

No, no...
This isn't gossip.
/ It's the truth.



weekly worker



**Gilbert Achcar responds
to CPGB accusations of
social-imperialism**

- Hillel Ticktin on austerity
- Berlusconi, the felon
- South Africa CP wars
- Socialist Party Ireland

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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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WHY
LEFT UNITY

NEEDS ITS

SOCIALIST

PLATFORM

LETTERS



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

Stimulating

Elaine Morgan's insights contributed much more to human anthropology than just 'seeing off' the 'savanna hypothesis', as I'm sure Chris Knight would agree. Anthropology was just one of her many interests - she is best described as a talented, 'creative' writer with a multitude of interests.

I remember purchasing *The descent of woman* in 1972, the year it appeared - not a 'scholarly' work; rather an intelligent drawing together of the discoveries and speculations of others, injected with important, original suggestions and implications arising from current fieldwork. It's a book I've always remembered positively, appearing when one of the 'great issues' under discussion concerned locating and defining the 'female orgasm'; Ann Koedt's seminal *Myth of the vaginal orgasm* arrived roughly at the same time.

There was a final break with Victorian morality, which viewed sex as essentially a male activity, displeasing to 'respectable' women, who were required to endure it, in marriage, from a sense of duty. Among alleged so-called 'progressive' theories challenging 'traditional' attitudes was that of Sigmund Freud, whose ideas carried much weight; Freud did recognise women actually enjoyed sex, but insisted, for the female, there were two distinct 'types' of orgasm - the first centred on the clitoris (perceived as the young girl's erotic zone). However, according to Freud, if the adult female still found the clitoris the focus of sexual excitement, it was a symptom of her "immaturity, neuroticism, masculinity and frigidity". The second type of female orgasm, according to Freudian theory, centred on the vagina - the erotic zone of the mature female; Freud insisted a woman 'matured' sexually by successfully transferring her erotic drive from clitoris to vagina.

Freud's ideas were first seriously challenged in the early 1950s, when Alfred Kinsey deduced, from a large study, there was "no such thing as a vaginal orgasm"; a decade later, Masters and Johnson carried out a series of laboratory studies, arriving at the same conclusion, neatly summarised by Ann Koedt, who pronounced the vaginal orgasm an *a priori* impossibility: "Women need no anaesthesia inside the vagina during surgery ... the vagina is not a highly sensitive area and incapable of producing the sensations required for climax." Koedt concluded the 'myth' of the vaginal orgasm is perpetuated by men who depend on penile penetration for maximum pre-orgasmic excitement, and who fear their own obsolescence (ie, the obsolescence of their penises), should clitoral orgasm receive recognition.

Needless to say, this remained an area of contentious debate for several years, culminating in Shere Hite's *The Hite report* (1976). For women, these were crucial questions; it was widely recognised only a minority of women achieved orgasm during intercourse; understandably, those females who accepted the 'official' view, regarded themselves as failures, routinely attempting to hide their perceived inadequacies by faking orgasms to satisfy the egos of their partners. Women's confusions were, of course, in marked contrast to the equanimity among men, for whom orgasm is easily achieved - its physiological locality never questioned, its biological function and purpose assumed.

In his *Origin of the family, private property and the state*, Engels makes his famous imaginative guess that "the overthrow of mother right was the world-historic defeat of the female sex. The man took command in the home also;

the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude, she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument in the production of children." The historical accuracy of Engels' account remains unproven - but in a general sense, few would dispute that womankind, *per se*, is reduced in modern society to 'an objectivity', created by and for man - to which, Elaine Morgan adds, even to the extent that her sexuality is denied her. Traditionally, sexual social behaviour, defined by men, not only knows nothing of female sexuality, but, as Ann Koedt suggested, regards it as a threat to themselves.

Overviewing the world's species (Morgan carried out no primary research), she concluded human sexual behaviour does not conform with most other species; among mammals, for example, the primate female is never coerced (an exception, I might suggest, being the orangutan, where rape is the order of the day!). This is a major theme explored in *The descent of woman*; Morgan's hypothesis on this question was to me, back in the 1970s, an essential contribution. (I've not seen it, nor the conclusions she draws, elsewhere - no doubt if it's my ignorance being displayed, Chris Knight will oblige!)

Morgan suggested that, following the females' "world-historic defeat", males restructured not only society as a whole, but even the manner in which the sex act was performed. As she had reported, considering species overall, the female sexual desire was the determining one (she initiates intercourse), but for the female mammal, (although Morgan hadn't quite realised it yet), it's the clitoris that must receive the stimulation, which is more naturally achievable when both participants face the same direction - the usual scenario in the natural world. Position, of course, is of secondary importance to the male; the vagina provides his frictional stimulation. Hence, the crucial 'turning the woman over' for the benefit of the dominant male that occurred in human society resulted in tragic consequences

for the female.

Recognising the importance of this event, as Elaine Morgan did, is of tremendous importance (even though she seemed reluctant to abandon theories of a vaginal orgasm); arguably the vaginal orgasm debate was itself a reflection of Engels' "world-historic defeat of the female sex". Elaine Morgan writes: "When he turned her over, she was not only frightened and uncomfortable; she was robbed of her behavioural reward. However lustily he exerted himself ... From the female's point of view, the whole exercise was a dead loss. Of course, the ape had no idea what had gone wrong. As far as he could make out, all the females of his species had gone cantankerous and completely frigid in a surprisingly short space of time and for no earthly reason."

Elaine Morgan - an insightful writer! Even the amateur bystander (aren't we all in that category?) can make meaningful contributions to human knowledge.

Bob Potter
email

Ruthless

For a good part of his 33 years in power, Robert Mugabe has presided over a ruthless dictatorship. Yet in the July 31 elections the 89-year-old ruler annihilated the hitherto iconic working class leader, Morgan Tsvangirai, and his Movement for Democratic Change. What happened?

The working class is deeply pained by this tsunami, and many are tempted to go for the easy answer that the MDC merely lost because of rigging. That there was intimidation, an uneven terrain and some manipulation or rigging may be true, but the massive scale of the MDC's defeat points to other and deeper reasons. To recover and move forward working people need to have an honest analysis to understand such factors.

Unlike 2008, Zanu-PF came into this election as a cohesive unit. It had its most democratic primary elections ever, resulting in popular local candidates running, many of whom

are small capitalists, who had been on the ground sponsoring local projects. Tsvangirai blundered by protecting unpopular incumbents of up to three terms who had been hardly visible in their constituencies. The MDC wrongly assumed that the 2008 protest vote, which was driven by economic melt-down, would be repeated. Tsvangirai's own sex scandals and the corruption of MDC-run councils did not help.

But there were deeper reasons for the defeat, reasons for which the MDC leadership must assume prime responsibility. Firstly, with total economic collapse in 2008, the MDC saved Zanu-PF from certain oblivion by agreeing to join a 'government of national unity' (GNU), in which the security apparatus of the dictatorship was left intact, whilst the MDC was landed with the burden of recovering the economy. The main mistake though was not just in joining such an ill-balanced GNU, but rather what the MDC did once it got into government. In charge of the economic and social ministries, the MDC launched a fanatic, International Monetary Fund-inspired neoliberal offensive to kick-start the collapsed economy. Its central elements included: slashing of all quasi-fiscal subsidies to the poor; wage freezes for civil servants and starvation wages for other workers; cash-budgeting and attacking unions. Whilst the MDC's Tendai Biti was being lauded by the west as "the best finance minister in Africa", the austerity knife was piercing deep into the hearts of the rural poor.

Even as Biti pleaded lack of money, the truth was that state monthly revenue shot up from \$60 million in 2009 to \$250 million by 2013 and he had received a special IMF bonus of half a billion dollars. Whilst berating civil servants that money does not grow on trees, Biti showered MPs with \$15,000 bonuses, luxury cars and endless foreign trips for ministers.

Whilst benefiting from these policies, Mugabe strategically

repositioned his party leftward, around land, indigenisation, economic empowerment and African nationalism. Such reorientation had also saved him from the 1990s revolts. Mugabe and his ministers dished out seeds, fertiliser and food to rural farmers, recognised the informal sector, and gave out urban housing stands and projects to youths and women. They vigorously courted the independent African churches and ran an anti-west, anti-sanctions campaign. On the eve of the elections minister Ignatius Chombo announced a hugely popular cancellation of council debts, which was denounced by the MDC. As agriculture recovered, Zanu-PF's rural base soared nationwide, just as that of Tsvangirai and the MDC massively shrunk.

It is therefore not surprising that the defining character of these elections is that the rural voters across the country have rejected and abandoned Tsvangirai and the MDC. Zanu-PF's 40% strong showing in the towns shows that many urban poor are following. As in Kenya and Zambia, where rising African nationalism triumphed, and the anti-neoliberal revolts across the world, the rural poor rejected the MDC as the party most closely identified with austerity and western puppetry. In the absence of a major left radical alternative, this has meant voting for an odious repressive regime, but one that was forced to make radical nationalist concessions to the masses to survive.

In our February 2001 document to the MDC national council, we had warned that unless the party embraced land reform, renounced the neoliberal ideology foisted on it by its new western friends, and returned to its working class base, it faced annihilation from a leftward-moving regime. We were booted out. The main reasons for this disaster cannot be intimidation or rigging. It becomes difficult to sustain rigging as the main reason when the pro-opposition, western-funded local elections monitoring body, ZESN, that had 7,000 observers nationwide, tells us that "in 98% of polling stations

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 Will women lead the revolution?
Yasmine Mather, Camilla Power (Radical Anthropology Group)

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 The Middle East after the Iranian elections
Moshé Machover (Israeli socialist), Yasmine Mather (Hands Off the People of Iran)

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 Erfurt programme
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



Where, how much and what's available

Glenhurst Apartments, 30 Bromley Road, London SE6 2TP
Five minutes walk from Catford station - trains leave London Bridge every 10-15 minutes

Full week, including accommodation in shared room: £170 (£110 unwaged, £200 solidarity)
Full week, no accommodation: £60 (£30)
Final weekend, including one night's accommodation: £35 (£20)
Day: £10 (£5). Session: £5 (£3)

Accommodation on-site available for the whole week - as is cheap, collectively prepared food. Apartments consist mainly of double and triple rooms. There is an indoor swimming pool and garden.

there were no incidents of intimidation ... nor did anyone attempt to disrupt the counting process”.

The message from the elections is clear. For working people there is no future with the MDC and Tsvangirai. Lacking a pro-poor ideology and strategy, it will not resurrect from this disaster. Yesterday’s workers’ leaders have become today’s poodles of the capitalists and bosses.

However, unless there is global recession, economic meltdown is unlikely. Whilst probably expecting a Mugabe victory, the west are stunned by his landslide, and for now withhold recognition to send a message to Mugabe not to dare pursue the aggressive nationalist agenda he promised in the elections. With survival guaranteed, Mugabe will still pursue his vote-catching nationalist agenda, but will likely moderate it and strike some compromise with banks, big business and the west to avert an open strike by the capitalists and west that may bring down the economy. He is likely to pursue an agriculture-mining-tourism-anchored economic growth agenda geared towards China, India, Russia and Brazil.

Without the necessary ideological, strategic and leadership overhaul, the MDC will suffer gradual, terminal decline. Without the emergence of a radical left alternative, the danger deepens of the working classes continuing to fall into the hands of a repressive, bourgeois nationalist dictatorship that opportunistically sings their song, but, with its survival guaranteed, will sooner or later, as it has done in the past, attack the poor, rural and urban, in the service of the system that it ultimately serves: that is, capitalism.

The way forward for working people is to break from the MDC and lay now the foundations for a new working people’s movement to continue the struggle against the regime. A movement that does not replicate the MDC’s rightwing ideological bankruptcy, but positions itself to the left of Zanu-PF on an anti-capitalist, democratic and internationalist basis. Such a movement has to be built slowly and organically from the struggles of workers and the poor, from the bottom to the top and anchored around the newly radicalising trade unions and social movements. It cannot be built or decreed from boardrooms or mere anti-Mugabe sentiment or the same ideology as the MDC. It will not only fight for political democracy, but also the full expropriation of the mines, banks, big businesses and big farms now under new black exploiters, placing these under the democratic control of workers and rural farmers for the benefit of all, as part of a regional and international struggle to smash capitalism and build socialism.

