who identify as LGBTQ and are members of a trade union in and around London are welcome. Refreshments provided. Organised by Greater London Association of Trades Union Councils: www.glatuc.org.uk.

Keep legal aid

Tuesday July 30, 4.30pm: Rally, Old Bailey, London EC4.

Tuesday July 30, 5pm: Rally, Manchester crown court, Crown Square Manchester M3.

Organised by Save Legal Aid: www.savelegalaid.co.uk/justicealliance.

Fight benefit cuts

Wednesday July 31, 7pm: Public meeting, Lansdown Hall, Stroud.

Organised by Stroud against the Cuts: www.stroudagainstcuts.co.uk.

Remember the Roma genocide

Friday August 2, 5pm: Second annual remembrance event. Assemble Holocaust Memorial Stone, Hyde Park, for march to French embassy, 58 Knightsbridge, London SW1.

Organised by 8 April Movement: dale.farm@btinternet.

End the Gaza blockade

Tuesday August 13, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Baptist Church, Manvers Street, Bath. Speaker: James Godfrey. Entry: £10.

Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign:

www.palestinecampaign.org.

EDL not welcome

Saturday September 7, 11am: Counter-demonstration, Whitechapel Road, London E1.

Organised by Unite Against Fascism: www.uaf.org.uk.

Call for a general strike

Sunday September 8, 12.30pm: Lobby of TUC conference, Hardy suite, Hermitage Hotel, Exeter Road, Bournemouth.

email info@shopstewards.net

Organised by National Shop Stewards Network:

www.shopstewards.net.

Stop the War Coalition

Saturday September 14, 10 am to 5pm: AGM, Old Cinema, University of Westminster, 309 Regent Street, London W1. £10/£5 (waged/unwaged).

Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk.

Unite the Resistance

Saturday October 19, 12 noon to 5pm: Conference, Bloomsbury Baptist Church, 235 Shaftsbury Avenue, London WC2.

Organised by Unite the Resistance: <http://uniteresist.org>.

CPGB wills

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

SWP

Now the rest should follow

The resignation of Martin Smith was long overdue, argues Peter Manson

"For the sake of us all he should go," we wrote two weeks ago (*Weekly Worker* July 11). We were, of course, referring to former Socialist Workers Party national secretary Martin Smith, who has been the subject of accusations relating to sexual harassment and worse for two years now.

We cannot, however, claim that this call precipitated comrade Smith's resignation from the SWP - rumours of which began to appear on the left blogosphere a few days ago. We have been arguing since the whole issue came to light in January that the central committee ought to persuade him to take that course of action. With such serious allegations hanging over his head, it was clearly in the interests not just of the SWP, but of the left as a whole, that he should have stepped down from membership of the organisation until such a time as he was able to clear his name.

So it is good that this course appears at last to have been followed. I say 'appears', because there has been no official confirmation either from the SWP leadership or comrade Smith himself. But that is par for the course - when has the central committee ever issued a statement on an internal matter that has caused it embarrassment, unless it has been forced to do so? So, once again, the membership has been left in the dark over the hardly trivial matter of the departure of the comrade who was the SWP's number one until January 2011 and remained a CC member until the beginning of this year. Just about every SWP comrade will have heard the rumours - and assumed they are true - but the CC has uttered not a word about it either publicly or internally.

It is frankly a mystery why the leadership insisted on standing by comrade Smith for so long. At the January 2012 SWP conference loyalists even organised a standing ovation for the man prior to his re-election to the CC, despite knowing that he faced very serious charges. Comrade Smith may well be a competent bureaucrat, but he is hardly renowned for his oratorical skills, theoretical acumen or even tactical nous.

It was comrade Smith who on May 22 2010 decided spontaneously at a gathering of the SWP front, Right to Work, to organise a totally inept stunt. He led SWP members and a few others, from among those who had gathered for an RTW conference, into the nearby Euston Tower headquarters of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas), where union leaders were in negotiations with British Airways over an industrial dispute. The disruption caused by the brief occupation of Acas provoked a furious reaction from Tony Woodley, then joint general secretary of Unite, who was trying to strike a deal on behalf of his cabin crew. Woodley may have wanted to persuade his members to accept a pay cut, but the rank-and-file cabin crew themselves had not called for any protest at the talks.

Incredibly, comrade Smith posted a crowing statement about the 'success' of the action on the SWP website, only to be overruled by the CC, who replaced it within hours with a more neutral comment. Two days later the internal *Party Notes* carried criticism of the action undertaken by the SWP national secretary: "... it is important we learn some lessons from the protest on Saturday. We are trying to bring together a serious coalition that can resist the cuts ... That means

when we hold stunts and protests we need to point all our fire at the Con-Dems and the bosses, and should try and avoid at all costs protests that embroil Labour and trade union leaders in them" (May 24 2010).

Yet even after this debacle the SWP kept Smith on the central committee. Apparently his union contacts (like brother Woodley?) and organisational skills made him a valuable asset. Even today loyalists are said to be clubbing together to help pay for his MA course. Donny and Anna Gluckstein are said to be the moving spirits here.

Crisis

The departure of comrade Smith must be seen in the context of the overall crisis that has gripped the SWP since allegations against him began to circulate in 2011.

Of course, as we have pointed out many times, the crisis, while sparked by those allegations, is not just about sexism or a failure to uphold the SWP's stated position on women's rights and women's equality. The crisis has in fact been generated by the organisation's anti-democratic bureaucratic centralism, and by its opportunism, linked to its lack of any programme.

Those very same negative characteristics have led to the CC flailing about hopelessly in response. Something approaching 500 members have quit the SWP this year - over 100 resigned *en bloc* to form the International Socialist Network, while the rest simply gave up in disgust. Of course, the SWP's official "registered membership" figures were always a complete fiction (according to *Pre-conference Bulletin* No2, distributed to members in November 2012, they totalled 7,957). The *Weekly Worker* has long pointed out that these figures, which officially include everyone who has filled in a membership application form over the previous two years, in reality are nothing more than a (largely out-of-date) contact list. Most in the SWP milieu now seem to agree that the real membership figure is probably around 1,000.

Adding to the leadership's woes, Michael Rosen, the famous children's author and a supporter of the SWP dating back to the 1960s, has issued an open letter and broken off relations. As for the Socialist Worker Student Society, it is a mere husk.

But it is not just oppositionists who feel betrayed. Even loyalists have been dismayed by the leadership's bumbling indecision. Take the 50-strong national committee, which met earlier this month and agreed by 26 votes to six to suspend four oppositionists after it was discovered they had set up a factional bank account. But after 250-plus members signed a protest petition initiated by the Revolutionary Socialist Opposition the CC overturned the suspensions agreed by the NC

(whose decisions are "binding" on it, according to the SWP constitution). So it appears that the six who urged restraint and a compromise were right after all and the 26 who went along with Charlie Kimber, Alex Callinicos, Michael Bradley and co were wrong. No wonder there are moves within loyalist ranks to install Amy Leather as the new national secretary. At least she possesses a backbone, it is said.

And now the dithering CC has implied that the Revolutionary Socialist Opposition will be allowed to continue without let or hindrance right up until the next SWP

conference in January 2014. The constitution outlaws permanent factions - indeed temporary factions are only permitted during the three-month pre-conference period (usually October-December of each year), after which they must be dissolved. Even during this period all factional statements must be issued via the central office and certainly not independently via any unauthorised website or email list. So the constitution is reduced to a mere piece of paper. And this, of course, has middle-rank loyalists splitting blood and demanding a full-scale purge.

In its pep-talk circular to members, 'After Marxism 2013: the fight against austerity and the role of the SWP', issued last week after the annual summer school, the CC states: "Marxism 2013 showed the strength of our organisation despite the difficult period the SWP has gone through ... But it's clear we still have some real problems in the SWP. The party now has an open faction operating. It has its own organisation, website

and meetings. This is despite the fact that the vast majority of members have shown time and again that they oppose this kind of factional organisation."

The leadership claims that "The SWP has never been the kind of organisation that deals with political argument simply by diktat or disciplinary action. These are political questions and the debates have to be won politically." Leaving aside the obvious fact that this claim flies in the face of reality, it is interesting that the CC concludes: "... we have to be really clear that if we're to continue to have a real influence in the movement, both in Britain and internationally, the next SWP conference must return the party to its normal functioning. The CC is determined that the next SWP conference will do this and bring an end to permanent factions for good."

And there were the leadership loyalists thinking that the March special conference had done just that! Hadn't it passed a constitutional amendment closing a loophole which the opposition had exploited beforehand? Previously the constitution had not actually specified that the pre-conference discussion period, when factions are tolerated, only lasts three months. But now they have to wait until January 2014 to "return the party to its normal functioning".

By the way, the statement features a particularly blatant example of the SWP's notorious dishonesty, when it declares: "Marxism 2013 was a real success for the SWP, with over 3,000 attending." How is "real success" to be measured? In 2011 "over 4,500" came to the school (*Socialist Worker* July 9 2011); and in 2012 "over 5,000" showed up (*Socialist Worker* July 14 2012). Every regular at Marxism knew that there were far fewer attending this year - not only had many of the SWP's own members and supporters stayed away, but it had been boycotted by a whole swathe of speakers and activists across the left. But still the leadership fails to openly and fully come to terms with its crisis.

And unfortunately the opposition has so far failed to do so too. True, at last large numbers have woken up to the reality of SWP bureaucratic centralism and to the abysmal failings of the CC, but no clear political differentiation can be discerned between the leadership and the faction. Where, for example, is the critique of SWP opportunism - the clearest recent example being its disastrous popular frontism of the Respect period?

In fact it is the ban on factions that has contributed to the absence of the necessary political clarification. In any democratic organisation members must have the right to discuss freely, and publicly, alternative policies to those proposed by the leadership. That is not to say that the existence of factions is in itself a good thing. But the right to form factions - at any time of the year and for as long as they are deemed necessary - is essential.