Munyaradzi Gwisai

International Socialist Organisation

Mask polishing

The elections have generally been described by all observers, the parties and the western nations as peaceful but by some as not being free and fair due to instances of bussing, a shamolic voting roll, massive disenfranchisement, double-voting, suspicious voting slips, among other things. In an initial statement the MDC rejected the election as a huge farce and met to offer a way forward to their members who were becoming restless, with some calling for a boycott of parliament and street protests.

What is clear is that the MDC is now desperate to regain confidence from its western imperialist handlers and has resolved to boycott parliament and other state institutions, demanding a rerun. But, most tellingly, the MDC states it will achieve all its aims through peaceful means. It would have been foolhardy for anyone to expect the MDC to go beyond

this and call for the mobilisation of the masses onto the streets, as this would be very difficult to control.

The mood across the country is one of shock for the masses who had put so much faith in the MDC. They are more shocked by its resolution to pursue a useless route. It is true that to a large extent Zanu-PF manipulated the voting system in order to defend itself against western imperialism and on behalf of Chinese-led imperialism, but also, critically, over the years the MDC lost its original appeal because of its record in office, as well as its initial limited radical tactics. The key observer bodies, SADC and AU, have endorsed the elections and the outcome, effectively ending their mediation role of over five years and setting the tone for inevitable, albeit grudging, acceptance of the results by western countries and the USA, which are eager to participate in the diamond industry and tone down the Zanu-PF indigenisation drive, despite their condemnation of the outcome. That observers known to be funded directly by western states have castigated the manner in which the poll was run will do little to sway the western states’ resolve to end this disastrous episode that has not boded well for them in terms of regaining dominance ahead of Chinese imperialism.

The key lesson for workers, youths and the poor masses is the inability of reformism to resolve even the basic democratic issues. Firstly, that a hated regime can steal its way to power and yet get away with it shows that real democracy is not compatible with a capitalist system, where economic and geopolitical interests ride above people’s wishes and interests. Secondly, and more importantly, this election has and will expose the reformist MDC as a degenerated part in the imperialist game with no intention and capacity to move beyond electoral, diplomatic, judicial, religious and legal routes in fighting for the rights and interests of the poor masses it claims to represent.

We call on the workers and the poor masses to reject the call for passive resistance and symbolic protests and instead mobilise for a general strike as a key element of revolutionary protests led by independent local organs to avoid betrayal and the hijacking of the struggle by reformist groups bent on squandering the fight of the poor.

Revolutionary Workers Group

Zimbabwe

SWP disarray

The Socialist Workers Party really does seem to be in disarray. National secretary Charlie Kimber this week sent a circular to all members announcing that the SWP annual conference is to be brought forward from its usual time, the first weekend in January.

The reason he gives is that “There are significant issues of politics, perspective and organisation which need to be debated and decided on in the SWP. It is best that we do this sooner rather than later.” So why, in that case, is the conference now to be held over the weekend of December 13-15 - in other words, just three weeks earlier than scheduled? What is the point?

We know that the central committee is behaving in a totally impotent manner. It has acknowledged that an opposition faction is now operating openly, publishing statements and discussion on the *Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century* blog. A week ago the opposition held a meeting of its supporters in London.

In any democratic organisation all this would be regarded as perfectly normal - but not in the SWP. Factions are only permitted in the three-month pre-conference period and even then all their material must be circulated via the SWP central office. If factional meetings are held, they must be open to all SWP members (not least CC spies!).

Several sessions of the SWP’s Marxism summer school featured open debate between the leadership and the

opposition, and afterwards the CC was effectively forced to admit that it could do nothing, even though this year’s March special conference clearly backed the factional ban. But never mind: the *next* conference will *definitely* ‘draw a line’ under this business. As the latest circular states, “... 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.”

What the CC is doing, then, is attempting to bring its unheeded commands into line with the reality. Once the three-month pre-discussion period starts, the faction will be ‘legitimate’, so let’s get it started as soon as possible! Yes, September 13, the day that period begins, is still some way off, but in August not much happens, does it?

By the way, just in case you were thinking of discussing what conference motions you ought to move, comrade Kimber warns: “Obviously motions cannot be discussed outside the pre-conference period.” Obviously!

Alan Fox

London

Platform ticket

As a Left Unity supporter, I was very pleased to see that the CPGB’s Provisional Central Committee is critically supporting the Socialist Platform of Left Unity (‘Rules for flirting’, August 1).

Since 2006 I have felt that revolutionary unity can best be achieved within broad socialist organisations. Even if your idea of a unified ‘Marxist party’ was theoretically the best way forward, sectarianism on the left was guaranteed to ensure that it never took off (if a larger organisation, particularly the SWP, proposed it, there may have been a different outcome). The failure of the Campaign for a Marxist Party illustrated problems with that strategy. Besides, I don’t think the level of mass support required to lead a revolution can be achieved by a party solely consisting of Marxists.

There is nothing in the Socialist Platform statement that I disagree with enough to prevent me from endorsing that statement. Nevertheless, I have decided that the time is ripe to try to launch the Revolutionary Platform of Left Unity. I have posted the text in various places online, including the Left Unity website, Facebook and my blog.

The idea is to unite as many genuine revolutionary socialists as possible within LU in a single platform, to try to overcome the problem which occurred with other broad socialist organisations (including the Scottish Socialist Party) of rival revolutionary organisations competing with each other within it rather than cooperating around shared goals.

If you want to sign this statement, please email me with your name and location. We need 10 members to become an official platform with the ability to put forward motions at the November conference.

Steve Wallis

steve.wallis2460@gmail.com

Banking hours

The launch each week of three new food banks across Britain is a sign of our times. There are now more than eight million people whose income from benefits, self-employment and part-time jobs is precarious.

The working week needs to be reduced to 30 hours with no loss of pay and the minimum wage raised to £10 an hour. This would create secure, full-time jobs for the ‘precariat’ and the one million young people not in education, employment or training.

It’s the only way to avoid food banks becoming a permanent feature of Britain’s social landscape.

John Smithee

Cambridgeshire

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 August 11 and 18: No forum - please come to Communist University.

Sunday August 25, 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 18: ‘Various formulas for the rate of surplus value’.

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

Free Bradley Manning

Friday August 9, 7pm: Public meeting, Hilda Porter Room, the Wesley, 81-103 Euston Street, London NW1. Speakers include: Tariq Ali, Peter Tatchell, Norman Solomon, Chris Nineham, Kate Hudson. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk.

Nuclear power: future or killer?

Monday August 12, 7pm: Discussion, Fairly Square bar and café, 51 Red Lion Street, London WC1. Speakers include Nikki Clarke (Stop Hinkley Campaign), Atsuko Kamura (Japanese Against Nuclear). Organised by Breaking the Frame: www.breakingtheframe.org.uk.

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.

End Gaza blockade

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Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.palestinecampaign.org.

Palestine solidarity

Saturday August 17, 2pm to 5pm: Fundraiser garden party, 7 Dippons Mill Close, Wolverhampton. Entry £5.

Organised by Wolverhampton Palestine Solidarity Campaign: wolvespssc@yahoo.co.uk.

Defend the union link

Tuesday September 3, 7pm: Public meeting, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Support the Labour-union link and Tolpuddle statement.

Organised by Defend the Link: www.defendthelink.wordpress.com.

EDL out of Tower Hamlets

Saturday September 7, 11am: Anti-fascist march. Assemble Altab Ali Park, Whitechapel Road, London E1.

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

Remembering victims of austerity

Saturday September 7, 1pm: Protests at council and ATOS buildings. 1pm-2pm: Jobcentre, 100 Broad Street, Birmingham B15; 2pm-3pm: ATOS, Five Ways House, Islington Row Middleway, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15.

Organised by Birmingham against the cuts:

www.birminghamagainstthecuts.wordpress.com.

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.

Spanish holocaust

Thursday September 19, 7pm: Talk, Bishopsgate Institute, 230 Bishopsgate, London EC2. AL Morton Memorial Lecture with professor Paul Preston on his recent book on the Spanish civil war. Tickets: £2.

Organised by Bishopsgate Institute: www.bishopsgate.org.uk;

and Socialist History Society: www.socialisthistorysociety.co.uk.

No to austerity

Sunday September 29, 11.00am: National TUC demonstration at Tory Party conference. Assemble Liverpool Road (M3 4FP) from 11am, for march to rally in Whitworth Park.

Organised by Trades Union Congress:

www.tuc.org.uk/industrial/tuc-22405-f0.cfm.

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.

August break

This issue of the Weekly Worker will be the last until August 29. We are taking our usual two weeks off, during and after next week’s Communist University.

CONSTITUTION

Ukip blocked by a cynical Cameron

Contrary to the expectations of many on the left, writes **Eddie Ford**, the winds of change in British politics are blowing to the right

On August 1 the government announced the creation of 30 new peerages. This brings the total membership of the House of Lords to 838, though currently 53 peers are on "leave of absence" or otherwise disqualified from sitting.¹ (By comparison, the elected House of Commons has a relatively paltry 650 members). As it so happens, there are only 400 seats in the Lords chamber, but this disparity never causes a problem because most peers do not regularly attend sessions - if they ever bother turning up at all.

The most notable ermined new entrant is Jenny Jones, London Assembly member, former chair of the Green Party and also former deputy mayor of London. She becomes the first ever Green Party member to become a peer. Another appointment is Doreen Lawrence, mother of the murdered Stephen Lawrence, who is to become a Labour peer. A Labour source described her as a "hero of modern Britain".

All the rest are the usual suspects of ex-ministers and dubious business people - such as Sir Anthony Bamford, the chairman and managing director of the JCB empire, now rewarded for being one of the Tory Party's major donors: his associated companies have handed over £4.7 million and in 2010 provided David Cameron with helicopter and private plane travel. Similarly, Howard Leigh, property businessman and Conservative Party treasurer, is elevated to the 'other place' - being a major donor to the value of £219,000. John 'three parties' Horam also becomes a peer - he is distinguished for his successive membership of Labour, the short-lived Social Democratic Party and now the Tories. Slightly curiously, Richard Balfie, a former Labour MEP, becomes David Cameron's personal "envoy to the trade unions". And Chris Holmes, a non-executive director of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, who is described by some as the Sebastian Coe of the London Paralympics, also joins the Tory benches in the Lords. Very PC and right on. Overall, the new intake consists of 14 Tories, 10 Liberal Democrats, five Labour and one Green.

Cameron has claimed that the "tilt" in the balance of appointments towards the coalition merely reflects the constitutional expectation to try to make the Lords "more closely mirror the result" of the last general election - the Tories now have 28% of the peers in the Lords, he said, even though they received 36% of the popular vote at the 2010 general election. Others would less generously say that he is trying to pack the Lords full of his supporters in a manner reminiscent of Tony Blair, who appointed 114 Labour peers and only 42 Tories between 1997 and 2001. Taking into account the new peers announced on August 1, Cameron has created 64 Conservative and 44 Labour peers in the lifetime of this parliament. More generally, since 2007 there has been a net gain of 27 peers in total after deaths, resignations and expulsions.

Anyway, the appointments mean that the Conservatives become the largest party in the Lords with 222 peers, while Labour has 221 and the Liberal Democrats 99, giving the two coalition parties a 100 majority over Labour. The other peers consist of bishops ('lords spiritual'), crossbenchers, non-affiliated and "other parties" (Plaid Cymru, Ulster

Unionist Party, Democratic Unionist, Conservative Independent, etc).

Underrepresented

But where are the new UK Independence Party peers? Or at least, this has been the long-standing protest - and demand - from Nigel Farage. At the moment, Ukip has two peers by virtue of the fact that Malcolm Pearson (Baron Pearson of Rannoch) and David Verney (21st Baron Willoughby de Broke) both defected from the Tories to Ukip in January 2007. Furthermore, David Stevens (Baron Stevens of Ludgate) in September 2012 joined Ukip, but for obscure reasons stills formally sits as an independent Conservative.

Farage has a point, as far as it goes. In terms of popular support, Ukip is currently far ahead of the Greens. Where they stood in this year's May local elections, Ukip candidates averaged over a quarter of the vote and overall picked up 23% of votes cast. Not only that: Ukip gained 139 councillors, retained another eight, and has 11 MEPs. Nor should we forget that its candidate, Richard Elvin, knocked the Tories into third place in the South Shields by-election, picking up 24.2% of the vote - not something the Greens can exactly boast about.