Many in the opposition are agreed that the leadership of Callinicos, Kimber, Bradley and co must go. Good riddance to Martin Smith, they say - now the rest should follow. But if the SWP is to play a part in building the mass revolutionary party the current situation cries out for, much more is needed. Centrally what is required is a fundamental critique of the "International Socialist tradition" - not least its dishonest political methodology, its programmeless opportunism and its debilitating sectarianism ●

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Charlie Kimber: bumbling

POLEMIC

Progressive sentiments amidst reactionary illusions

Gilbert Achcar has strongly objected to being described as a 'social-imperialist' in the *Weekly Worker*. So what is the truth about him? Yassamine Mather investigates

Gilbert Achcar does not fit the description of a stereotypical social-imperialist. First of all, he is passionately pro-Palestinian. His book, *The Arabs and the holocaust: the Arab-Israeli war of narratives*,¹ is a valuable study of the myths created around the formation of the state of Israel. He describes himself as anti-war and indeed his articles written at the time of the US invasion of Iraq were unambiguously anti-war.

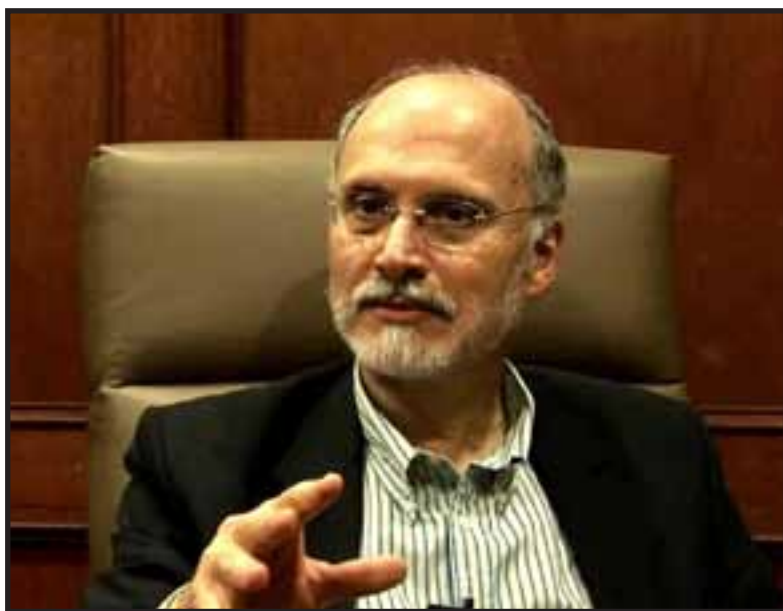
Achcar has distanced himself from both conspiracy theorists and those who defend reactionary dictators in the Arab world - those who claim that the enemy of the US is necessarily a friend or that Muslim fundamentalists are the 'anti-imperialist allies of the international working class'. In *Hands Off the People of Iran* we have always argued against those who confuse reactionary anti-western rhetoric with anti-imperialism and we recommend Achcar's article, 'Eleven theses on the resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism'.² Achcar's stance on such questions has been consistent. He is also right when he argues against the view held by many on the left that US wars in the Middle East are all to do with oil.

The only time I met Achcar (and shared a platform with him) was at a conference in Lausanne in 2003.³ The main difference in our two approaches lay in my insistence that the left should support the Iranian working class's call for the overthrow of the capitalist Islamic Republic of Iran. (From memory GA was less critical of Tehran. He emphasised the difference between Shia and Sunni Islam, the latter being the religion of the oppressed, he said.)

Apart from that instance, as far as Iran is concerned, he has made some useful comments: for example, in criticising president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's holocaust denial, in clarifying the progressive characteristics of the Iranian opposition movement in 2009⁴ and there is no doubt that until 2011 all his writing fell on the right side of the thin line between opposing both imperialism and the Islamic regime, on the one hand, and support for regime change from above, be it in the form of a military intervention or sanctions, on the other.

However, we are all judged by our *current* political stance and this is where Sarah McDonald takes issue with Achcar's position in last week's *Weekly Worker* to which he has strongly objected.⁵ will know the Achcar who came out in support of western intervention in Libya, Mali and Syria. Although Achcar does not sit easily alongside those whose politics is often dictated by their soft attitude towards Israel, such as the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, at the end of the day his support for military intervention is of a social-imperialist character and, whether he likes it or not, what he has written on Libya, Mali and Syria has been praised and distributed by the Eustonites, the AWL and other social-imperialists. What made his stance on those countries all the more harmful was the fact that it stood in sharp contrast to his previously impeccable anti-war credentials.

Achcar's recent statements on Libya and Syria have been



Gilbert Achcar: getting things wrong

unambiguous. In relation to Libya he wrote: "Every general rule admits of exceptions. This includes the general rule that UN-authorized military interventions by imperialist powers are purely reactionary ones, and can never achieve a humanitarian or positive purpose."⁶

When it came to Syria, he actually advised the opposition on how to go about getting foreign intervention: "... the Syrian opposition must define a clear stance on the issue of foreign military intervention, since it is clear that its position has a major influence on whether or not intervention might take place. The reluctance regarding direct intervention that we see today on the part of western and regional states might change tomorrow if intervention requests made on behalf of the Syrian opposition were to increase. It was the Libyan National Council's request for international military intervention at the beginning of March that paved the way for the similar request issued by the Arab League, and the subsequent resolution of the UN security council. Had the Libyan opposition opposed direct military intervention in all its forms (instead of just opposing intervention on the ground and requesting air support, as it did), the Arab League would not have sought intervention nor would such action have been sanctioned by the UN."⁷

Achcar is right to argue against conspiracy theorists who see opposition movements in Libya, Syria or Iran simply as western plots. These are reactionary rulers - Gaddafi, Assad and Iran's Islamic regime are all hated by their own population and it is an excellent thing that the youth in all these countries have rebelled. However, regime change in these countries must not only come from below: it should be entirely free of western intervention. Any such intervention would retard human emancipation, which can only take the form of a revolution led by the working class. It should be obvious to all that any imperialist intervention would serve imperialist interests and be directed against those of our class.

Economic crisis

We have to understand the frustration of the population in these countries and their desperate calls for help. But

Marxist internationalists cannot look at these instances as isolated events. The uprisings in the Arab countries, including those ruled by 'rogue' governments, were not just about fighting dictators (Gaddafi, Assad, Mubarak, Ali ...). They were also related to the savage consequences of the transfer of economic crisis from the central capitalist states to the periphery.

For more than two decades following the collapse of the eastern bloc capitalism's supremacy was unchallenged. Then in 2008 the economic crisis and the ensuing depression ended the dream. Many of the countries of the Middle East experienced the worst of it, fuelling further discontent, protests and uprisings. In the absence of a revolutionary left and at a time when secular opposition was weak in the Arab world, religious fundamentalism, combined with nationalism, gained support.

Opposition to dictators has always existed, so the dislike for Alawi rulers in a mainly Sunni state (Syria) or the hatred for Gaddafi's 'green revolution' was not new. The same goes for Egypt, where most people were opposed to Mubarak's dictatorship, and Syria, where the new dynastic dictators were reviled by large sections of the population. However, it was the fall in foreign-currency income from exports and tourism, the flight of industries and capital that lay behind many of the protests. Whatever their slogans, none of the Islamists in or out of power were in favour of a return to small-scale, national production. These countries were and remain part of a global capitalist order and the failure of political Islam to deliver on most of its promises from Egypt to Tunisia is now clear to all.

However, in Libya and Syria the fact that the dictators appeared to be anti-US (they were never anti-western, never mind anti-imperialist) has left the door open for a rainbow of rightwing forces masquerading as a revolutionary opposition. Of course, in both countries and especially in Syria there are genuine revolutionary, secular forces amongst the opposition, but at the moment it does not appear as if such forces have the upper hand. So it would be naive to believe that western intervention at whatever level

(short-term no-fly zones, military supplies to the opposition, non-military aid) will have any result other than to strengthen the forces aligned to the reactionary cliques in Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the Gulf states.

Classic social-imperialist theory argued in the 1990s that the development of capitalism in the periphery might be brutal, but it was necessary and ultimately in the interests of the working class as a class. Later during the invasion of Iraq and its subsequent occupation, the Eustonites and the AWL argued that the US army was protecting the Iraqi working class against barbaric Islamic forces and to call for the withdrawal of troops was therefore irresponsible. In reality, western intervention in Iraq boosted religious sectarianism, paving the way for an Islamic Shia government. It was this phenomenon that helped exacerbate sectarian antagonism between Shia Iran and its Sunni rivals in the Gulf and beyond. A conflict which is, by the way, very relevant to the current civil war in Syria. In addition, the refusal of a section of the left to call for the withdrawal of British troops from Iraq was detrimental to the struggles of the British working class against its main enemy, the UK capitalist state.

I should stress that Achcar cannot be associated with support for military intervention in Iraq. However, if we believe that freedom from the current barbaric situation can only be achieved through human emancipation in the imperialist countries as well as the countries of the periphery, and if we equate that emancipation with the victory of the international working class, then we ought to understand why one cannot place our hopes in "exceptions".

Even though we are living through the relative decline of US global domination, it remains the hegemon capitalist power. So the French/Italian call for military intervention in Libya was pie in the sky until the US got involved. At the end of the day, it is US interests that determine whether intervention is on the cards.

Contrary to what the supporters of intervention say, public opinion in the US, UK and indeed most countries can be manipulated in line with world capital's current requirements. As far as the United Nations and 'international law' are concerned, Marxists should have no illusions in either. We have seen occasional opposition to specific US policies in the UN. However, that body remains part and parcel of the US-dominated world order, an order which sees the security council authorising sanctions, bombing and invasion only when it suits America and its allies.

Anecdotal exaggerated reports about the influence and strength of secular revolutionary forces in Syria (or in the past in Libya) have nothing to do with supporting the Arab revolution. On the contrary, support for a genuine revolutionary process to overthrow Assad requires brutal realism: yes, we have to argue against Iran's military support for Assad, but we cannot turn a blind eye to the support given to the Syrian opposition by an array of reactionary states ranging from Qatar and Saudi Arabia to the US and UK. For sections of the British left the opposition in Syria

has been dominated by progressive, secular forces and the working class has played a leading role within it. But everything I have read points to the fact that the leadership of the Syrian National Coalition is divided, with Islamists and other reactionary forces vying for control.