Rubbing salt into the Ukip wound, under the terms of the coalition agreement David Cameron and Nick Clegg agreed to make the Lords "reflective of the share of the vote secured by the political parties in the last general election".² Something seemingly reaffirmed during a parliamentary debate on January 8 of this year, when Clegg declared that Lords appointments will be made "according to the proportion of votes won by parties at the last general election" - and this is "precisely what we intend to do". Given that Ukip secured one million votes (3%) in the 2010 general election, then it should be 'entitled' to about 23 peers, as opposed to the mere two it has now. Indeed, Lord Pearson has written two letters to Cameron expressing Ukip's frustration.³ The second letter tried to strike another deal by saying Ukip would settle for "another half a dozen" peers rather than the 23 they should be due.

Well, on August 1 Cameron finally responded - definitely no deal with the party he described not so long ago as a "bunch of fruitcakes and loonies". Farage furiously denounced this "insult to democracy", which puts the UK "on a par with a developing world country dictatorship". Even if you are not a Ukip supporter, he continued, the "injustice here is apparent".

The official position is that, while the Greens have an elected Westminster MP in the shape of Brighton's Caroline Lucas, Ukip has none. A position reinforced with dark references to 'extremists'. If Ukip were given peers on the basis of the number of votes gained in an election it would inevitably mean seats for the British National Party. Yet this is not a convincing argument either, seeing how the BNP is dying on

the vine, torn between its doomed 'turn to respectability' and the primal (and equally hopeless) desire of some BNPers for a 'return to the streets' following the Woolwich killing. In the end, the only conclusion you can reasonably come to is that the Tories' gut anti-democratic instincts are kicking in - determined to keep a deadly rival out of the parliamentary club.

Of course, the fact that the debate over Lords representation and proportionality has focused so much on Ukip tells us something important about the period we are in - bleak though that may be. The winds of change in this country, insofar as there are any, are blowing to the right. This runs contrary to the dogmatic expectations of some on the British far left, who assumed that the economic crisis and the austerity regime would automatically lead to a growth in their ranks. To paraphrase an old slogan - first mass social despair, then *us*. But in reality the only significant development in British politics has been the rise of Ukip, not the left, which is almost nowhere to be seen - the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition is no more than a joke and, as things stand now, many in the leadership of Left Unity seem determined to repeat the same old 'broad party' mistakes that wrecked the Socialist Alliance, Scottish Socialist Party and Respect.

Some may try to delude themselves that the Ukip vote in May was purely a protest vote and will dissolve with the mist. But the vast majority of these people knew exactly what they were buying into - which was a brand of noxious *rightwing populism*, Ukip ultimately being part of a broader phenomenon in politics, whether in Europe or the United States. A movement that combines xenophobic national chauvinism - especially a withering contempt for migrants - with a reactionary, populist hatred of the out-of-touch liberal political establishment.

Stymied

We are where we are with the peerage system because *all* attempts at reform, no matter how cosmetic, have been stymied. Way back in the glory days of 2010 Nick Clegg gave the Tories what they needed, a coalition government, in return for their agreement to a package of constitutional reform - which, according to a boastful Clegg, was going to be the "greatest" since 1832. Please howl with laughter now. Rather, it has been

a complete failure for the Liberal Democrats - an omnishambles. No Lords reform, no AV voting, no reduced House of Commons or boundary reform, the latter blocked by Clegg himself in revenge for the 'no' vote in the AV referendum. Nothing to show except a fixed-term parliament, which at least has the merit of removing the ability to set the timing of an election from the sitting government.

Meanwhile, the Lords are inexorably expanding like an unwanted waistline. The current size of the chamber is a post-1999 high and is 172 more than 13 years ago. In the words of the Electoral Reform Society, the 30 new members are the latest additions to an "increasingly bloated" chamber, ERS research indicating that the total number of peers could rise to nearly 1,000 by the end of the current parliament. Katie Ghose of *The Guardian* even fears that the number could reach 2,000 after the next general election.⁴ But, whatever numbers we are talking about, it is more than obvious that the Lords appointment process gives *huge* patronage power to the prime minister - being inherently corrupting and anti-democratic.

Communists therefore call for the total abolition of the House of Lords, not for it to be reformed or 'modernised'. Not for us the reactionary dreams of *The Daily Telegraph*, which hoped that Doreen Lawrence can make the Lords "relevant again", or its elitist yearning for a "group of men and women who can make judgements on legislation

without fear of a fickle electorate" (August 2).

The fundamental point is that, partly elected or not, even wholly elected, the House of Lords will continue to impose 'checks and balances' *against* democracy. Just imagine a scenario where members of the Lords are put in place by the same electorate that voted for MPs (even if by a different electoral method) - then what exactly are they supposed to be doing that 'ordinary' MPs cannot? There is no rhyme or reason to elect a second bunch of representatives just to oversee the work of the first bunch. After all, a single chamber can set up its own various specialist committees empowered to examine the detail of proposed legislation and recommend changes - there is no need for an 'other place'. At the very best, it just produces endless gridlock - as we have seen over and over again in the US.

In reality, the existence of a second chamber acts to *frustrate* the popular will - to dampen down and becalm the democratic impulses of the masses. Keep things nice and orderly. Good grief, if you did not have a second chamber, then almost anything could happen - and that would never do, would it? Yes, of course, there is the 'death penalty' argument - that is, without a delaying second chamber then we might see legislation to reintroduce the death penalty rushed through parliament. Or bring back public floggings and corporal punishment at schools (if it has ever gone away).

No-one should be duped by this anti-democratic scare tactic. Backward and reactionary ideas tend to originate from despairing feelings of powerlessness. Feelings of atomisation and alienation. The greater the sense of powerlessness, the more anti-social sentiments and reactionary ideas will flourish.

Instead, communists demand the abolition of the second chamber and the monarchy - fight for real, effective, consistent and extreme democracy. Which by definition can only mean a ruthless struggle against capitalism. There can be no socialism without democracy, just as there can be no real democracy without socialism ●

Notes

1. www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/lords/composition-of-the-lords (as of June 8 2013).
2. <http://ukipian.com/2013/03/11/where-are-the-new-ukip-peers>.
3. *The Huffington Post* August 1: www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/08/01/nigel-farage-ukip-house-of-lords_n_368858.html.
4. *The Guardian* August 1.



Nigel Farage: threat to Thatcherite Tories

ANALYSIS

Declining forms, failing system

What does austerity tell us about capitalism itself? Hillel Ticktin discusses three key features

I have said that austerity is a deliberate policy: it does not flow automatically from over-expenditure, as the governments in Britain, Germany, the United States or wherever have tended to argue. Although, of course, officially the United States is not implementing a policy of austerity, this is the effect of what it is pursuing, even if in a lesser form than in Europe.

So the question is, why are they pursuing this policy? I have argued that austerity is needed in order to control the working class and therefore defend the system. But I would like to examine this question a little more deeply. Why is it that the bourgeoisie has lost control of the system?

The present crisis is deeper and more extensive in fact than in the great depression - the drop in production in many countries has been greater than it was then. That is not true of the United States, but the US effectively went in for a salvage operation and saw to it that its banks were propped up and dealt with the situation in a way the other countries did not.

But why, under conditions where unemployment is extensive and rising, is it still felt necessary to introduce a policy of austerity? I have argued that this has happened because it was felt there was no alternative. Taking the road of expansion would mean making a series of concessions to the working class and would risk a loss of control.

What that implies is that the ruling class has already lost control of the system itself. Now that is no new discovery, but it is very much connected to the question of decline. Capitalism in decline begins to shed crucial features which buttress it and are essential to its functioning. To put it in a dialectical way, we can say that a system in decline finds that the mediations which ensure that the poles of its contradictions are able to interact begin to malfunction to a greater degree, or even cease to exist. That results in crises, which become increasingly difficult to overcome. That is what is meant by the decline of capitalism.

What is *not* meant by the decline of capitalism is that total production is decreasing, that productivity is going down, and so on. That is not what I am arguing. The question is not one of *absolute* decline (though there are aspects of absolute decline at any given moment, in any given system). The overall system is in decline, even though productivity continues to rise and production continues to increase.

Let us look at the form of capitalism which previously provided the necessary control.

Reserve army

In the first instance it involved the existence of a reserve army of labour. The reserve army of labour includes a large number of long-term unemployed and also people who lose their job and then find a new one, people who are in and out of work over their lifetime. The essential point is that this mass of unemployed workers competes with other workers for jobs, and consequently those in work are forced to accept both lower wages and inferior conditions compared to periods of full employment.

However, the potency of the reserve army of labour is not just based on its size. Thanks to the pressure exerted under the democratic or semi-democratic forms that exist, governments were compelled to introduce the welfare state. While that is very limited in the United



Back to the 1920s?

States, it is quite extensive in Europe. Workers today who lose their jobs are not in the position they would have been in the 19th century, when they would have had to beg, borrow or whatever in order to survive. So today workers do not have the same fear of unemployment as they had even in the first half of the 20th century.

That is why austerity very much involves cuts in welfare benefits. It is argued that workers are skiving, that they are not telling the truth when they say that they cannot get a job, that they are disabled or that they have no savings. Consequently a privatised arm of the state has been created to declare workers fit for work whether they are or not. This privatised arm amounts to a modern apparatus of economic force to ensure that as few people as possible receive benefits.

The point I am making is that the benefits introduced as concessions reduced the potency of the reserve army of labour. Consequently the working class is not under the same control as it was during the period of classical capitalism. An effective, efficient capitalism demands a reserve army of labour desperate for work, not one that is getting by on benefits. One of the crucial elements of control has been restricted - one could argue even broken - because it is certainly impossible to restore the reserve army of labour to the form it took prior to World War II (though it is apparent that a section of the capitalist class would like to do that).

If this is the case, one has to say that capitalism itself is in trouble, because the reserve army of labour is crucial to its functioning. That it does not really exist at present is not simply a technicality or temporary weakness. Its form was gradually changed and has effectively been removed.

Commodity fetishism

The second pillar of capitalism was commodity fetishism. Capitalism's controls operate through exchange, through sale and purchase, through the commodity: Adam Smith's 'invisible hand' if you like. Products are exchanged on the basis of

exchange-value, which takes the superficial form of price. The point is that capitalism's interrelationships are developed on the basis of exchange values, and consequently appear to stand above humanity through the operation of the economy as a whole. The market, in other words, rules.

The market appears to be a technical function of the system, not something which is driven by humanity. But, of course, it is human: it is the functioning of human beings within the division of labour in society. In their class relationships - of capital and labour, of the sale of labour-power itself - real human interactions appear as technical relations. The sale of labour-power appears to stand above the human being as a function required to feed, clothe and house workers and their families.

This second form of control, this second crucial aspect of capitalism, is also being undermined. It is being undermined at the most basic level because workers can see that they are exploited. That they have to sell their labour-power, that their labour is then used to create the value which is turned into profit, while only a small part goes to them in the form of wages. This profit adds to capital and provides the basis for the system to continue, for capital to function as self-expanding value. Self-expanding value - which also appears as a force of nature standing above humankind - is the central basis of capitalism itself.

Orthodox economics does its best to obscure this reality, as it tries to ensure that the market appears eternal - a wonder to behold. But, once one understands that this is not the case, ideologically it becomes hard for the capitalist class to defend itself. We have had several centuries during which the works of Marxists and others have exposed the ideology, which to a large degree is shot through. Attempts to restore that ideology have not really succeeded: its hold is unstable and dubious. It has gone through various forms over time, but it remains the case that it is not trusted and it is not believed to a large degree.

This results from a situation where it is the capitalist, as the embodiment of self-expanding value, who controls

the process and takes the profits, who has the wealth and the high standard of living, while it is the worker who has to accept the fact that he or she is controlled and who has a relatively low standard of living. That situation is very hard to justify. However much the media does its best to restore the situation to that of the 19th century, it cannot do so. The result is that capitalism has a big problem - if the market is not accepted, the system itself is in trouble.

In a downturn like the one we are experiencing, where capitalism looks broken because it is broken, then people must further question whether the system itself can be allowed to go on. It is a system of fantastic inequality, a system that proclaims itself democratic, where we vote for our leaders, but on the other hand enforces a dictatorship in the factory, in the institutions, in the public sector.

This poses the question of how long this system will continue. Of course, the Russian Revolution overthrew capitalism, but unfortunately it turned into Stalinism and was used as a stick to beat the left and as 'proof' that capitalism is superior. It is indeed true that Stalinism was inefficient and remained inefficient to the end.