Illusions

We on the left must be optimistic, but there is no point in being in denial. The sad saga of the Revolutionary Socialists in Egypt moving from supporting the Muslim Brotherhood to welcoming the army coup is an extreme example of where this can lead. Yes, the working class is fighting and there are many strikes. However, illusions in either political Islam or bourgeois democracy remain strong. The proletarian revolution is not just around the corner.

The same is true of Syria. The secular, radical opponents of the Assad regime may tell us that their allies are 'moderate' Islamists and that the 'extremists' are few and far between, yet almost every report tells us the opposite. Yes, there are democratic and working class forces, including amongst the Kurds, but there are also a large number of al Qaeda supporters, those aligned to the Muslim Brotherhood and of course the Assad regime is backed by Iran and Hezbollah. There are usually flaws in political analogies, but those employed by Achcar in support of intervention in Libya are frankly ridiculous. Here is what he writes:

"Just for the sake of argument, if we could turn back the wheel of history and go back to the period immediately preceding the Rwandan genocide, would we oppose a UN-authorized, western-led military intervention deployed in order to prevent it? Of course, many would say that the intervention by imperialist/foreign forces risks making a lot of victims. But can anyone in their right mind believe that western powers would have massacred between half a million and a million human beings in 100 days?"⁸

As Edward S Herman rightly points out in *Monthly Review*, "Achcar clearly swallows the standard narrative on the Rwanda 'genocide', in which the imperialist powers just 'stood by' ... while the Hutus supposedly massacred between 500,000 and a million Tutsis (and 'moderate' Hutus). But in fact the western powers didn't just stand by: they actively intervened throughout."⁹ The same is true of Syria and Libya. As in Rwanda, they are part of the problem and can have no part in any solution ●

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Notes

1. London 2010.
2. <http://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article1132>.
3. *L'Orient dans le sillage de la guerre impérialiste*, Lausanne, May 16-17 2003.
4. 'Leave Iran to shape its own future', joint letter to *The Guardian* July 15 2009.
5. 'Not taking into account the specific conditions', July 18. In this article Achcar was described as a "social-imperialist".
6. G Achcar, 'A legitimate and necessary debate from an anti-imperialist perspective', ZNet, March 25 2011.
7. <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/1652>
8. <http://mondediplo.com/openpage/libya-a-legitimate-and-necessary-debate-from-an>.
9. <http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2011/herman080411.html>.

OUR HISTORY

Further fortunes

While the emphasis inevitably shifted according to circumstances, writes **Lars T Lih**, for the Bolsheviks democracy was just as vital as centralism



ALEXANDER BOGDANOV



VLADIMIR ULYANOV



GRIGORII ZINOVIEV

A couple of months ago, I wrote an essay entitled 'Fortunes of a formula',¹ in which I presented some new documentary material that threw a surprising light on the famous formula of 'democratic centralism'. Material from Lenin's writings and from the Bolshevik activist and party historian Vladimir Nevsky made it clear that 'democratic centralism' was *not* a defining feature of Bolshevism. In fact, the formula was part of the party lexicon in only two, sharply distinct periods: in 1906-07, when political conditions were more free in tsarist Russia than ever before or since; and after 1920, when the Bolsheviks were faced with the unforeseen tasks of administering a large country.

Furthermore, the phrase 'democratic centralism' meant entirely different things in the two periods. In 1906-07, the emphasis was on 'democratic', and the concrete meaning of the term was genuine election of leadership bodies and wide, open discussion of party issues. From 1920 on, the emphasis was strongly on the 'centralism' deemed necessary in a party responsible for running the Soviet state.

Almost immediately after publishing this essay, I came across two further documents - one written in 1909 and the other in 1923 - that throw further eloquent light on the status of 'democratic centralism' as a Bolshevik value. Much to my relief, they corroborated the essential points made in my essay. They show even more strongly that 'democratic centralism' was tied to specific conditions rather than put forward as a general principle, and accordingly it meant very different things in the two periods.

The two documents presented also help us put 'democratic centralism' in the context of more basic Bolshevik organisational norms. The 1909 document uses the term *partiinnost*, 'party-ness', to sum up the basic Bolshevik approach. The 1923 document makes it clear that 'worker democracy' was a more fundamental goal, at least in aspiration, than 'democratic centralism'.

The earlier document from 1909 is the platform of the dissident Bolshevik group, *Vpered* (*Forward*). The platform was penned by Alexander Bogdanov, the leader and ideological mentor of *Vpered*. Naturally enough, most writers are exclusively interested in the *differences* between Bogdanov and Lenin, a topic to which whole books have been devoted. But Bogdanov's platform is also invaluable because of its description, contained in the earlier sections of the 40-page platform, of the essence of Bolshevism: that is, the consensus to which all Bolsheviks might subscribe. In his polemical response to this platform, Lenin did not deny the accuracy of Bogdanov's rendition of the ABCs of Bolshevism.² The excerpts translated below are taken from these meant-to-be-uncontroversial sections.

Recall that our aim is to find out what 'democratic centralism' was in the *Bolshevik* outlook. I believe that Lenin would endorse most of what Bogdanov says in the translated excerpts. But even if we decide that Lenin rejected the values put forth in these excerpts, we can be sure that one group of Bolsheviks - the *Vpered* group itself - believed in them. More, the group was confident that the Bolshevik faction as

a whole would subscribe to them.

The second of my two documents comes from a *Pravda* article written by Grigori Zinoviev on the occasion of the anniversary of the October revolution in November 1923. Zinoviev discussed various problems facing party life, one of which was insufficient democracy within the party, leading to alienation of the rank and file and lack of creative responses to new challenges. Zinoviev's style is one we can often find in his speeches and writings: a frank admission that things are not satisfactory, a mitigating plea that objective conditions are responsible, and a pledge to do better, especially as objective constraints relaxed their grip.³

Only after translating these documents did I see another continuity between them. Both Bogdanov and Zinoviev talk about the dangers of a mutual alienation growing up between the top rungs of the party and the lower rungs. Both use the same vocabulary of the *verkhi* vs the *nizy*, which might be translated as the 'higherarchy' vs the 'lowerarchy'.

In the fall of 1920, the problem of a split between the *verkhi* and the *nizy* became the subject of a widespread debate and discussion within the party. After the introduction of the New Economic Policy, a dissident group called *Rabochaia Pravda* (*Workers' Truth*) put forth the same concerns. In his 1923 *Pravda* article, Zinoviev does not hide the fact that he is trying to steal the thunder of *Rabochaia Pravda* by showing that the official party leadership was sensitive to the mutual alienation separating the people at the top rungs and the people on the bottom rungs of the party.

These two documents show us Bolsheviks talking to other Bolsheviks. Of course, Bogdanov and Zinoviev want to make specific and potentially controversial points, but in each case their argument starts by making appeals to common, consensual Bolshevik values. As shown by the excerpts I have translated and appended to these remarks, their comments on 'democratic centralism' come from the non-controversial part of their statements. Their points on this topic are made in passing, with no expectation that anyone would or could disagree.

Possibly a new alertness to the topic of 'democratic centralism' was responsible for my running across these documents so soon. But perhaps these things are sent to us with a purpose. Perhaps providence is telling me that these documents should be published as soon as possible. In any event, I have translated the relevant sections and prefaced them with short explanations.

Bogdanov 1909

Bogdanov wrote the *Vpered* platform in 1909 as a manifesto of the newly formed Bolshevik group. The controversies between this group and the more established Lenin group are not the issue here. The important fact for us is Bogdanov's effort in the early parts of the platform, prior to making specific suggestions for the reform of party life, to make a statement of general Bolshevik principles to which all Bolsheviks might subscribe.

Bogdanov's statement of principles has three sections. The first section, translated here, is about organisational principles. The second

section presents what I have elsewhere called "the old Bolshevik scenario"⁴: that is, the revolutionary strategy that called for class leadership by the socialist proletariat of the democratic peasantry. This section is a terse and telling statement of basic Bolshevik principles. The third section goes into territory more particular to the *Vpered* faction: namely, proletarian values vs bourgeois values.

Bogdanov starts off by stating that Bolshevism has no principles peculiar to itself - it is simply scientific socialism as applied to Russian conditions. This was undoubtedly Lenin's opinion as well. Bogdanov's further discussion is therefore closely tied to Russian developments.

This feature poses a problem for the translator. Bogdanov sets up a crucial opposition between *partiinnost* and *kruzhkovshchina*. I have chosen to keep these terms in Russian, since English translations such as, say, 'circle-ism' is hardly more informative for the unprepared reader. *Partiinost* can be rendered as 'the party principle', or 'thinking in terms of the party', or 'concern for the party as a functioning institution'. During the Soviet period, the term acquired quite different overtones.

Kruzhkovshchina derives from the word *kruzhok*, which can be rendered literally as 'little circle'. The very first underground social democratic organisations that arose in the 1890s consisted of these 'little circles'. The crucial fact about these *kruzhki* was that *they were not part of any larger organisation* - because, of course, there as yet existed no larger organisation for them to be part of. Thus

es of a formula

kruzhkovshchina can be defined as ‘the unfortunate and destructive habits of *kruzhki* life that manifest themselves after a national party organisation has been created’.

Bogdanov then goes on to narrate in allusive fashion the conflict in the party in 1903-04, after the Second Party Congress came up with a party programme and established what were meant to be generally recognised party authorities. His account confirms my own analysis in *Lenin rediscovered*, which is not too surprising, given that I relied heavily on Bogdanov’s own writings from 1903-04.⁵

One very important point about this episode in party life should be stressed. When we think of debates about ‘centralism’, we usually picture an insistence that local committees blindly follow orders handed down from above. We also assume that centralisers are leery of too much free discussion.

In the episode described by Bogdanov from 1903-04, the opposite is the case. What upset the Bolsheviks during this period was not that the party committee

in Podunsk was not toeing the party line. In his account, Bogdanov does not fill in the blanks with the proper names of the carriers of *kruzhkovshchina*, but if he did they would be Martov, Axelrod, Trotsky and Plekhanov, who joined them (for a while). It is these stellar luminaries of the party who are the rebels: the intellectual émigrés who refuse to work within the institutions set up by the Second Congress, who think they have an inherent right to leadership positions. *They* are the ones who try to prohibit free discussion: for example, by banning agitation for a Third Congress.