Capitalist 'strike'

The third aspect of the present crisis to which we should refer is the way in which capital is not actually functioning as such. An increasing quantity of money is lying uninvested in the banks - such as the \$25 trillion being held in the Bank of New York Mellon, to name but one. The fact that investment is not taking place represents one of the most important aspects of this crisis. To a considerable degree the rich and businesses hold *money*, which is not the same as capital. In order for money, the universal equivalent, to become capital it must be invested to create profit, to become self-expanding value.

But that is not happening to the degree that would be expected. This is probably the first time that such huge sums of money are simply lying idle, and that is a crucial aspect which distinguishes the present crisis

from previous crises. This situation has been referred to as a strike by the capitalist class and there are a number of contending theories about this. One is from the US economist, Paul Krugman, which argues, for example, that this is an effect of monopoly.

The point is that this refusal to invest in the old way preceded the immediate crisis period from 2007. There has been a wall of money that does not know where it should go. That itself shows us that there is a crisis and that the crisis is not just of a temporary nature, but a reflection of the problems of the system, where capital cannot be capital. The capitalist class is afraid to reflate - to invest and expand - which would effectively remove the reserve army of labour altogether through full employment. So, in order to survive, it has to turn to finance capital - a wasteful and short-termist form, and a crucial aspect of the decline of capitalism. It will not reflate because it is afraid it will be overthrown. But the reverse then happens: it ceases acting like a capitalist class, and capital cannot be capital.

Social forms

I have discussed three factors connected to the crisis which all point to capitalism's decline. But underlying it all is the increasing socialisation of industry and of labour. That is to say that the form of industry itself is increasingly integrated. And it necessarily turns to forms which are *more* integrated, which are *more* social, even if at the same time there is an attempt to prevent and reverse this.

There are two crucial aspects. One is the increasing role of government. It is true that we are seeing more privatisations, but nonetheless even in this privatised form - as with the utilities - there is usually government involvement and forms of control over prices. There is an extensive use of government subsidies, guarantees and direct investment. It is clear that these cannot be undone - despite the existence of a section of the capitalist class that wants to change the situation to one of 'small government'. The fact is that it is not going that way and will not go that way.

The second aspect is the increasing centralisation and concentration within the economy itself. Although there are counter-tendencies, it remains the case that the economy is effectively dominated by a few large firms. The mass of small firms around them are usually used as proof that monopolies do not exist, but it is rather the other way round: the small firms are *dependent* on the large firms.

This increasing degree of socialisation indicates that the form of capitalism whereby a large number of competing capitals raise productivity through competition no longer exists. The rise in productivity, which has acted as an essential justification for capitalism, is today limited - it is dwarfed by what would be possible under a socialist, planned society.

To conclude, the decline I have described is not absolute, but relative. Nevertheless it exposes the failure of the entire system, compared to what is possible. A planned society, democratically controlled from below, would not only have higher levels of productivity: it would produce for need, not for profit ●

This article is based on one of a series of regular podcasts, available at <http://critiquejournal.net/27July.wma>.

LEFT UNITY

Resistance and socialist change

Seven comrades from the Socialist Platform explain their vision for a Left Unity party



A world of obscene inequality

The Socialist Platform has been established to promote socialist ideas within Left Unity and to argue that the party set up at the November founding conference should be explicitly socialist, with clear and unambiguous socialist aims and principles.

The Socialist Platform's 'Statement of aims and principles for the Left Unity party' is presented for consideration and debate.¹ It sets out briefly what we mean by socialism and some principles to guide the new party in its activities. The statement is presented in a spirit of enthusiasm for a new party that will represent the interests of the working class and fight for a new form of society in which the needs of all are met.

Everything it touches

Capitalism means exploitation, poverty, a widening gap between rich and poor within countries and between them. It can never satisfy the needs of the majority. It destroys lives and wrecks communities. Inter-state rivalry drives the threat of war. Capitalism degrades human relationships; it preaches self-interest rather than solidarity as the human goal. It wounds the planet, perhaps fatally, unless we act.

If a society should be judged on the way it treats the old, the infirm, the sick, the disabled, the young, then this society stands condemned. If a society can be judged on how it protects and nurtures each individual, this one stands condemned. This society is sick, rotten to the core. Capitalism infects everything it touches.

We believe there is an alternative: a society without classes, without exploitation, without rich and poor, without want, without war; a society in which science and technology are

used to increase our leisure time and in which humanity lives in harmony with the natural world, not at odds with it; a society with no oppression and discrimination, in which every individual is cherished and able to develop to their full potential. That society is one in which private ownership of the means of production has been replaced by democratic common ownership, where everyone participates in the planning of production in the interests of society as a whole. We believe that these ideas can inspire. We should boldly proclaim them and argue for them.

Those who have signed the platform statement are socialists from different traditions and have different experiences and methods of working. We recognise that there will always be differences in any party, even between those who share a common aim. But we believe that reasonable, comradely debate about our goals and how we can achieve them can only assist in clarifying our ideas and guiding our practical work.

Austerity stamps its imprint

We are facing an avalanche of attacks. The welfare state is being smashed to pieces. Everything that used to be taken for granted is being taken away - free healthcare, free education, affordable housing and much, much more. Young people face a life in debt, with little prospect of getting a decent place to live or bringing up a family in any sort of comfort. The chances of a meaningful, rewarding job are pretty much non-existent. Those out of work, retired, disabled, sick and living on benefits face a miserable life in poverty. Austerity is stamping its imprint on every aspect of our daily life. Anxiety, depression and

even suicide result.

Left Unity has to be a party that is involved in the resistance to austerity. We have to fight as hard as we can to save our hospitals, to defeat the bedroom tax and to stop attacks on our pensions. But so long as we have capitalism we will have to fight. These attacks will not cease, even if we win victories.

Left Unity will be built by being active in the communities, workplaces, colleges, in every working class struggle - strikes, occupations, pickets, direct action and acts of civil disobedience. Consistent work in an area, patiently arguing our case and actively participating in these struggles, will win support for our party. But, as well as being against the attacks we face now, we must offer a positive alternative. We do not think that the alternative is a 'better' or 'fairer' capitalism. We believe it must mean getting rid of capitalism altogether.

We can offer resistance today while also arguing for a new society, in which things are organised differently. These things are not opposed, but complementary. That is why we argue for the new party to be *both* a party that supports all campaigns and struggles to defend and extend our living standards and democratic rights *and* a party that fights to get rid of capitalism completely and create a new society.

Without a care

Society is divided primarily into two classes. One class - the capitalist class - is numerically small, but owns the largest part of the wealth in society and the means of production - the factories, technology, transportation, the land and its natural resources. The other class - the working class - is enormous and comprises the majority in most countries in the world. It is that class of people who own no capital and survive

only by selling their ability to work in return for wages.

Whilst capitalism has developed the productive forces out of all recognition over the last 200 years, integrating the whole of the world, it has done so without regard for the misery created for billions of the world's inhabitants and the destruction of the natural world around us. Capitalism exists simply to expand, to reproduce itself - to make more profit. It pays no heed to human needs unless a profit can be made. It is profit that drives investment, not need. People die for lack of water, food and basic medicines in a world that could easily provide them. Capitalism cares little about the pollution of the air we breathe or the water we drink, rising temperatures or the rising sea levels that ensue. Environmental disasters such as Bhopal or the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico are the consequence of profit at any cost.

For all its expansion of the productive forces, capitalism is incapable of meeting the needs of the vast majority of the world's population. Private ownership of the means of production - factories, technology, transport, the land and its mineral resources - and competition prevent the rational, democratic planning of production. Capitalism claims to be the most efficient system ever - that the market is the best manager of resources - yet even in the advanced capitalist world millions are deprived of the means of existence.

Unemployment in the European Union is now at 26.5 million. More than one in five young people in the EU are without a job. In Spain and Greece it is more than half. Yet with the advances in science and technology there could be fulfilling, socially useful work for all with a

much reduced working week, yet still providing a guaranteed income for all the necessities of life in the modern world. Capitalism prevents this. Socialism could begin to address it.

Capitalism develops through periodic crises, throwing the world into turmoil. Humanity is in thrall to the whim of the undemocratic market. These crises are an inextricable and inevitable consequence of the private ownership of the means of production. The latest crisis has given fresh impetus to the attacks on all the reforms made since World War II with the argument that there is no alternative.

There is an alternative

It is this argument that has to be addressed. Those born now and future generations will have few of the benefits of the 'welfare state', which is being smashed up in front of us, unless we do something about it. These gains were only a temporary makeover of the ugly reality of capitalism that existed for most of its history. Their system is in crisis and the owners of capital intend to resolve the crisis in the way they always do - by making the working class pay.

Nor should we forget that even under the 'welfare state' millions still lived in poverty, without access to fulfilling work and a secure life. Elsewhere, unremitting misery prevailed and still continues for the two-thirds on the planet who exist in abject poverty.

The destruction of the things we cherish is not accidental, nor driven simply by ideology. It is driven by the dynamics of the profit system and by the need of the owners of capital to protect that system. If the system exists to make a profit, then everything that stands in the way must be bulldozed. If the capitalists cannot make the profit they want, they will not invest. So business taxes must be reduced, regulation must be minimised, wages must be lowered, workers must work faster and longer, services provided by the state must be privatised. To make all this more easily achieved, trade union and workers' rights must be restricted and civil liberties denied. If investments turn bad, they must be bailed out.

Any government that aims to manage capitalism, rather than dismantling it and restructuring society with production for need, not profit, will inevitably be forced by the logic of the market and the workings of the system to act in the interests of the capitalist class. If a government wants capitalism to work better, it will be forced by the economic basis of the system to do whatever is necessary to make it work better. That means implementing policies that promote investment and maximising profits: in other words, low taxes, minimum regulation, low wages, privatisation and so on. This is the reason that the social democratic parties across the world, like the Labour Party, Pasok in Greece or PSOE in Spain, support austerity policies. Because they cannot contemplate a break with capitalism, they are compelled to act in its interests.

Capitalism cannot be made to work in the interests of the majority. That is not how it functions. Big business will always find ways to flout or ignore regulation. Even if regulation succeeds, which it never can fully, the basic exploitative relationship between capital and labour remains - the capitalist makes his/her profit out

of the unpaid labour of the workers s/he employs.

Against oppression

The new party must stand against oppression and discrimination. Everyone who has signed up to the Left Unity project will be committed to the emancipation of women, LGBT liberation and an ending of racism and all other forms of discrimination. The fuller party programme will have to elaborate in more detail the steps we fight for now and in the future.

We have to combat discrimination and oppression now and always, but without the eradication of class society we believe that there is no chance of ridding society of the oppression of women and all other forms of oppression and discrimination. We are convinced that the ending of capitalism is a necessary step towards ending oppression and discrimination in all its forms. It is a process that we can begin, but which others may have to complete. This means that we will be engaged in all campaigns that take up the fight against oppression now, consistently working to strengthen them.

We recognise that young people face an uncertain future and within their communities they are often the target of police harassment, bullying, unemployment on top of the widespread deprivation. Our new party must be at the forefront of opposing racist state methods against the youth, by reaching out to them, standing with them when

they confront the state and winning them to a vision of different society. Against oppression our watchword is *solidarity*.

Our planet

The environmental catastrophe being prepared by the profit system's pell-mell rush to make a profit, without a thought of the consequences, is one of the most glaring examples of the inability of capitalism to protect humanity from disaster. No amount of regulation could tackle greenhouse-gas emissions or prevent another Bhopal, so long as private interest dictates production. This can only fully be addressed when decisions about production are no longer taken by a few self-interested private owners, but by society as a whole.

Left Party Platform

The Left Party Platform has presented a statement for adoption by the new party and an accompanying article: 'Towards a new left party'. There is much in both the statement and the article that we agree with and we welcome some improvements in formulations in comparison with the document presented to the national Left Unity meeting on May 11.

Both documents are primarily a description of the dismantling of the welfare state, the rightward shift of the Labour Party and the need to fight austerity. These general issues have led each one of us to respond positively to Ken Loach's appeal for a discussion and debate about the need

for a new party. We are all interested in creating and building a new party to represent the interests of those whom the Labour Party has abandoned. Working class people have no useful representation by any political party.