Bogdanov ends this episode by claiming that the Bolshevik concept of *partiinnost* was finally accepted by the party as a whole as a binding organisational norm (I came to the same conclusion in *Lenin rediscovered*).

He then goes on to make other claims for basic Bolshevik principles that certainly sound curious to modern ears: moving toward an elective leadership as soon as possible (What? Not a self-perpetuating elite?), working for larger party unity (What? Not hard-boiled splitting tactics?),

encouraging a variety of ideological tendencies (What? Not striving for a monolithic party line?). Bogdanov sets forth the familiar opposition between spontaneity and consciousness (or *stikhiinost* vs purposiveness), but he seems to be unaware that this opposition entails domination of party life by intellectuals, as we are so often assured by modern writers. In fact, he evidently feels it entails the opposite!

I have translated a few revealing paragraphs from later sections of the platform in which Bogdanov describes generally acknowledged party problems. I have not translated any of Bogdanov’s positive suggestions, since these are not germane to our present investigation. Note that the discussion of ‘democratic centralism’ is *not* in the section outlining basic Bolshevik principles.

Bogdanov’s remarks give a strong confirmation to the account in Nevsky’s party history that ‘democratic centralism’ was a set of practices that are possible *only* given a certain relaxation of police repression. ‘Democratic centralism’ in the period 1906-07 means *democratic* centralism, with

open and frequent worker assemblies clothed with real powers being the norm. As police pressure tightened after 1908, this kind of *democratic* centralism perforce shrivelled up.

Zinoviev 1923

Zinoviev’s article, ‘New tasks of the party’, appeared in *Pravda* in late 1923, a time when it was becoming increasingly clear that the Lenin era was drawing to a close and that the Bolsheviks had to reaffirm and/or modify basic principles for the future. His remarks can be paraphrased as follows:

We all want to increase “worker democracy” [*rabochaia demokratiia*] within the party. Of course, there are objective obstacles to a full implementation of this principle. We now live according to the principle of democratic *centralism* (Zinoviev’s emphasis). A party that administers a country such as Soviet Russia has to be centralised. Furthermore, within the party, there is a large gap in the cultural level between the leaders and the mass membership - that is, in basic

literacy, basic grounding in Marxism, specialised competence. The best party workers are engulfed, on party orders, in affairs of state and economic administration. The comrades left behind to attend exclusively to party work are not exactly top drawer.

As a result, ‘centralism’ in practice means today that decisions about all current issues are taken at the top and come to the mass of members in ready-made and unalterable form. Naturally this is an unsatisfactory state of affairs. We may have to live with it for the present, but we need to leave it behind as quickly as possible. Our ultimate goal is free and open discussion by *all* party members in a way that will allow us to apply the collective experience of the party to the pressing problems of the day.

So argues Zinoviev. There is a current of opinion today that likes to put the blame for overcentralised party organisations on something called ‘Zinovievism’. Zinoviev’s own presentation of his take on proper party organisational norms shows that the story - as usual - is more complicated ●

Translated documents

1. Bogdanov’s Vpered platform

Source: NS Antonova and NVD Dozdova (eds) Neizvestnyi Bogdanov (three volumes) Moscow 1995, IIts ‘Airo-XX’, 2:52-8

We understand Bolshevism as the strictest and most consistent application of the ideas of scientific socialism to Russian realities.

Bolshevism first appeared on the scene in the period when the organisational construction of our party was going through its first and most difficult stages. This construction was a very challenging affair not only because it was carried out in the underground, but for other, internal reasons. The party was created by uniting previously scattered and isolated *kruzhki* [‘circles’] that carried out artisan-level [*kustarnaia*] work in the localities. But the habits of the *kruzhok* stubbornly refused to die and continued to interfere with the consolidation of the party - all the more because at that time there was a predominance of intelligentsia elements over proletarian ones in the personnel of these organisations.

By their very nature, these intelligentsia elements experience difficulties in submitting to organisational discipline and were less capable of close party unity. And when the party programme was worked out [in 1903] and when by this means a strong basis for general party life was laid, the same *kruzhki* that had led the task of organisational unity - especially the émigré *kruzhki* - revealed, on the one hand, a disinclination to dissolve into the overall life of the newly established whole, and, on the other hand, a striving to retain for themselves the same leadership status in the future. In this way, the party was threatened by the domination of *kruzhkovshchina* in a new guise, with the most authoritative voices in the party energetically supporting it.

It was then that Bolshevism stepped forward with its organisational slogans. It demanded that the interests of the cause should be put higher than any authorities, that *partiinnost* should be

placed higher than *kruzhki* relations, and also that the Russian section of the party should receive a predominating influence over the sections outside the borders. Bolshevism had to fight a long struggle for these organisational ideas. Nevertheless, even if they had not been fully incorporated in the actual life of the party still today, they are, formally at least, recognised now by everybody.

When the Bolsheviks insisted on *partiinnost* as against *kruzhkovshchina*, they certainly did not understand *partiinnost* simply as discipline and subordination to duly constituted party centres, but mainly as making broad and organisation-wide decisions about all issues of party life. Naturally, just as soon as the possibility opened up of moving the establishment of party organisations themselves away from the previous closed forms of the underground to more democratic forms, Bolshevism immediately made the move: in 1905 the Bolsheviks were the first to call an all-Russian conference, in which a significant majority of delegates was elected directly by the organised workers.

Inasmuch as they were defenders of *partiinnost*, Bolshevism at all times also took the lead in the gathering-in of the party: the Bolsheviks carried out unification with various national organisations, and they have always supported the unity of party work.

Another very important aspect of the organisational question was an object of internal struggle within our party: should the basis of the party be the purposive [or ‘conscious’], advanced elements of the fighting proletariat, or, for the sake of a broader development, should we construct the party directly out of the *stikhiinyi* [or ‘spontaneous’] mass worker movement? The supporters of this second possibility believe that we should adapt the organisation as a whole to the aspirations and the understanding of the proletarian mass [*nizy*], that even the party programme should be worked out at a general worker congress, etc.

Bolshevism opposes such views: it believes that subordinating social democracy to the moods of the proletarian mass [*nizy*] that is just

entering the struggle is incorrect and unreasonable. Bolsheviks claim that social democracy is first of all the party of the *purposive* revolutionary proletariat, one that relies on the whole experience of international socialism. Social democracy should raise the worker masses up from the *stikhiinnyi* movement to the level of higher socialist purposiveness - *not* lower its own organisation and tasks to this *stikhiinyi* movement. This and no other is what strict scientific socialism means for us, since it aspires to organise the worker movement in its higher forms, and to lead the movement with the highest possible level of planned forethought attainable under the circumstances [...]

Organisational question

Since 1906 our party has been built up on the principle of democratic centralism: that is, the leading collectives - starting with factory committees and ending with the central committee - are elected by assemblies of the organised workers. Since we find this principle to be completely correct, we think it should be carried out in future as widely as possible. Since 1907, however, when the reaction became dominant in the country, the implementation of democratic centralism has lost momentum. Police repression and the use of provocateurs has created enormous difficulties in setting up assemblies of organised workers of any size at all, so that, for example, city committees have begun to keep up their membership, not by elections by the members at [open] conferences, but by election by district committees, and sometimes even by way of cooption.

Thanks to all this, the ties between the ‘lower’ levels of the organisation with the ‘higher’ levels [*nizy* vs *verkhi*] have been weakened: the ‘lower’ levels are cut off from general party life, and the life of the ‘higher’ levels has been extraordinarily weakened, as we all know [...]

Various ideological [*ideinyi*] tendencies exist in any strong and viable party; they are the guarantee

of its growth and development. They find their expression in specific publications [literally, ‘in literary groups’], in freely created associations of fellow thinkers at congresses, conferences, etc. But in our party today they have taken on another and completely abnormal form: parties within the party, a situation that destroys the general unity of our work. Indeed, under present circumstances, they interfere with the free development even of the ideological tendencies themselves.

This state of affairs came about due to the fact that in our case the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks [as distinct factions] arose on the ground of an organisational split [in 1903-04]. This split was completed even before the ideological distinction of the two sides became fully defined. The factions became fortified in separate organisations that the party to this day has not been able to dissolve into itself [...]

2. Zinoviev, ‘New tasks of the party’

Source: Pravda November 7 1923

In our own internal party life, we lately undoubtedly seem to be becalmed, and even outright stagnation can be observed in places. If we wish to carry out the tasks discussed earlier in even a minimally satisfactory way, or to show ourselves capable of responding to those international events that grab all our attention at present, then we must see to it *that the internal life of the party becomes much more intensive. We must see to it that the worker democracy inside the party about which we talk so much takes on to a greater extent real flesh and blood.*

Our main misfortune is that often practically all of the most important issues come to us from the top to the bottom *already decided*. This narrows the creativity of the whole mass of party members and diminishes the independent activity [*samodeiatelnost*] of the ‘lower’ [*nizy*] party cells. To a large extent, of course, this is inevitable. Our party is based on the principle of democratic *centralism*. Given that it

administers a country such as ours, the Russian Communist Party cannot help being organised in a strictly centralised way. But to a very significant extent, this fact is explained by the way that the cultural-political level of the whole mass of party members lags so very strongly behind the level of its leadership strata. Many of our best party officials - at the behest of the party - are completely occupied with economic and administrative work, and so have no or very little possibility of plunging into mass party work among wide strata of the workers. Some of the comrades who are posted exclusively to party work are not always able to respond adequately to the new and huge demands on them that result from the growing exigencies of the masses. The party must devote all attention to these tasks, ones that have a predominant significance at present [...]

Without indulging in superfluous bombast about the sanctity of the principle of worker democracy, it is imperative that worker democracy should actually be applied within the party, that free discussion within the party on general political, economic and other issues be intensified. In particular, we must draw the attention of the rank-and-file members of our party to the burning questions of industrial life.

The writer of these lines is fully aware of the fact that the present article has only put forth these questions without solving them. A genuine solution of these questions will come about only as a result of an exchange of opinions within our party. By summing up the collective experience of our party, we will discover those practical measures that will lead us to our goal [...]