However, both of the LPP documents fail to state clearly what is the cause of the problems they describe or the solutions to them. The documents contain generalisations and vague, inadequate formulations, with no clear aims or principles set out. It is not enough to be against austerity and neoliberalism, without also explaining that the crisis is rooted in capitalism and that the answer lies only in getting rid of it.

No return to 1945

We are all against austerity. We have to organise the maximum resistance to it. But resistance is not enough. Creating a new party is not enough. What *type* of party? A new party must have a political programme to chart a way to an alternative to austerity. That alternative is not a return to the welfare state of the 1945 Labour government, but an advance to a completely new form of society. The political and economic circumstances that led to the creation of the welfare state under capitalism no longer exist. That is why the attacks on it are taking place.

Neither of the LPP documents gives any clear indication of what sort of party the LPP wants to set up. Will it be a party that tries to manage capitalism? Or will it be a party that breaks with capitalism? At different places the documents seem to point in different directions. Whilst there are references to socialism, it is unclear from the context what exactly is meant by the use of the word. It is this lack of clarity that detracts from both documents.

There are references to renationalisation of the privatised industries, but no mention of the abolition of private ownership of the means of production more generally. The only conclusion one can draw is that the documents are calling for a 'mixed economy', an economy in which industry remains primarily in private hands, with some in state hands. This remains capitalism. The profit system will remain, the nationalised industries will service big business. Overall, the impression is conveyed that the LPP aims at a return to some sort of social democratic golden age, when the Labour Party was more leftwing. In so far as any clear aim can be discerned, it aims at managing capitalism, not getting rid of it.

This impression is reinforced by the references to new leftwing parties in Europe. Again, the documents are vague. For example, the LPP statement refers to Greece, France, Germany and elsewhere, where "new political parties have developed, drawing together a range of left forces, posing political, social and economic alternatives. They are anti-capitalist parties that stand against neoliberalism and the destruction of the welfare states - whether at the hands of the right or of social democracy - and fight for alternative social, economic and political policies."

It would have been far clearer if the 'alternatives' being posed by these parties had been spelled out. Are they alternatives that allow capitalism to continue, in which case those alternatives are doomed to failure? Or are they alternatives that posit a breach with capitalism, in which case they should be supported? Anyone who follows European politics will know that there is an array of political voices inside these parties - some socialist, some social democratic, some Stalinist, some liberal. Which voice in these parties is the LPP asking us to emulate? Is it the wing of Die Linke which implemented cuts in coalition with the social democratic SPD in

Berlin, leading to its rejection by the voters in 2011? Notwithstanding the rapid rise in popularity of Syriza, is it not clear that its leader, Alexis Tsipras, is presenting a more emollient face and retreating from any idea of fundamental change?

It is not enough just to be a 'leftwing' party. The UK Green Party could justifiably claim to be a 'leftwing' party, but its council in Brighton has implemented cuts. A lack of clarity about the aims and principles of our new party at its inception runs the risk of allowing the examples of Berlin and Brighton to be repeated.

That is why we believe that it is important to set out the aims and principles in the way we have.

Arguments against a socialist party

Various arguments have been raised against having such an explicit commitment to socialism.

The strangest objection comes from some socialists, who argue that we should not be so explicit because we will 'frighten people off' or we will 'wreck the Left Unity project'. 'It will never get off the ground if you argue for socialism too soon,' they say. 'It's a broad party we're building. You can't impose socialism on it, otherwise it won't be inclusive.'

We do not believe that those who want to fight against austerity will be put off from joining a socialist party that openly and patiently argues its case. Who are the people who it is feared will walk away? Those who we campaign alongside in the anti-cuts campaigns, the anti-bedroom tax protests, opposition to imperialist wars and against racism are unlikely to be repelled by our arguments. We will say, 'We want to fight here and now to stop the privatisation of the NHS/oppose the bedroom tax/oppose police brutality, but we also want to fight for a society in which we no longer have to get up each morning to fight these fights. We want a society in which hospitals don't get closed and in which there is no police racism. It's called socialism. But to get it we have to build a party that will campaign for it. You should join it.' How will this put people off?

Another argument is that the supporters of this platform want a 'narrow' party, whereas they want a 'broad' party. We want a mass working class party, which will include all who want to support the party's aims. There is nothing to be gained from being in a narrow or small party. We set our sights on transforming society. We believe that can only be achieved by the majority of the working class acting in their own interests to get rid of capitalism and begin afresh. To reach that stage will require a mass party of millions of activist persuaders, millions of people who will argue for socialism.

We are a long way from that at the moment. It will take time, hard work and patience. It cannot be achieved overnight. Those who believe that fudging the aims and principles of the party is a quicker way to achieve support will find very quickly that it is not. It will lead to confusion, opportunism and disappointment. Far better to try to get things correct at the beginning, even if it means taking things more slowly. To make the party successful will require a long period of work in working class communities, earning respect for its hard work and principled positions.

Language

Other complaints will be about the language used. There is a very real concern here. We agree that we must try to present socialist ideas in an accessible way, so that those who are unfamiliar with them can more easily understand them. If people think our statement could be better written, we welcome suggestions to improve it.

But, more often than not, this

objection is nothing to do with language. It is an argument that hides the real objection, which is to the ideas of socialism themselves, not the way they are presented. Let us be clear. Socialist ideas have become less popular and less common in society over the last 30 years. Many are unfamiliar with them. Our task is to make socialism popular, not to try to become popular by hiding it. But the only way that we can do this is by arguing for them. We will never make them popular if we do not go out confidently and boldly to make our case.

Behind this argument about language is another concern. Some people may be worried that if we are too stridently socialist, because the ideas are not a mass force in society now, we will not obtain good votes when we stand in elections. But we cannot hide what we stand for. We must be different. We must determine our policies on the basis of our aims and principles, and campaign to win support for them. To do anything else will lead us in the footsteps of the Labour Party, which continues marching to the right on the issue of immigration, because it believes that is the way to get more votes.

If we want to be seen as truly incorruptible and different from other parties, we must be seen as the people who say what they think. We would rather say what we think and not get elected than water down our policies to win votes. Of course, we want to win seats, so that we have an even greater presence in society and a stronger base from which to argue our case. But any seat won by hiding what we think will not be worth having.

Say what you think

We believe that it is important to debate these issues openly, seriously and in a reasonable tone. This places an obligation on all to present their arguments for consideration, criticism, refinement, rejection or agreement.

Every member of Left Unity should argue for what they believe. There should be a thorough debate in the branches and a vote should be taken at conference. Through a comradely debate our ideas will become clearer. Those who lose will then have to campaign to win a majority next time and those who win must prove in practice that their approach works. There is nothing unusual about this.

The Socialist Platform statement is a starting point. It is not a party programme or a policy statement. It is intended only to lay solid socialist foundations for the new party. It makes clear that socialism has to be international and democratic. We welcome criticism, suggestions for improvement, additions. No doubt there will be plenty of debate about programme, tactics, methods of work, terminology and other aspects of party work. But if we get the principles and aims of the party unambiguously established from the beginning, those debates will be framed by a clear idea of where we want to end up, making it much easier to measure our work and achievements against our overall objective. If we get things right at the beginning, we have a much better chance of building something significant, that will play a central role in changing history.

We present the statement for your support. Please sign it if you agree with it ●

Mark Boothroyd, Tim Lessells, Soraya Lawrence, Will McMahon, Cat Ryland, Chris Strafford, Nick Wrack

If you want to join the Socialist Platform or find out more about it contact: luspcontact@gmail.com

Notes

1. <http://leftunity.org/socialist-platform-statement-of-aims-and-principles>. See also *Weekly Worker* August 1.

Summer Offensive

Discussion, argument - and a break

We received a very encouraging email this week about Communist University, our annual school which begins this coming Monday, August 12. A comrade from a Trotskyist group whose members have been pretty regular attendees at CU over recent years writes that they will be coming this time too and "look forward to seeing you all again, so we can engage in some useful discussion and argument".

And the *argument* is the thing, comrades. In CU, the comrades chairing are given briefing notes making it absolutely clear that we want to forefront the important disagreements that divide the revolutionary left and - it is underlined - they must *prioritise* those who have serious political disagreements in the debate, no matter the order in which comrades have indicated to speak. Mike Macnair's piece in last week's paper is worthwhile recalling in this context: "At the level at which education in Marxism has to work, which is education for adults, that means confronting them with unresolved and debated problems: learning through dialectic. By contrast, training drills into the recipients by endless repetition a single practice." Put in more prosaic terms, there's nothing more educative than a bloody good argument.

Communist University is the week-long event when the *Weekly Worker* 'goes live', as it were. In contrast to other organisations, we are looking to educate our comrades rather than train them in the party line. It is an event that participants - whatever their

political backgrounds - generally find educative and inspiring.

And it costs money. Which brings me to the Summer Offensive, our annual fund drive that ends on the last day of this year's CU. We have had a decent, but not inspiring week. In addition to the usual standing orders that come in to the paper, here have been some "pretty hefty" donations, as the paper's editor put it when he reported the figures to me. Three comrades - EJ, NW, DT - put in £50 each and JM added a more than welcome £86.

It was a disappointing week for website visits - only 8,841 visits and the usual Thursday spike (when the paper is uploaded) did not materialise. The holiday break is clearly having an impact, so it is pleasing that the steady pace of the Summer Offensive continues, with £2,209 coming in this week, taking our running total to £14,950. Well done to comrade MZ (near £300 for his eBay auction in aid of Hands Off the People of Iran), RG and SW for their £100 cheques - and a host of smaller, very welcome donations.

This is the last issue of the *Weekly Worker* for a spell - there will be two weeks without an issue, including the CU week - but we hope you will continue to send in your cheques and make use of our PayPal facility to support our annual fund drive. It ends on August 18 and - with well over £10k still to go - it really could do with your support! ●

Mark Fischer

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

ITALY

Heading for jail?

Can it really be true that ‘the law is equal for all’? Silvio Berlusconi may yet have more tricks up his sleeve, writes **Toby Abse**

On Thursday August 1, five judges sitting in a special summer panel of the Cassazione (supreme court) made a momentous contribution to Italian history, which Beppe Grillo, the leader of Movimento 5 Stelle (5 Star Movement - M5S), has compared to “the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989”. They turned the 76-year-old Popolo della Libertà (PdL) leader and three-times former prime minister, Silvio Berlusconi, into a convicted criminal in the eyes of the Italian legal system - which, in contrast to Anglo-American jurisprudence, presumes the innocence of all defendants until they have exhausted all possible appeals.

As many both in Italy and abroad have remarked, it was particularly fitting that Berlusconi, like the leading American Mafioso, Al Capone, before him, was finally convicted for tax evasion. By Berlusconi's standards it was a relatively minor tax fraud of €7.3 million - although the elaborate system he devised, under which the price of the rights to the numerous American films shown on his Italian TV stations was artificially inflated, had deprived the Italian exchequer of hundreds of millions of dollars over a very long period: the other charges were ruled to be ‘out of time’ under the statute of limitations.

Whilst it is almost universally accepted that Berlusconi's age and lack of previous criminal convictions mean that he will not have to serve any of the nominal four-year jail sentence, which will in practice be commuted to a year of either house arrest or community service, this definitive conviction came as a massive shock to Berlusconi. Never before in his extremely murky business and political career, spanning over half a century - starting with enormous Milanese property developments financed by what was widely presumed to be the money-laundering of Sicilian Mafia fortunes gained from heroin trafficking - has he had to face the full force of the law. Berlusconi has, of course, become very familiar with the Italian criminal justice system in more recent decades, having been a defendant in 18 criminal cases over the last 24 years.

Contrary to Berlusconi's transparently mendacious claims, this has not been an instance of judicial persecution of an innocent man. He has only been genuinely acquitted in terms of Italian law on four occasions - on the somewhat debatable basis that he was too wrapped up in his prime ministerial or political responsibilities to be personally aware of criminal actions committed by subordinates in his business empire. However, he has usually escaped a definitive conviction not by the force of legal argument, but by a variety of very dodgy expedients, including amnesties, statutes of limitations and, most farcically of all, in the case of two charges of false accounting, by passing a law turning a serious criminal offence into a civil misdemeanour now treated with roughly the same degree of severity as a minor motoring offence in the UK.