Notes

1. *Weekly Worker* April 11 2013.
2. For Lenin’s main response, see www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1910/np/i.htm#v16pp74-197. The Historical Materialism Book Series has announced a projected 10-volume edition of English translations of Bogdanov’s writings; for details, see <http://bogdanovlibrary.org>.
3. For further examples, see my essay, ‘Zinoviev: populist Leninist’, reprinted in B Lewis and LT Lih *Head to head in Halle* London 2011.
4. See ‘How Lenin’s party became (Bolshevik)’ *Weekly Worker* May 17 2012.
5. LT Lih *Lenin rediscovered* Leiden 2006, chapter 8.

CULTURE WARS



The man and the machine

Calculated pardon

The Alan Turing case exposes both the flexibility of the political establishment and its hypocrisy, argues Eddie Ford

The man famous for cracking the Nazis' 'unbreakable' Enigma code at Bletchley Park, Alan Turing, is due to be given a posthumous pardon. Lord Sharkey, a Liberal Democrat peer, started the ball rolling with a private member's bill and on July 19 - to the surprise of many - the government indicated that it would throw its weight behind the move. Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, a Conservative whip, said the government would table the third reading of the Alan Turing (Statutory Pardon) Bill in the Lords at the end of October and if no amendments are made the bill would have a "speedy passage" to the House of Commons. An outbreak of consensus.

In many respects the plan to pardon Turing represents a fairly major shift in the government's position. Only last year the government declined to grant pardons to the 49,000 gay men, all now dead, who were convicted under section 11 of the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act - including Turing and Oscar Wilde.

Turing was a sexually active and shamelessly gay man (a fact known amongst his circle of friends) at a time when homosexuality was illegal and widely considered to be a perversion best not talked about. Many, of course, in the medical profession thought that this disturbing mental illness could be cured with suitable treatment. Turing was convicted of "gross indecency" in 1952 after starting a relationship with a 19-year-old man. In order to avoid going to prison, he was forced to undergo 'chemical castration'. He was injected with oestrogen (female hormones), which was supposed to make him behave in a socially acceptable manner. But his libido remained intact and he began travelling abroad in search of 'safe sex', especially Norway. He eventually committed suicide in June 1954 by

eating an apple laced with cyanide - though some have argued, not entirely convincingly, that his death was an accident caused by his careless storage of laboratory chemicals.¹

The 1940s and 50s were a contradictory period in British history. During World War II, thousands of gay servicemen had their sexuality quietly overlooked by commanding officers. Army psychologists were routinely told to turn a blind eye if an officer made a private admission of homosexuality. No need to undermine morale - after all, there was a war to fight and win. However, these 'heroes' were forced to return to a life of secrecy and persecution. Public disclosure of their sexual orientation might well lead to a prison sentence - unless an obliging police officer was happy to be bribed to keep your little secret quiet.

Not to be forgotten also was the atmosphere of moral panic at the time about 'homosexual spies' and Soviet entrapment techniques because of the revelations of Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean, exposed as KGB double agents. Reds under the bed - and in the MI6 bed too. In the United States of this time, furthermore, there was the similar but far more irrational 'Lavender scare', which ran parallel with McCarthyism. In 1950, US under-secretary of state John Peurifoy announced that the state department had "allowed" 91 homosexuals (or 'lavender lads') to resign.²

Readers will no doubt recall that in 2009 Gordon Brown issued an official "apology" for the treatment meted out to Turing. Sadly you can never turn the clock back, he said. Although Turing had been "dealt with under the law of the time" and in accordance with the correct procedure, it was still "utterly unfair" - he had "deserved so much better". Therefore on behalf of the British government, Brown declared

he was "deeply sorry".

Nevertheless, the campaign for a full pardon gathered steam. On December 14 2012, Stephen Hawking, astronomer royal Lord Rees and nine other eminent signatories wrote a joint letter to *The Daily Telegraph* urging David Cameron to "formally forgive this British hero", who was also "one of the most brilliant mathematicians of the modern era". Denying that it would set a precedent, they added it was about time his reputation went "unblemished". Peter Tatchell of Outrage went one step further, arguing that Turing deserved a "posthumous knighthood".

During the debate in the upper house, Lord Ahmad said the government had "great sympathy" with the calls to pardon Turing, given his "outstanding achievements" - he described Turing as "one of the fathers, if not the father, of computer science". Similarly, Baroness Trumpington - a Tory peer who worked at Bletchley Park during the war - was "certain" that, but for his work, "we would have lost the war through starvation" (interestingly, Trumpington is a veteran opponent of legislative equality for gay people). And Liberal Democrat Lord Sharkey reminded us again that Turing was a "hero" and a "very great man".

Almost the entire debate has been framed in such a way, with repeated emphasis on how Turing was not only a war hero, but an outstanding genius. Definitely a cut above the rest of us. Perhaps summing up this venerative attitude, Steven Pinker, a Harvard professor and popular science author, recently wrote: "It would be an exaggeration to say that the British mathematician, Alan Turing, explained the nature of logical and mathematical reasoning, invented the digital computer, solved the mind-

body problem, and saved western civilisation. But it would not be much of an exaggeration."³

Of course, only an ignoramus would deny Turing's exceptional scientific achievements. Whilst working at Bletchley Park, his incredible 'bombe' machine - an electromechanical device - was able to rapidly decode the 158 million, million, million variations used by the Nazis in their commands through the creation of a prototype high-speed processor. In 1936 he wrote a seminal paper called 'On computable numbers, with an application to the *Entscheidungsproblem*' (decision problem), detailing his notion of a "universal computing machine". Essentially, he provided a rough blueprint for what would later become the electronic digital computer.

In his later years he also began extensive research into the chemical basis of morphogenesis, one of three fundamental aspects of developmental biology, along with the control of cell growth and cellular differentiation. Not only that: Turing predicted the existence of oscillating chemical reactions - which were actually observed for the first time in the 1960s. And plenty more besides.

But central to the sheer volume and intensity of the praise heaped upon Turing is the fact that it was a *Briton* who invented the computer and laid the basis for the worldwide web, and it was *British ingenuity* that rescued the world from Nazi tyranny, etc. Get the picture? Turing is now almost up there with Winston Churchill in the pantheon of national heroes. Hypocritically, Turing is being politically used to promote a narrow nationalist agenda.

There is another dimension to the Turing question which is far more welcome, however. Namely, the steady *normalisation* of homosexuality in

society. No longer does being gay mean ostracism or criminal charges. Nowadays, even members of the Dáil in Ireland can mention they are gay without generating an uproar - a significant shift in societal attitudes. And virtually no-one in official Britain would bat an eyelid if an MP or government minister announced they were gay - so what? Stop boring us and get on with it.

Just as a form of anti-racism has been incorporated into official bourgeois ideology, the state now being institutionally *anti-racist*, the same goes for anti-homophobia - despite all the loud fuss about gay marriage that emanated from the more antediluvian sections of the petty bourgeoisie and the church. The idea that the capitalist ruling class is inherently racist or homophobic no longer holds water.

Given that we are witnessing a progressive phenomenon, the retreat of anti-gay bigotry, communists would not dismiss the moves to pardon Turing as irrelevant. That would be foolish. It is obviously of some significance that the government has bowed to public opinion. Equally though, it also a matter of self-interest. To put it at its most crude level possible, there are just not enough votes in gay-bashing and homophobia - a prejudice that increasing numbers of British people, especially younger ones, find utterly alien ●

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Notes

1. www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-18561092.
2. www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/50s/gays-in-govt.html.
3. S Pinker *The better angels of our nature: why violence has declined* New York 2011. The book is essentially a Hobbesian-cum-Whiggish version of history, in which society is becoming progressively more civilised and peaceful, thanks to the marvels of "strong government" and capitalism.

SPORT

Overachieving at last

The British have been surprised by a series of sporting successes. **Harley Filben** considers sport's relationship to nationalism



Andy Murray: flagging

There is something wrong with the British summer this year.

For a start, the sun is actually shining for more than three hours at a time. And it is shining, for once, on our fair nation's sporting fortune. The latest triumph is Chris Froome's victory in the Tour de France (following Bradley Wiggins in 2012). Just two weeks before that there was Andy Murray. The Scottish tennis prodigy became the first Briton to win the men's singles title at Wimbledon after an increasingly farcical 77-year drought, clobbering Novak Djokovic in straight sets. The Welsh-heavy British and Irish Lions team had already sealed their victory over Australia by way of a crushing third-test performance.

Australians barely had time to catch their breath before the start of the Ashes and, while they ran England perilously close in the first test at Trent Bridge, the Australian cricketers suffered an even worse humiliation at Lords than their rugby-playing compatriots did in Sydney. Two matches in, the series is all but wrapped up in England's favour, and the pre-series whispers of a 5-0 whitewash have become cacophonous.

What the hell is going on? There may be something of an optical illusion at work - Murray, it is true, is an exceptionally talented tennis player, but it is hard to escape the fact that the Australian teams are at something of a low ebb. Their cricketers, in particular, appear to be in the throes of dressing-room recriminations, and have made a basically adequate England side look superhuman by comparison with their ineptitude. It is also, of course, an even-numbered year, so the home nations' dire football sides will not spoil the party.

Other views are available. Mark Perryman, the former Eurocommunist hatchet man, contributes a piece on Murray's victory to the *Morning Star* (July 11), and it is every bit as good as the tense reunification of two wings of 'official communist' degeneration would lead you to expect. Perryman, as the head honcho of the once-modish Philosophy Football brand, may know a thing or two about football. What is clear from his piece in the *Star* is that he knows nothing at all about anything else.

"The Lions' triumph doesn't fit into a previously cosy version of sports nationalism. Those selected were elite rugby players, of course, but entirely unused to playing together

as a team until they go on tour," he sagely informs us - and at one stroke, *British* nationalism, inclusive of the Irish ascendancy that historically dominated Irish rugby in its early days, disappears. How convenient! "This moves us away from a traditional - or certainly English-focused - version of Britishness" - as if the Lions tours were some sort of novelty of 2013 ...