The view - most notably associated with the former magistrate, Antonio Di Pietro - that Berlusconi entered politics in 1993-94, immediately after the downfall of his principal political patron, former socialist prime minister Bettino Craxi, to avoid bankruptcy and imprisonment is more



Silvio Berlusconi: felon

than plausible. And two decades of being Italy's dominant political figure - leader of the main centre-right force when not prime minister and, according to many calculations, Italy's richest man - gave Berlusconi a false sense of security. He came to hold a belief that those judges or witnesses could be bribed. That or they could be threatened: economically with the loss of employment, an end to any hope of career advancement in the state sector or the media and show-business worlds. Failing that, given Berlusconi's links since university days to Palermo-born Marcello Dell'Utri, currently appealing against a Mafia conviction, there could be even more dire consequences.

Two showmen

In the latest case, he assumed that by hiring Franco Coppi, a veteran defence lawyer with a very high professional reputation for wit, intelligence and astonishing mastery of legal technicalities, who had kept Giulio Andreotti out of prison on rather graver charges than the one Berlusconi was facing, he had overcome any possible disadvantages of relying on Niccolò Ghedini, whose 16 years of acting as Berlusconi's in-house defence counsel may perhaps have left many of the judiciary very weary of his rather predictable courtroom manoeuvres and excessive emotional identification with his main client. Whilst Berlusconi was undoubtedly disappointed when Coppi patiently explained to him that there was no way of postponing the day of judgement until the point in the autumn when the five judges on the summer panel would be replaced by their Cassazione colleagues who usually handle tax fraud cases (a set of judges who had proved far more amenable to Berlusconi's claims that he was too busy running a political party or a government to notice his subordinates' underhand dealings), he still assumed that the ingenious Coppi would manage to find some flaw in the lower court's verdict sufficient to secure a retrial that would ‘time out’ at least his 2002 tax fraud offence, and with any luck the 2003 one as well.

Coppi's confident attitude during the first two days of the Cassazione trial - nonchalantly eating a substantial restaurant meal during the lunch break, in marked contrast to the nervous Ghedini, who despite his years of experience in handling Berlusconi's court cases found himself acting as Coppi's junior, and was far too busy

regularly reporting to Berlusconi on his mobile phone, or rushing frantically round to the tycoon's Roman residence to give more detailed explanations, to even eat a sandwich - led Berlusconi to assume he had little to fear. Perhaps this was the case of one showman being misled by another.

Whilst the legal star, Coppi, undoubtedly put up a superior courtroom performance to the servile hack, Ghedini, ultimately this was for him a professional contest like any other and, although Coppi was playing to win, the possibility of defeat was not psychologically devastating, and one suspects any subsequent references to possible appeals to the European Court of Human Rights were just a ploy to humour a disappointed and extremely irritable client, rather than a considered legal judgement on the part of a man lacking Ghedini's partisan blinkers.

It needs to be underlined that, despite Berlusconi's subsequent rhetoric, the verdict was by no means a foregone conclusion. The judges retired to their chambers at midday on August 1, and only emerged with a verdict more than seven and a half hours later, by which time not only the defendant and the international media, but also Italy's president and prime minister were getting somewhat impatient. The timing would suggest that the discussion was long and animated, with some initial differences of opinion amongst a panel with a wide variety of legal backgrounds, who, far from working together as a team on a regular basis on previous occasions, had been thrown together more or less at random on the basis of their availability during this year's holiday season.

In the run-up to the hearing, Coppi had managed, insofar as it was humanly possible with such a wilful character as Berlusconi, to persuade his client to refrain from his habitual tirades of abuse against each and every member of the judiciary, as such outbursts would have a negative impact on any waverers on the panel. Once he was found guilty, however, Berlusconi reverted to type. A few hours after the sentence, he issued a nine-minute video that was shown on all Italian television channels, in which, far from accepting the verdict, he asserted his total innocence, and ranted and raved against the vast judicial conspiracy against him. Although the television journalists may have been genuinely disappointed by Berlusconi's refusal

to hold a press conference - at which he might have had to answer questions - or to grant any interviews in the wake of the verdict, their willingness to allow a convicted criminal to make such an unchallenged and unedited broadcast to the nation, shown not just on his own three notoriously subservient channels, but on state television too, is more an indication of his continued hegemony over Italy's media, and indeed over the coalition government, than of the journalists' professional hunger for a topical story.

Berlusconi has shown no real sign of calming down in the days since the video. By the following evening, Berlusconi had instructed his parliamentarians to demand a presidential pardon for him within the next few days. His approach to this matter appears to most observers to be completely counterproductive. According to Italian convention, requests for a pardon are normally expected to come from convicted criminals, their close relatives, their lawyers or their guardians. Not from the heads of parliamentary groups in the Chamber and Senate. Moreover, some signs of at least apparent repentance are usually expected, and the criminal is usually expected to have served at least some part of their sentence. In addition, it is highly unusual to grant a pardon to a criminal with other trials pending, including convictions in the lower courts, against which an appeal is being made - such as the seven-year sentence against Berlusconi for having sex with an under-age prostitute in the Ruby case.

Civil war

What amounts to very public blackmail of the head of state will make it very difficult indeed for president Giorgio Napolitano to grant such a pardon without creating a major scandal. No doubt the president himself may have been disappointed with the judges' intransigent defence of legality and the much violated principle that “The law is equal for all”, displayed in every Italian courtroom.

After all, what about the effect of the verdict on the stability of Enrico Letta's ‘grand coalition’ government? This is a government born of Napolitano's personal desire to replicate the ‘strange majority’ led by Mario Monti that governed Italy in 2011-13, and to sabotage any possible deal between the centre-left Partito Democratico (PD) and M5S, of the kind that former PD leader Pierluigi Bersani had sought between February and April this year. When PdL coordinator Sandro Bondi - a former minister of culture in one of Berlusconi's governments - threatened the president with “civil war” on August 3 if no pardon was granted to Berlusconi, any leniency in the near future became even more improbable.

It is hard to see how Berlusconi's address to a national demonstration in Rome on August 4, directed against the magistrature as a whole, can really be seen as a sign of any increased moderation on the convict's part. Yes, the fraudster called for the continuance of Letta's coalition government and refrained from explicitly attacking Napolitano by name, but Berlusconi also denied that the PdL was being “irresponsible” - the adjective used by Napolitano in rebuking Bondi for his “civil war” proclamation.

At this point, we also need to

differentiate between, on the one hand, Giorgio Napolitano and Enrico Letta, and, on the other, the PD in general in terms of their reaction to Berlusconi's antics since his conviction. Napolitano has always acted as Berlusconi's protector, which is why PdL parliamentarians were such enthusiasts for his re-election in April. Enrico Letta probably places excessive hope in the capacity of his uncle, Gianni Letta, one of Berlusconi's most prudent, rational and courteous courtiers, to restrain his master's limitless rage at the practical consequences of being treated as a common criminal.

(These consequences may well include his loss of the title of ‘cavaliere’ or ‘knight’, and his expulsion from the Italian Senate when the length of the ban on his public office holding is resolved after a further hearing at the Milanese appeal court, which in the Cassazione's opinion miscalculated in setting it at five years. But Berlusconi's passport has already been confiscated, rendering any possibility of future convivial weekends with his friend, Vladimir Putin, let alone fleeing the country in the manner of his hero, Craxi, utterly impossible, unless he resorts to expedients more usually associated with Nazi war criminals or Balkan warlords.)

However, the attitude of PD parliamentarians is rather different from that of Napolitano. Whilst most of them have a thoroughly obsequious attitude to the first former ‘official communist’ president of the republic, and take some pride in the fact that the current prime minister, and a large proportion of his cabinet, came from their own party, there is a limit to how much blatant provocation from Berlusconi, or his minions in the PdL such as Bondi, they can be expected to stomach. They know only too well that most of their rank-and-file members detest the old delinquent with far more fervour than the PD's cynical professional politicians, many of whom have spent the last 20 years compromising with him - especially the 101 traitors who failed to vote for Romani Prodi in April's presidential contest.

Therefore, while it is more than likely that the coalition will survive until the autumn, as parliament is due to close for a three-week summer holiday on August 9, it is increasingly improbable that the Letta government will last for the 18 months that the premier and Napolitano have often claimed would be necessary to carry out the allegedly essential reforms, including controversial modifications to the constitution - vigorously opposed by M5S and the soft-left Sinistra Ecologia Libertà - that they have in mind.

Although there can be no doubt about Letta's intelligence or his capacity to make the very most of an extremely poor hand in negotiating with his European counterparts, particularly Angela Merkel, his first hundred days as premier have been most notable for repeated postponements of crucial economic and financial decisions on urgent matters such as a projected increase in VAT, or the collection of further instalments of IMU (a property tax on all freeholders), at a time when Italy's public debt and budget deficit appear to be rising rapidly, and youth unemployment has reached nearly 40%. ●

SOUTH AFRICA

Maverick targeted

Peter Manson reports on a case that has gripped the Johannesburg media

In a controversy that might have an air of familiarity for those who have followed the crisis in the Socialist Workers Party, Zwelinzima Vavi, the general secretary of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu), was last month publicly accused of raping a Cosatu employee at the confederation's Johannesburg headquarters. The woman did not take her case to the police, but lodged an internal complaint of "sexual harassment" with Cosatu. A hearing was held on July 29, but was aborted after two hours when the woman withdrew her complaint. Not much more of what happened at the hearing beyond that is known (more on this below).

However, all this is of interest to the left in Britain not just for its superficial similarity with the 'comrade Delta' case. There are also major differences between the two. First of all, whereas Delta did merit a comment or two in several bourgeois newspapers, the allegation against comrade Vavi was headline news in the South African media for the best part of a week. That is because, unlike the SWP, Cosatu is a major *political* organisation in addition to being South Africa's largest trade union centre, to which all the biggest unions are affiliated.

Its political role derives from its status as a member of the African National Congress-led tripartite alliance - the third member being the South African Communist Party. More than that, however, there is a very substantial overlap between all three organisations, with thousands of individuals, including very senior members, belonging to two of them or all three simultaneously. The overlap is particularly pronounced between Cosatu and the SACP, which is undoubtedly the largest 'official' Communist Party in the western world, now claiming no fewer than 170,000 members. Most of the top union leaders and Cosatu officials, including Vavi, are SACP members.

But here is the second major difference. Whereas comrade Delta enjoyed the support and protection of the SWP central committee, Vavi is regarded as a maverick by the SACP leadership. Vavi, who has been general secretary for 14 years, has been far too critical of the ANC and president Jacob Zuma - not to mention the SACP's enthusiastic support for both - for the party's liking. He has condemned the ANC for presiding over rampant corruption and has said that Cosatu's support for the ANC in next year's general election should not be regarded as a foregone conclusion - for the SACP tops that amounts to sacrilege. Furthermore, he has told SACP general secretary Blade Nzimande in no uncertain terms that he ought to give up his post as minister for higher education and instead concentrate on running the Communist Party (Nzimande is one of seven SACP government ministers).

For months comrade Vavi has been facing an internal campaign to silence and/or dislodge him. He faces charges of instigating a "political rupture", mixed with allegations of "administrative impropriety" from senior Cosatu officials and SACP loyalists trying to unseat him. The impropriety is said to relate to the sale of the federation's old building and purchase of a new headquarters - in other words, the loyalists have been attempting to turn the tables by implying that Viva himself is corrupt, to the extent that he has been



Zwelinzima Vavi: power struggle

lining his pockets at union members' expense. The general secretary admits that Cosatu House was probably sold too cheaply, but strongly resents the implication that this was anything other than a miscalculation, for which others were also responsible.

The accusations of political disloyalty to ANC and SACP leaders seem to be much more well founded. For example, in a recent internal exchange he wrote: "We have referred to the SACP initially endorsing Gear [the Thatcherite Growth, Employment and Redistribution package introduced under Nelson Mandela in 1996] without suggesting the movement of a comma. Today, the SACP threatens to endorse a similar anti-worker, neoliberal offensive for so-called 'strategic reasons'."

Manna

It is against this background that the accusations of serious sexual misdemeanour emerged. In the words of Ranjeni Munusamy, writing in the online *The Daily Maverick*, "The rape allegation is therefore manna from heaven for Vavi's enemies. It exposed his infidelity and shattered his relatively clean public image. It undermined his stature as one of the few public figures with integrity, who the public has come to count on to speak truth to power and chief crusader against corruption and government failures."

It was in fact Vavi himself who made the allegations public, issuing a comprehensive information pack to the press as a pre-emptive measure, knowing the information was likely to leak out.

His story goes like this. Yes, he did indeed recruit the woman (who has not been named for legal reasons). He met her in 2012 when she was working on the South African Airways check-in desk in Johannesburg and was so "impressed" by her "efficiency" that he invited her to come and work for him. He also appears to have been "impressed" by her appearance, for their relationship at work soon became intimate. According to Vavi, this was restricted to "hugs and kisses" until one day in January this year, when he entered the Cosatu women's office where she worked, locked the door and had intercourse with her for the first and last time.

He claims that their relationship was entirely consensual and that he and the secretary exchanged more than 400 text messages of an intimate nature both before and after that occasion. He has made many of them available, including several from the day when they had sex. She texted him in the evening to say:

"That was not consensual"; and a short time later wrote: "Now I am starting to feel that you hired me merely based on my looks." She added: "I am sorry if I gave you ideas." And in another text she said: "I'm worried. Please tell me I don't have a reason to, then I'll let it go." Vavi comments: "Her worry related to the issue of HIV" and he was at pains to reassure her on the question.

Vavi claims that shortly after the January incident the 26-year-old's husband found out about them. This, he says, resulted in an email offering to take the matter no further if she was paid the sum of R2 million (£134,000). The email message stated: "This document serves as a written agreement that once my demands are met ... I will solemnly swear not to divulge any information regarding this matter."

Later texts reveal that the woman told Vavi she had been approached by his detractors in Cosatu, who urged her to cooperate with them. In fact Vavi supporters have gone so far as to claim that Frans Baleni, general secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers, "planted" the woman - rather unlikely, in view of the general secretary's own admission as to how she came to be employed.

But the accusation casts a light on the growing divisions within the South African labour movement, centring on the relationship of Cosatu and the SACP to the ANC. The NUM is now one of the most ANC-loyal unions and partly as a result of this has failed to seriously support its platinum mineworker members in their grievances (it was platinum workers who were the victims of last year's massacre at Marikana, when 34 miners were shot dead by police). Disillusionment with the NUM rose to such a pitch that tens of thousands of platinum workers left to join the breakaway Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union - and now the NUM has lost its status as the largest Cosatu affiliate.

Vavi himself goes further than accusing loyalist unions like the NUM of setting him up: "For years now I have been dealing with consistent threats to my life, political assaults and efforts to destroy my contribution to the struggle of the working class and the poor in this country. Lately, as we all know, these efforts to destroy me have intensified. I am unable not to view this matter in the same light." He had earlier claimed to have received threats hinting that he could be killed in a "car accident"; and in a radio interview last month he said he had been told last year by a member of South African state intelligence that "they'd come across a plot to poison

me from the Iranian intelligence services".⁴ The political connection between Iran and Vavi's South African enemies is unclear.

As part of his counteroffensive, Vavi lodged a complaint of extortion with the police against the woman and her husband. As things stand, this is the only complaint that is still 'live', but this looks set to change very shortly. There is no doubt that there will now be a misconduct case brought against Vavi by top Cosatu officials. It is said that, when they meet on August 12, these SACP-influenced officials will call for a special sitting of the confederation's executive committee to initiate disciplinary charges relating to misuse of Cosatu premises and abuse of recruitment procedures.

Hypocrisy

What has the SACP leadership been saying about all this? Well, officially not a word. The line is, this is Cosatu's business and has nothing to do with us. However, in a rally to mark the 92nd anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party, Nzimande referred to the dispute: "Let's be absolutely clear. The SACP is not backing any personalities or factions (alleged or real) within Cosatu. Yes, there are thousands of SACP members, many of them leaders, within the trade union movement. They are there in their own right. Those in leadership positions in unions are there because as communists they have won the trust of the workers. They have not been deployed from the outside. The SACP does not and will not meddle in the internal affairs of Cosatu."

In an obvious attempt to respond to comrade Vavi's accusations he went on: "The SACP does not want a tame, lame-duck, conveyor-belt federation. The SACP does not want a labour federation that's afraid of 'speaking truth' to government or anybody else. But let's be even clearer - we want a labour movement that goes well beyond the petty bourgeois, hyper-critical, NGO ambition of just speaking (or is it tweeting?) truth to government from the side lines."

In case you were wondering, one comrade who frequently engages in "tweeting" is a certain Zwelinzima Vavi.

While, however, the SACP is officially neutral on the Cosatu dispute, the leadership itself could be accused of being hypocritical, if not "hyper-critical". Its lackeys on the ground have been pushing a very different line. Take Dominic Tweedie, the SACP's number-one hack in the blogosphere, who runs several SACP-influenced email discussion lists. He says of Cosatu:

"... the senior person involved was the big boss of the organisation, the one who hires and fires, and who has admitted having sexual intercourse with this employee *in the business premises*. This is an impossible situation. What was this woman supposed to do? How was she going to reject the man, unless she was ready to lose her job? ... There are no excuses that can make this tolerable."

In another posting he bluntly states: "... the Vavi era at Cosatu is over. There is no possible rehabilitation for him as GS, and his personal rehabilitation, if it is possible, can only begin after he has walked away ..."

This, surely, is the real SACP line. Leaders like Nzimande would not dream of doing anything more than hinting about Vavi's political criticisms - the real reason why they want rid of him - but, in the words of *The Daily Maverick* journalist quoted above, the rape/sexual harassment allegations are "manna from heaven".

Rape capital

None of this is to understate the seriousness of allegations of rape - especially when we are talking about South Africa, which faces "a globally unprecedented problem of violence against women and girls", according to the Medical Research Council.⁶ Estimates for the frequency of rape in the country vary from one every 11 minutes to one every 26 seconds. There are, of course, huge numbers of unreported attacks, but, whichever statistics you use, South Africa is undoubtedly the rape capital of the world.

In fact earlier this week, on August 6, justice minister Jeff Radebe (an SACP member, as it happens) announced the revival of a system of dedicated courts dealing exclusively with sexual offences. At least 22 such courts will be opened this year alone.

We pointed out in relation to the SWP that comrade Delta should long ago have resigned from membership of the organisation until such a time as he was able to clear his name. The SWP leadership should have done its utmost to get him to follow that course. We cannot have such serious accusations hanging over working class leaders, which can only serve to weaken and undermine the organisations they head.

The same principle ought to have applied to Cosatu and Vavi - the general secretary should have stood down when the allegations surfaced until he was cleared. Of course, it would have been a very brief departure, since the comrade no longer stands accused of either rape or sexual harassment following the Cosatu hearing.

Talking of which, no detailed report of the hearing has been issued by anyone, as far as I know, so it is not known what led the woman to drop her complaint. Vavi has said that she was unable to answer certain questions put to her, but we do not know what these questions were or the manner in which they were asked ●

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Notes

1. <http://mg.co.za/article/2013-07-26-00-vavi-says-critics-are-govt-turncoats>.
2. *The Daily Maverick* July 29: www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2013-07-29-vavi-and-the-perilous-cocktail-of-politics-sex-and-conspiracy/#.Ufgrmm0phoE.
3. July 29 media statement.
4. <http://ewn.co.za/2013/07/15/Vavi-takes-precaution-after-death-threats>.
5. www.sacp.org.za/main.php?ID=4045.
6. www.mrc.ac.za/gender/prev_rapedd041209.pdf.

IRELAND



Without access to full information nothing serious is possible

Attempt to silence critics

The recent publication of an article by Craig Murphy, member of the Socialist Party of Ireland, in the *Weekly Worker* has provoked some extremely interesting responses.¹

The comrade wrote a critique of the internal regime and political method of the SP. He raised the treatment of recent resignations of prominent members and showed how the ordinary membership had been denied the opportunity to properly discuss the reasons behind these resignations.

A membership aggregate was called on July 7 to deal with the departures. The 60 members present were given the resignation letters to read, digest ... and return. The fear is that they might fall into the wrong hands. Like others, Craig was forced to scan through them quickly, given the time constraints imposed. Then the audience was treated to a 40-minute presentation by general secretary Kevin O'Loughlin on the current state of struggle and demoralisation of those who had left. The criticisms made by those who resigned were either ignored or explained away as an anarchistic deviations.

Loyal members took to the floor to denounce those who resigned for their loss of commitment to Trotskyism. Jimmy Dignam, former full-timer, Richard O'Hara former branch secretary, and leading trade union militants Andrew Phelan and Megan Ni Ghabhlain were all dismissed as erstwhile revolutionaries who had now unfortunately retreated from the battlefield. There was nothing to be learned from them, save the necessity of keeping faith in the leadership.

Craig Murphy wanted to hold the leadership to account and to open up a space for real debate. The leadership had evidently thought they had successfully put the thorny subject

to bed after the aggregate. But now they were forced, by proxy, to deal with his *Weekly Worker* article in the social media.

A number of issues have flowed from its appearance on *Cedar Lounge*, a prominent blog in Ireland. The piece quoted at length from the resignation letter of Richard O'Hara, who had been especially concerned about the "serious democratic deficit within the Socialist Party".² He had argued that the slate system used to elect the leadership was a way of guaranteeing the unassailability of the present leadership and attempting to ensure conformity. The lack of minutes, records of votes or reports from the meetings of the executive compounded a culture of secrecy and intolerance.

'Jolly Red Giant', a regular contributor to *Cedar Lounge* and a man with 30 years membership in the SP under his belt, took the writer and his supporters to task. Firstly SP internal structures were no business of anybody outside the SP. Secondly there is no slate system for the national committee - but presumably there is for the executive committee which is elected from the NC. Thirdly there were no issues raised by the outgoing members that needed to be dealt with. There is "no 'crisis' - there is no 'split' - there is nothing more than an attempt by the *WW* to stir the sh*t, as they do every week, and then we have others with the odd chip on their shoulder deciding to jump on the bandwagon".³ He went on to denounce the article as nonsense and gossip - written by an individual influenced by the CPGB. He had written "an article that was riddled with rubbish". This "non-issue has been manufactured by an individual and the *WW* - and it has

been manufactured to my knowledge without the consent of the individuals involved or the Socialist Party".⁴

Others in the discussion forum have helpfully pointed out that the article was written by a real person and that there has been no denial of the occurrence of the resignations or the aggregate. The denials relate to the significance of the departure of these four leading members and the truth of their criticisms. If Jolly Red Giant is to be believed, these were spineless individuals who became demoralised and left without saying anything of relevance. Now that they have gone, they have no right to be listened to or taken seriously. The *Weekly Worker* had made the controversy up - along with an SP member who came under its evil spell - to destroy the healthy, democratic organisation that is the SP.

JRG has argued that the article should also be dismissed because of the failure of the writer to raise his differences internally before publishing in the *Weekly Worker*. Well, I cannot speak for Craig Murphy, but from what I understand there are major obstacles in criticising any aspect of the SP leadership internally. In his resignation letter, Richard O'Hara acknowledges that he will face such a reproach. He responds that members "have a duty to think about why this never really happens. Apart from the somewhat difficult atmosphere in the party, the lack of real structures or publications and the top-down approach to political education, the reality is that the fact that nothing has really changed within the party means that one gets the feeling that, no matter how hard one argues, nothing will ever change."

Craig Murphy is still a SP member - a member who has rebelled against

bureaucracy by publishing openly. I understand that the leadership has not used the opportunity of the article to launch an open debate within the organisation - even though it does not have the excuse of his resignation to fall back on. Instead he is vilified because he used the *Weekly Worker* to publish his criticisms. According to JRG, the paper spends its time "doing nothing except trying to dig up gossip on other left groups".⁵ How dare it ask questions about the SP or provide a resource for the publication of articles by disgruntled members?

And what applies to the *Weekly Worker* applies to the whole workers' movement. It too has no business knowing how the SP comes to its decisions. The SP wants to lead the working class by keeping it in the dark as to its internal debates and structure. All information will be on a 'need to know' basis. In fact its own membership does not even know how the leadership makes its decisions or who stands where on disputed questions. The most they are allowed to do is 'flesh out' (ie, implement) the decisions of the executive, which are made in secret and filtered down to the minions.

SP members should take courage from Craig Murphy. He did, by the way, discuss his article with other members and ex-members before publication. He sought to ensure that the views he expressed were those reflective of other critics. He has stood up for what he believes in as a revolutionary. And he has defended his comrades from underhand attacks by the SP leadership - attacks which aim both to underplay their criticisms and to intimidate others from speaking out. It is no doubt difficult to stand up as individuals, but members can act together. The example of comrades

in the Socialist Workers Party in Britain collectively facing down its bureaucratic leadership can and should inspire.