As far as the tennis goes, there are more clangers to come. Noting that both Alex Salmond and David Cameron were fighting over reflected glory from Murray's *tour de force*, Perryman claims that "nobody was very much interested in what either had to say. Tennis, like most individual sports, doesn't really do nationalism in the way team sports do. The story becomes a personal one - of family, sacrifice, talent spotted and developed, disappointments turned into a glorious sunny July afternoon of triumph." Funny, then, that the media, and the British tennis-loving population in general, failed to celebrate Roger Federer's equally impressive performance to defeat Murray in four sets last year.

After a few token twitches against racism and sexism, which are so facile as to be beneath examination, Perryman looks forward to "a more multi-sports summer, enabling a much greater variety of ways to identify with what sport and nation means to us". This betrays, alas, a *very* (white) English-focused view of sport - as if a summer rugby tour was ever going to escape notice in the sport's working class south Wales heartlands, as if the substantial south Asian population in Britain fails to notice when there's cricket on ... Perryman, on the whole, writes as if he has only just discovered sports other than football, and presumes to speak for all Britain in his ignorance.

Beyond such details, there is a bigger picture he equally misses. The place of sport in the national psyche - the English national psyche in particular - is an odd one. There is no escaping the nationalist aspect of sport culture; a big event, especially in football, is a chance to fly the flag, and flying the flag is reciprocally a means of participation in the sport. Even the grammar of bar-room chatter - 'We really showed those Aussies,' say England supporters who would not know which end of a cricket bat to hold - testifies to the ritualised participation in a small national story.

This leads some to fear sport is inherently contaminated by

bilious national chauvinism, but this is wrong-headed. There were no murderous brawls between the British and Australian expats when the Lions series was on; an England-India test match does not generally lead to racist violence in east London. Even football casuals on a foreign rampage are more interested in having a fight than flying the flag (an interest local firms are often more than willing to indulge).

The nationalism of sport is less xenophobic than theatrical; it unites fascists like the English Defence League with *Guardian* journalists and (truth be told) most on the far left too. Even those who support 'anyone but England' are, by virtue of their naive inversion, part of the ritual. It is hardly the strongest tie to the nation, but it provides a peculiarly participatory means of engaging in a national ritual.

It will suffice to compare it with the recent birth of a royal heir - while, no doubt, many are following the oppressively unblinking news coverage of the Windsor scion, and even thronging together in public places in celebration, the event remains something that is fed to a basically passive audience. Nobody says that 'we' produced a jolly nice baby, referring to the young prince. Nobody deconstructs tactical blunders on the part of the maternity nurses over a few pints. There is nothing to do but observe that a woman has successfully given birth to a child, maybe raise a glass and move on.

Sport afflicts the English in a particular way, not least because a good deal of world sport has its origins in the English public school system. Football, the most universally played and understood sport in the world; rugby and cricket, more limited to British ex-colonies, but still (especially in the case of cricket) mass cultural phenomena - all are products of the English upper classes. The modern Olympic Games were invented by a Frenchman, but explicitly modelled on the gentleman-amateur ethos of the English public school.

The social role of these sports has changed, from being principally a means of socialising the ruling establishment to mass culture; and so, obviously, has Britain's place in the world. The interminable rubbishness of British sporting endeavour hooks in neatly to the collapse of British world hegemony. It is often joked that the empire was an extremely bloody way to teach the oppressed peoples of the world how to beat us at cricket; that the relative competence of the English cricket team in the last decade feels somehow *wrong*, or at least exceptional, representing a mismatch with the national narrative.

Scratch the surface, however, and the reasons for success are rather more mundane. The solid British showing at last year's Olympics, for a start, is straightforwardly a function of London 2012's bottomless budget. Countless millions were thrown at elite sport to ensure a *respectable* showing, at least, although nobody seriously entertained competing with America and China, for whom success in such matters is pretty much a matter of high-level foreign policy.

Much was made of Mo Farah, the Somali-born long-distance runner and putative face of modern multicultural Britain; but most medal winners were

public school-educated, and thus had access to better sport facilities and at an earlier stage. The cricket team's turnaround, meanwhile, coincided with a load more money being thrown into the national side by the England and Wales Cricket Board. The English football team remains dire because the Football Association cannot possibly compete in terms of financial incentives for players and managers with the billionaires to whom they have whored out the top tiers of the game.

At the base, atrophy is everywhere. Despite its fierce following, the Welsh rugby grassroots are dried out -

facilities are closing, and village teams are shutting up shop. More generally, playing fields and sports grounds up and down the country are being sold off to predatory developers, in the service of a zombified property boom and supermarket chains.

I said that sport spectatorship is participatory, but that is a half-truth. It is more participatory, obviously, to play sport yourself. Frankly, it makes you a better spectator, if nothing else. Decaying capitalism offers us a world in which, along with all its other horrors, talking about elite sport is the closest we will come to being a part of it ●

Summer Offensive Frippery

If the whole royal baby media-fest has sparked a republican/proletarian fury in you, what more satisfying way to vent your disgust than by making a donation to this year's Summer Offensive? The SO is, of course, the annual fund drive of the Communist Party - a consistently militant republican trend in the workers' movement.

This week, £1,489 was added to the SO running total, taking us to £11,309 - a solid achievement, but still some way off our £30k minimum target, due on August 18 (and also, readers may care to reflect, over £1,000 shy of the cost of a *two-day* stay in the Lindo maternity ward, where Kate has just delivered - £6,265 per night, apparently). Special mention to comrade SK this week, who delivered two whopping £200-plus amounts to party and paper coffers. Thanks also to RE (£110), GD (£100), comrades at the regular London Communist Forum who have also contributed £100 over the past period, and the numerous other supporters of the campaign who have chipped in with smaller amounts.

Readers will be relieved - but not particularly surprised - that this issue of the *Weekly Worker* does not come with a full-colour six-page pullout souvenir special on the royal birth. No doubt, many republicans - let alone Marxists - will be heartily sick by now of the nauseating stream of pro-monarchy sewage the mainstream media has released into the environment. Consequently, I have no doubt that comrades will have a measure of sympathy with the front page of the current issue of *Private Eye* (July 26-August 8) - "Woman has baby: inside, some other stuff".

On the left, the *Morning Star* has cornered the market in this sort of downbeat reportage of all things royal - 'Police deal with traffic disruption in central London' is normally its template for coverage of House of Windsor nuptials, funerals and other monarchical knees-ups. It is hard not to feel a modicum of sympathy for this raspberry to the saturation pro-establishment bilge that mainstream hacks are churning out in such prodigious quantities. However, the truth is that these sorts of responses speak to a key political weakness of the contemporary revolutionary left

- its narrow, sometimes sub-political, economism.

In a Welsh Socialist Alliance day school in the early noughties, I recall Charlie Kimber - a Socialist Workers Party luminary who has featured heavily in these pages over the past period - simply dismissing the whole institution of the monarchy as "frrippery": some ostentatious, but ultimately irrelevant adornment at the head of the British state. For most of the left republicanism is regarded at best as a side issue, a diversion from the main job of what is projected as *the* "class struggle" - strikes and campaigns over issues such as cuts, the NHS, etc. The struggle to abolish the monarchy is left either to 'Here's my bum, queen mum'-style anarcho-clowning or the eminently safe bourgeois republicanism of *The Guardian*.

In fact, the little sprog that has just slid into the world in the aforementioned private Lindo maternity wing is third in line to a throne that is not simply some expensive relic of a former age. It actually wields enormous power at the centre of a monarchical system of government that - at every level of its state apparatus - hollows out democracy and negates control from below. That's why this paper *does* cover issues in the realm of high politics - the constitutional arrangements of the state, the monarchy, the act of union, self-determination for Scotland and Wales, etc. This is something that causes some puzzlement amongst comrades on much of the rest of the left - this stuff is 'bourgeois', not proper 'working class' politics, after all. This type of programmatic philistine is part of what needs to be swept away in the cultural revolution on the revolutionary left that this publication and the website it powers consistently fights for (there were 10,846 readers online last week, by the way).

So, what better way to 'celebrate' the birth of a new brand new royal than by pushing our SO total along, comrades? ●

Mark Fischer

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IRELAND

Not for the public domain

Craig Murphy, a member of the Socialist Party in Ireland, reports on the resignation of four prominent comrades and the dishonest response of the leadership



Clare Daly and Joe Higgins: happier times

On Sunday July 7 an aggregate meeting of the Socialist Party (Committee for a Workers' International Ireland) was held in Wynn's Hotel, Dublin to discuss the resignation of four comrades.

Notably these comrades had individually emailed letters of resignation to the party staff. Moreover those resigning had occupied positions of considerable importance: Jimmy Dignam had worked in Joe Higgins' office in parliament; Richard O'Hara had been branch secretary in the Swords branch in north Dublin during the Clare Daly debacle which dogged the SP throughout the second half of last year and worked full-time in parliament; Andrew Phelan had been involved in forming the independent Fightback group in the Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland (outside party stricture); and Megan Ní Ghabhláin had similarly been involved in organising a militant opposition to Croke Park 2¹ in the Irish National Teachers' Organisation, which is one of the two largest teachers' unions in Ireland. Hence their resignations could not pass without mention.

That the comrades had written letters detailing their differences and that an aggregate meeting had been organised to discuss the resignations had been made known to me at the previous branch meeting. The letters themselves, however, were not to be revealed to members until the Sunday aggregate for fear they would "fall into the public domain".

When I arrived at Wynn's on Sunday I began summarising the most salient arguments of O'Hara's letter - as his arguments were the most developed - as soon as I received a copy. Summarisation was compelled, as members were not allowed to keep their copies - the absurdity of having a 'democratic discussion' regarding

the resignation letters, while not being allowed to view the letters beforehand and retain them afterward, unfortunately seemed to be lost on the rest of the room. Clearly the intention of holding the meeting was to reassure the SP's uninformed membership of the infallibility of the leadership and pre-empt any further dissension.

With 60 members in attendance, the meeting began with a 40-minute lead-off by Kevin McLoughlin, the SP general secretary. McLoughlin's talk did not address primarily the content of the resignation letters. Instead, as was his stated intention, he focused on the 'Irish context' in which the comrades resigned (as opposed to the hallowed Egyptian context). In his view the decisions to resign were only explicable against this background: the difficulty of party-building since the crisis, the collapse of the United Left Alliance (ULA),² the failure of the Campaign Against Household and Water Taxes (CAHWT) to prevent the implementation of the Property Tax and the rollback of trade union opposition to 'Croke Park 2' represented by the Haddington Road agreement.³

As I had quickly read the letters prior to the beginning of the meeting, it swiftly became clear to me that in concentrating on the Irish background to the resignations, McLoughlin was attempting to provide an explanation of the comrades' decisions to resign utterly removed from the reasons given. And so the resigned comrades were variously described as being disheartened or demoralised by the trials of the Irish situation (due no doubt, of course, to their inability to see the dazzling militancy of the Egyptian masses). Furthermore, given that those who resigned had not participated in party activity for some time before their resignations, their disagreements with the party were reduced to being the result of inactivity

itself. This crude, false judgement distorts the reality that the inactivity and resignation of comrades were both products of a common disillusionment with the nature and conduct of the SP itself. Moreover, it is intended to consign the reasons for withdrawal from party activity and ultimately resignation to the realm of psychological rationalisation; not political disagreement.

The little of the content of the letters McLoughlin did address was done in an unprincipled manner. For example, Richard O'Hara's criticism of the use of the slate system in national committee elections, on the grounds that it institutionalises conformity amongst the NC and, alongside the secrecy of NC and executive committee meetings, produces unaccountability of the leadership to the membership of the party. McLoughlin dismissed such reasoning by pointing out that the slate system used by the SP was also subject to candidate nominations by individual members of the party to the slate, which will then be considered by the outgoing leadership. As the reader has no doubt recognised, this is merely an evasive, incidental argument and does not amount to a principled defence of the use of a slate system. As for the papal secrecy of NC and EC meetings, the general secretary had nothing to say.

Going further still, McLoughlin incredibly construed O'Hara's criticism of the slate system as an attack on the very concept of leadership and party, when he referred to the departed comrades as pandering to an "anarcho mood that's out there". This falsification was to be parroted by almost every other speaker during the course of the meeting.

Sophisms

When the floor was opened for discussion, the circumlocutions of McLoughlin gave way to a slew of

vulgar denunciations. In general, I will not waste the reader's time chronicling who said what exactly; a worthless exercise, given that it all congealed into a droning three-hour morass of philistine pontification. Rather I will detail the recurring sophisms which were used, first to adulterate and then to speciously dispense with the protests of the resigned comrades, in a reprehensible, straw-man fashion.

The resigned comrades were repeatedly accused of abandoning the *revolutionary party*. The evidence for this being furnished by O'Hara's confession: "Ultimately I do not regard myself as a Trotskyist." The various speakers took this as O'Hara's self-imposed *fall from grace*, the guilt of which had driven him, inevitably, away from any faith in the party of revolution. Tony Saunois from the CWI's international secretariat jolted to the conclusion that all the arguments of the resigned are just "rationalisations for their abandonment of Trotskyism". Saunois also did not miss the opportunity to reaffirm the laity, by explaining that, even though the ULA and CAHWT had been failures, they were but a foretaste of things to come. After all 'the crisis' is still with us.

Should we dare look, however, to the writing of the heretic O'Hara we would find he had "been in the process of clarifying [his] thoughts on what type of party is needed in the struggle to overthrow capitalism and [had] come to the conclusion that the Socialist Party cannot serve as this party". Moreover, "In recent years, there has been a large amount of scholarship on Leninism and Bolshevism and its misinterpretation by those on the left and right." He continued: "I believe that a large part of the answer to failures of the left lies here. The actual experience of the Bolshevik Party needs to be rediscovered and transplanted to a modern context in order to rebuild a genuine revolutionary socialist party" - a veritable Hydra of counterrevolution indeed. As for the historical research - a reference, of course, to the work of Lars T Lih - it was dismissed from the floor as the preserve of academics, not genuine class warriors.

And so it continued, with the departed comrades having the charge of temporising with reformism added to their ahistorical, anarchistic anti-Trotskyism. Since this is merely the corollary of the supposed abandonment of the *revolutionary party*, it does not merit serious discussion.

Take note, however, of the SP's complete inability to recognise any differing Marxist conception of revolution and revolutionary politics. Mind you, this is not to give the SP the credit of having any clear understanding of what a socialist revolution is and what it entails (in the SP to articulate the need for such an understanding would be considered 'dogmatic' and 'ultra-leftist'). But it does give us an insight into the monolithic sectarianism of the SP, where '*revolutionary*' means us and '*reformist*' means them. Without any recognition of the political tasks of a Communist Party the meaning of these words will continue to be consigned to the realm of sectarian mudslinging (alongside such shibboleths as 'dialectical and undialectical thinking').

Abstract and concrete

The greatest refusal to hear criticism, however, was announced with claims

that O'Hara's letter contained too many "abstract generalisations" and not enough "concrete criticisms" of the party. Noting the bourgeois prejudice here (where 'abstract' equals 'bad' and 'concrete' equals 'good'), let us take a look at some of O'Hara's frightful abstractions:

- "... fundamentally I do not feel the party is a truly democratic organisation that it is built in a way that will allow it to grow, nor do I feel that is capable of dealing with the low level of political and class consciousness at the moment and rebuilding the workers' movement."

- "I feel there is a serious democratic deficit within the Socialist Party. Slates are an inappropriate way of electing a leadership. No minutes, records of votes or written reports of national committee or executive committee meetings are distributed. It is impossible for ordinary members to know which members of the leadership bodies are playing a positive role and which ones you might agree or disagree with on a particular issue."

- "Branch democracy is also non-existent. In essence, the full-timers pick those people that they think are most equipped to build the party in a particular way and install them as the branch committee, ultimately making the most important decisions about how the branch is run, if not all the finer details."

The true terror of the word 'democracy' here lies not in abstraction, but that it could be misunderstood as a majority of the membership having control over the direction and operation of the SP. Sadly the term was dismissed from the floor as being "just a phrase".

- "Discussion, debate and disagreement around serious issues of perspectives, tactics and theory have to be encouraged within the party. They simply are not and I do not believe they ever will be."

- "There is a doctrinal and dogmatic approach to theory which generally consists of new recruits having the politics of the party 'explained' to them enough times until they agree."

- "Rosa [the SP-sponsored campaign for Reproductive rights, against Oppression, Sexism and Austerity] is a front, in the style of the SWP, designed to bring potential recruits closer to the party". (Rosa, we were assured, was no front, as the SP's website openly acknowledged that it was the property of the party.)

- "There are other issues that I find deeply problematic: our (lack of) trade union work, our perspectives and attitude to the campaign against the property tax (which struck me as deeply unrealistic); I also think the paper is extremely poor - a low level of politics and lack of theory, the lack of real input about the content from ordinary members and the drab and repetitive nature of the articles".

But where is O'Hara going with all this? After all, it is just 'all so complex'. For, you see, the lack of democracy in the SP is not related to the absence of discussion within the SP, which has nothing to do with the dogmatic approach to theory foisted upon the membership, which has no bearing to the abysmal quality of the paper to which members cannot contribute, and none of these things can be associated with the adoption of deeply unrealistic positions or the establishment of sectarian fronts over which the membership has no control.

For the party apparatus to

What we fight for

recognise the connections between these ‘issues’ would be to recognise that *they* are responsible for the inability of the Socialist Party to grow beyond anything but a sect. It is their institutionalised conduct of control and obedience which ensures that the SP will always drive away members - whose participation in activity is always voluntary - as soon as they begin to think critically: ie, for themselves.

SP failings

1. There exist no means for members to alter the course of the organisation. Decisions are made by the executive committee, which is elected from the national committee, which, though elected by the membership, will rarely be opposed due to the slate system. Once the executive’s decisions are made, they are passed on to the branch committees, which, after deciding how the branch is to enact the refined will of the EC, initiate a branch ‘discussion’ on the activity the branch members are expected to perform. It is not a coincidence that the phrase ‘flesh out’ is often used as a synonym for discussion in the SP. Members are not deciding on positions and activity, but rather are simply concretising what has already been decided.
2. Should a comrade object to the new course in the midst of a branch meeting, the party staffer present will typically take them aside and offer them the opportunity of a private meeting in the SP’s offices, where they will have the party line explained to them *ad nauseum*. The SP’s high turnover of membership - an effect of the executive’s usurpation of all strategic decision-making - means that, should the dissenting comrade persist, they will find themselves isolated in the branch, surrounded by inexperienced and uncritical new comrades. The only recourse, it seems, is resignation.
3. If I may offer a criticism of my own of O’Hara’s letter, I take issue with his reference to the SP’s “over-emphasis on agreement with the finer details of the revolutionary programme”.

Similarly two other resigned comrades expressed sentiments of basic programmatic agreement and even concern for the pillorying of the SP’s programme, due no doubt to its participation in the ULA and CAHWT (and, perhaps more simply, parliament). While O’Hara was being diplomatic, I find all three statements to be founded on the falsehood that the SP actually *has* a programme. No such programme exists.

A Marxist programme would be a document which, having been produced and deliberated upon by all members of the party, would outline the general views and ambitions of communism - abolition of the state, of classes, of the law of value, of patriarchy and women’s oppression, all of which are to give way to the free development of the individual as the condition of the free development of humanity, productively, sexually, intellectually. Alongside this would appear a list of concrete demands, usually divided into a political section, the purpose of which is to outline the revolutionary democratic means by which the rule of the capitalist class (the rule of law) shall be supplanted by the workers’ republic (the rule of the majority); and an economic section, which attempts, through the reality of struggle, to improve the position of the working class under capitalism, to aid the pre-socialist organisation of labour and to develop the workers’ understanding of themselves as a class.

4. In contrast the SP, with its transitional method, aims to tailor its demands to the present consciousness of workers as they are, not as the future ruling class, in the erroneous belief that participation in working class struggle of any kind will generate a socialist consciousness.

For example, the SP held a public meeting prior to the conclusion of the Haddington Road agreement, during the first half of which the awfulness of the Croke Park agreement, the trade union leadership, and austerity generally was expounded unto death - as though the audience did not know. Following an almost mute

floor discussion, the meeting was continued with the airing of the usual vague reassurances that the SP stood for “democratic and fighting unions” - in point of fact a falsehood, given that the SP, until the Croke Park 2 ‘no’ vote, viewed trade unionism as a waste of time and actively discouraged Phelan’s and Ni Ghabhláin’s efforts. And, to reassure the floor of the SP’s ‘credibility’, the table presented ‘solutions’ to the Irish state’s €16.2 billion fiscal deficit. There followed the expected reformist drivel about the need for higher corporate and capital gains taxation, a wealth tax, a financial transactions tax and so on. Given that Ireland’s ‘Celtic tiger’ boom was the unanticipated result of the republic’s long-standing tax haven status and that the Irish bourgeoisie’s place amongst its class globally is maintained by its international financial services, one must conclude that it is ‘easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle’ than for these demands to be realised.

At the meeting’s very end, Joe Higgins had the presence of mind to tersely remind the floor that we stand for socialism and do not believe that capitalism can be ‘fixed’ anyway. This no doubt transitional approach amounted to nothing more than a sectarian advertising adventure. It is akin to trying to persuade someone who believes the Earth to be flat that it is in fact a sphere by first convincing them that it is a cube. The terrible irony here is that such ‘credible’ demands are utterly impossible to achieve under capitalism and do not even articulate the need for socialism. They are truly transitional to nothing; save sowing illusions.

The inevitable effect of this ‘transitional’ routine - in which the (supposed) socialist consciousness of the SP plays no part - is that the SP’s ‘programme’ is nothing more than an eclectic, incoherent mess of demands that could never advance the cause of socialism. Socialism is an utter *non-sequitur* as far as the actual practice of the SP is concerned. And suddenly the abandonment of ‘socialism’ by

ULA TD Clare Daly for mindless community activism no longer looks inexplicable.

Without the membership majority animating the party through a directly elected leadership, bound to a *Marxist programme*, which can only be augmented by the majority, and facilitating the debate and polemic necessary, not only to democratically arrive at positions, but to allow comrades to develop themselves as Marxists, the SP will remain as profoundly alienating a place. This produces a constant membership turnover, whereby new recruits are garnered by the fatiguing of established members. The result - the SP’s inability to build an involved *cadre membership* - is compensated for by its bloated apparatus and national committee (roughly comprising 20 and 35 people respectively, in an organisation of little over 100). Thus is the sect reproduced!

One is forced to conclude that the SP will never be the party of the Irish working class ●

Notes

1. The Croke Park agreement - named after the Gaelic Athletic Association’s largest stadium, where negotiations between the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and the state took place - was signed on June 6 2010. After the previous year’s budgetary adjustment of €4 billion, partly resulting from 5%-10% reductions in public-sector pay, there was a trickle of trade union militancy among public servants. In order to maintain control of the situation the state promised the unions that there would be no further pay cuts or forced redundancies in the public sector in exchange for their compliance with the government’s plans for public sector rationalisation. As of March 2012 the agreement has resulted in 28,000 ‘voluntary’ redundancies and a €3.1 billion reduction in public-sector pay.
2. The ULA brought together the SP, the Socialist Workers Party in Ireland and other groups and campaigns to contest the 2011 general election. Five ULA candidates were elected as TDs, but this did not stop the sectarian infighting and the SP walked out of the alliance in January 2013.
3. The failed ‘Croke Park 2’ agreement was voted down by union members’ ballots in February this year, with the opposition being led by teachers’ and nurses’ unions and the police. Its successor, the Haddington Road agreement, is only slightly amended, and will lead to €1 billion in public-sector pay cuts, extended working weeks and effectively eliminates the overtime for which many public-sector workers (particularly the police) are dependent on to ensure mortgage obligations can be met

Communist University 2013

A week of debate, controversy and comradeship

Monday August 12

2.00pm Fighting for a mass party
Nick Wrack (Independent Socialist Network - personal capacity), Jack Conrad (CPGB)
4.45pm The Middle East after the Iranian elections
Moshé Machover (Israeli socialist), Yassamine Mather (Hands Off the People of Iran)

Tuesday August 13

10.00am The new social media and the revolutionary claims made for them
James Turley (CPGB)
2.00pm Imperialism
Mike Macnair (CPGB)
4.45pm Will women lead the revolution?
Yassamine Mather, Camilla Power (Radical Anthropology Group)

Wednesday August 14

10.00am Technology, the ‘productive forces’ and socialism
Gabriel Levy
2.00pm Class revolution versus people’s revolution: left debates since the 1790s
Marc Mulholland
4.45pm Capitalist crises and their causes
Hillel Ticktin (*Critique*)

Thursday August 15

10.00am Why is the left so scared of science?
Chris Knight (Radical Anthropology Group)
2.00pm To be confirmed
4.45pm Capitalism: terminal crisis or long-term decline?
Hillel Ticktin (*Critique*)

Friday August 16

10.00am Why getting the Soviet Union right still matters
Jack Conrad (CPGB)
2.00pm The SWP crisis: causes and consequences
Paris Thompson (International Socialist Network)
4.45pm Lukács, Korsch, *et al*: philosophers of Leninism or ultra-left?
Mike Macnair (CPGB)

Saturday August 17

10.00am Marxism and ‘broad parties’
Ben Lewis (CPGB), Tim Nelson (International Socialist Network)
2.00pm Socialism or barbarism
Hillel Ticktin (*Critique*)
4.45pm The singularity of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict
Moshé Machover

Sunday August 18

10.00am The min-max programme from Marx to the present
Ben Lewis
1.30pm Revolution and counterrevolution in the politics of the everyday: what the anthropology of human nature tells us about the struggle for left unity
Lionel Sims (Radical Anthropology Group)
4.00pm Evaluation of school



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Day: £10 (£5). Session: £5 (£3)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

weekly Worker

**Peace talks -
not for peace
but for delay**

Déjà vu all over again

Watch US secretary of state John Kerry assuming the mantle of our lord: just as JC resurrected Lazarus, JK is about to revive the dead-as-a-door nail talks between the Israeli government and the captive so-called Palestinian 'Authority'. Though, unlike old Lazarus, this corpse will talk and talk ... but will not walk.

I do not much enjoy repeating myself, but the *Weekly Worker* has recently acquired many new readers, so for the benefit of those among them who have recently arrived from outer space and have not seen this show before, I will shamelessly quote from my article, 'Zionist "negotiating strategy" sham', published in this paper almost two years ago:

For the Israeli leadership, the 'peace process' - or, as many Israelis (who have trouble distinguishing between long and short vowels) pronounce it, 'piss process' - is a perpetual ratchet mechanism for buying time, while colonisation of Palestinian lands is extended and expanded.

The Israeli negotiating strategy, successfully applied for the last 20 years, is very simple. At each stage of the process, Israel puts forward new conditions. If the Palestinian side rejects them, the negotiations are broken off, and world public opinion is invited to blame Palestinian intransigence for the deadlock. However, if the Palestinian side capitulates to the new demands, then Israel finds a pretext for stalling. A favourite ploy is to create provocations such as 'targeted assassination' of Palestinian militants. These are rarely reported by the international media, and never given any prominence, as they are considered routine moves in the 'war against terror'. Eventually, some armed Palestinian group retaliates with a bloody bombing inside Israel or an ill-aimed rocket barrage. This is invariably given lurid coverage in the international media. Thereupon Israel breaks off the talks, because obviously one cannot negotiate with such terrorists. Again, the Palestinians are blamed for the failure of the talks. Meantime, Israeli colonisation continues to metastasise.

After a while, there is another international initiative for resuming the negotiations. In the new round of talks, the previous Palestinian concessions are taken as a starting point, and Israel's conditions are ratcheted up.¹

So here we go again. Netanyahu himself brazenly boasted about his tactics for using negotiations to torpedo any meaningful agreement. You can watch him bragging about it on a visit to a family of colons in the occupied West Bank: he was apparently unaware that he was being recorded on home video, which is now online.²

And, of course, leaders of the so-called 'international community' are well aware of Netanyahu's game. We know this thanks to another



Barack Obama and Benjamin Netanyahu: difficult relationship

accidental recording. On November 8 2011 Reuters reported:

French president Nicolas Sarkozy branded Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu "a liar" in a private conversation with US president Barack Obama that was accidentally broadcast to journalists during last week's G20 summit in Cannes.

"I cannot bear Netanyahu - he's a liar," Sarkozy told Obama, unaware that the microphones in their meeting room had been switched on, enabling reporters in a separate location to listen in to a simultaneous translation.

"You're fed up with him, but I have to deal with him even more often than you," Obama

replied, according to the French interpreter.³

Important

Nevertheless, these pots calling the kettle black all persist with this charade. Why? Netanyahu's foreign minister designate, Avigdor Lieberman - who is suspended from office while defending himself against charges of corruption - has put his sticky finger on it. He recently pointed out on his Facebook page that "It is important to negotiate - and even more important that negotiations be conducted on the basis of reality and without illusions." Lest there be any misunderstanding, he added that, as he had said many times, there is no solution to the conflict, at least not in the coming years.

"What is possible and important to do is to manage the conflict."⁴ In other words, negotiations with the Palestinians are not about reaching a resolution, but about 'managing the conflict'. This managing act is in Israel's interest, as well as that of the top manager in the White House.

Lieberman is right about one thing: in the coming years there can be no resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This is because the balance of power is so heavily biased in favour of Israel. But here I am, repeating myself again. New arrivals from outer space: please refer to my article, 'Breaking the chains of Zionist oppression', where I wrote:

Palestinian resistance - whether armed or non-violent - may be

able to put up a defensive struggle, but *on its own* it has no realistic prospect of inducing Israel to give up the Zionist colonising project and share Palestine on equal terms, be it in two states or in one

It is impossible to escape the conclusion that all schemes for resolving the conflict within the narrow confines of Palestine are exercises in futility⁵ ●

Moshé Machover

Notes

1. *Weekly Worker* September 29 2011.
2. www.youtube.com/watch?v=3-5hUG6Os68&feature=youtu.be.
3. www.reuters.com/assets/print?aid=USTRE7A720120111108.
4. www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/170096#.Ue05VRaXCN2.
5. *Weekly Worker* February 19 2009.

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