Some have had problems with the article appearing in a British journal. They cannot see how this issue affects the left or working class in Britain or why it should be 'any business of theirs'. The uniqueness of the *Weekly Worker* in providing a space for open debate is clearly the most important factor. But also there is the question of internationalism - I for one am not a nationalist and I welcome the contribution of comrades in Britain and elsewhere to our debates here in Ireland.

There is a crying need for a genuine Marxist group here in Ireland. The SP and the SWP have lurched to the right in their electoralism - with no mention of awkward questions like abortion to be allowed in any political literature for the forthcoming SP local election campaign. We who recognise the need for a democratic revolutionary party need to make it our business to organise together. I believe we will provide inspiration for those in the workers' movement who are tired of the tawdry reformism of the existing groups. Marxism is challenging, practical and above all it is *true*.

There will be a public meeting in late August/early September for those interested in this project. Details to follow ●

Anne McShane

Notes

1. 'Not for the public domain' *Weekly Worker* July 25.
2. *Ibid.*
3. <http://cedarlounge.wordpress.com/2013/07/25/weekly-worker-article-on-the-sp>.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*

POLEMIC

Slander and gossip

In this article, which he entitled ‘Inventive illiteracy amidst petty sectarianism’, **Gilbert Achcar**, a founding signatory of Left Unity, responds to accusations of social-imperialism. Needless to say, a reply will follow

I have not previously had any experience in dealing with the CPGB, but was regularly told by various friends on the British left that it is a sectarian organisation whose main activity is spreading gossip about the radical left through its weekly paper. I now have confirmation from my own experience that this is plainly true.

In the issue dated July 25, the CPGB’s *Weekly Worker* published an article signed by Yasmine Mather dedicated to their assessment of myself as a “social-imperialist”.¹ This favourite label of Stalinism in its heyday (along with such niceties as “Hitlero-Trotskyite”, etc) was first bestowed on me in an article by another of the paper’s writers, Sarah McDonald, in the previous edition.² The label was quite odd there, as it appeared at the beginning of McDonald’s article, which otherwise was praising my contribution to a debate on socialist organisation that took place at the 2013 edition of Marxism,³ the annual forum organised by the Socialist Workers Party - itself a regular target of the CPGB’s gossip.

Calling me “social-imperialist” at the outset of the article without further comment was so odd that I suspect that it was added to McDonald’s article by the *Weekly Worker* editors so as to deflect in advance any accusation from like-minded sources that they might be praising someone whom countless politically illiterate people have accused of ‘supporting’ Nato’s intervention in Libya, despite my repeated assertions and explanations that this is a baseless accusation.

The slander stuck so strongly in the mind of sectarians of all sorts that other imagined positions have been attributed to me since then - the most vicious being the canard spread by a Lambertist multilingual website (the Lambertists are a Trotskyist equivalent of the CPGB), according to which I took part in a meeting of the Syrian National Council (whereas it was actually a meeting of the leftwing National Coordination Committee) in order to urge them to call for an imperialist intervention in Syria (whereas my contribution to the meeting was dedicated to exactly the opposite).

Mather starts her article by stating that “Gilbert Achcar has strongly objected to being described as a ‘social-imperialist’ in the *Weekly Worker*”. She does not explain how and where I objected. The fact is that shortly after the publication of the article, its author, Sarah McDonald, sent an email to both me and Paul Le Blanc, who took part in the same panel at Marxism, asking us for an interview and ending with “Comradely”. I replied: “How dare you ask me to give you an interview after calling me in typical third-period Stalinist style: ‘social-imperialist Gilbert Achcar’? How can you write ‘comradely’ to a ‘social-imperialist’ in your right mind?”

I asked for a public apology. Instead of that, Mather’s article in the next issue purported to “investigate” the “truth” about me. It starts with noting that I do “not fit the description of a stereotypical social-imperialist” (sic), the reason being my commitment to the Palestinian cause and my anti-imperialist record, including my stance against the Iraq war. In describing this record, Mather says that she shared a platform with me at



For some the painful truth must be dismissed as mere gossip

an anti-imperialist conference in 2003 (I can’t recall that at all) and that I was “less critical of Tehran” than her (perhaps I was reluctant to “support the Iranian working class’s call for the overthrow of the capitalist Islamic Republic of Iran”, as she advocated, according to her recollection, since this “call” is a pure fantasy). She then adds “from memory” (sic) that I “emphasised the difference between Shia and Sunni Islam, the latter being the religion of the oppressed” - one of the most preposterous inventions ever attributed to me.

Then comes Mather’s discussion of my new “social-imperialist” record. It is about “the Achcar who came out in support of western intervention in Libya, Mali and Syria”. “Whether he likes it or not,” pursues Mather, “what he has written on Libya, Mali and Syria has been praised and distributed by the Eustonites, the [Alliance for Workers’ Liberty] and other social-imperialists”. Well, I do not know if all the above-mentioned have distributed what I have written on Libya and Syria, but I am positively sure that no-one ever distributed what I have written on Mali - for the simple reason that I have written not a single line on that country!⁴ Mather is such a scrupulous prosecutor that she adds to her accusation figments of her own imagination.

On Libya, she singles out of context one sentence of a long article that I have written on the issue to insinuate that my “unambiguous” stance was one of “support for military intervention”, a stance of “a social-imperialist character”. I have warned so many times against such illiterate distortions of my position on Libya that I will not waste my time and that of the readers in reminding them here of what I really stood for. Anyone interested can read the above-mentioned article as well as my two interviews to NLP on this same debate.⁵

On Syria, Mather provides us with yet another illustration of great reading skills, powerfully enhanced by the thick glasses of petty sectarianism. She pretends that I “actually advised the opposition on how to go about getting foreign intervention” and

produces as proof a long quote taken from an article based on the talk I gave at the meeting of the National Coordination Committee referred to above, in which I explain why it is important for the Syrian opposition to “define a clear stance on the issue of foreign military intervention”.⁶ However, what Mather overlooked (or maybe she stopped reading the article at this point) is that this was a preamble to an argument against any calls for a no-fly zone over Syria and other forms of direct western military intervention. A few quotes from that article are here in order, since this same canard is also propagated by the Lambertists:

“The Syrian opposition must be aware that the cost of allowing direct foreign military intervention (as opposed to indirect intervention, such as providing arms) in Syria will be much higher than in the Libyan case for several reasons ...

“Acknowledging this reality does not in any way suggest that one must therefore refrain from supporting people’s demands for democracy and human rights, whether in Syria or Iran. It requires, however, to be taken into account in the way the Iranian opposition does, which completely rejects foreign military intervention in the affairs of its country and defends its country’s right to develop nuclear power in the face of Israeli-American threats that attempt to prevent it from doing so by claiming that Iran is developing nuclear weapons ...

“The requests made by the leader of the Syrian Free Army for international intervention in order to ‘implement a no-fly zone or no-sail zone in Syria’, and create a ‘secure zone in northern Syria that the Syrian Free Army can administrate’ are at best further evidence of the lack of strategic vision among the leadership of the Syrian uprising. They are also a product of that blend of short-sightedness and emotional reaction to the viciousness of the regime that leads some of its opponents to hope for what could lead to a major historical catastrophe in Syria and the region as a whole.”⁷

In passing, Mather’s article displays another illustration of the CPGB’s ability to fabricate slanders when

she accuses Egypt’s Revolutionary Socialists of “moving from supporting the Muslim Brotherhood to welcoming the army coup” - a pure calumny and another figment of Mather’s sectarian fantasy. She ends up describing as “frankly ridiculous” a reference to the Rwandan genocide that I made in the long article on Libya that she quoted initially. Her argument for this is a piece that Edward Herman wrote against me in 2011 (I found it so despicable that I did not bother to reply⁸). She quotes the following excerpt from Herman:

“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.”

Mather apparently only reads the initial paragraphs of articles or does not understand what she reads. She omitted Herman’s main point that he makes clear right after: that it was not the Hutu government along with Hutu militias that perpetrated genocide against the Tutsis, but the other way round.

A word of advice for the CPGB’s next piece bashing me: some holocaust deniers attacked me for my book *The Arabs and the holocaust*; you’ll find there plenty of other great quotes for your defamatory purpose ●

Notes

1. ‘Progressive sentiments amidst reactionary illusions’ *Weekly Worker* July 25.
2. ‘Not taking into account the specific conditions’ *Weekly Worker* July 18.
3. www.youtube.com/watch?v=g_2gKEINUWg.
4. Besides, whenever I have been asked about my stance on the French intervention in Mali in public meetings, as was the case recently again at the summer university of Attac in France, I came out unequivocally against it.
5. The article: www.zcommunications.org/libya-a-legitimate-and-necessary-debate-from-an-anti-imperialist-perspective-by-gilbert-achcar; the interviews: www.newleftproject.org/index.php/site/article_comments/popular_rebellion_and_imperialist_designs1; www.newleftproject.org/index.php/site/article_comments/after_gaddafi.
6. <http://english.al-akhbar.com/content/syria-militarization-military-intervention-and-absence-strategy>.
7. *Ibid*.
8. <http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2011/herman080411.html>.

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Abolish all state secrets

A sick parody of justice

The conviction of Bradley Manning shows the need to abolish state secrecy, argues **Paul Demarty**

To almost nobody's surprise, corporal Bradley Manning - the soldier who was the source of the most sensational Wikileaks disclosures - has been convicted of the vast majority of charges against him. Sentencing is the subject of a whole new bout of judicial wrangling, taking place now, but he faces up to 136 years in prison.

It barely needs to be said that this is, however predictable, a repugnant outcome. Strip away the jingoism, the jargon, the grave charges ("aiding the enemy", of which he was acquitted) and the ridiculous ones ("wanton publication") - we all know what Manning is 'guilty' of. He is guilty of having the conscience the US military bureaucracy does not - guilty of being unable to sufficiently repress his own humanity to watch a video of a helicopter crew machine-gunning terrified civilians without wanting to do something.

He is 'guilty' of exposing this crime, and of a whole series of other disclosures more or less embarrassing to the US. We knew, of course, before that video of the helicopter crew, that atrocities were happening in Iraq, as they often do in wars. We knew, before the release of the Wikileaks cables, that US foreign policy relied on propping up dictators and sundry undemocratic and corrupt regimes.

Courageous men and women like Manning do us a different service - of bringing these obvious truths into sharp and unavoidable focus, even if only for a moment. The fog of bureaucratic bullshit that enshrouds the grim *Realpolitik* of US imperialism in decline is briefly cleared away. In such a moment, the state cannot pretend that its bombs do not dismember children and its client states do not torture the innocent; it has instead to make the case that such horrors are necessary.

The foul persecution of Manning and other whistleblowers makes it abundantly clear that Barack Obama and his securocrat cronies cannot win that argument. And so, morally and politically rudderless, they resort to repression, reanimating the highly anti-democratic 1917 Espionage Act in their naked intimidation against conscientious employees and the press. Obama, having promised in vague terms a new era of transparency in government, has shown his true colours. His administration has been more intolerant of whistleblowers than any other in living memory.

Exactly how long Manning's sentence will end up being is up in the air. We know that the court will graciously dock the three years he has already spent in detention from the final tally. We also know that a further 112 days will be knocked off as 'compensation' for cruel and degrading treatment he received in military prison, which the United Nations stated amounted to torture. You do not have to be a revolutionary to bristle at this one - surely it is the baseline standard for any bourgeois liberal that a trial before which the defendant has been tortured *cannot be but a mistrial*. It is a farce, a sick

parody of justice. It ought to become a 21st century Dreyfus affair.

Obama's 'new era'

But it won't. The American left - liberal and revolutionary alike - is not energised and bursting into the spotlight, but hopelessly disoriented. Of all the events of recent years to disorient them, it was the emergence of Obama as a presidential candidate, and then his election, which did the most damage. Obama, after all, is black - the first black president, an event that would have been unthinkable a worryingly short time ago. Moreover, he promised 'change', and hinted that this 'change' would compare favourably with the poisonous crusader mindset that afflicted George W Bush and his initially neo-conservative inner circle. Where there was war, there would be peace. Where there was Orwellian legislation like the Patriot Act, there would be good old American liberty.

It was perfectly predicable that Obama would be a disappointment. It is perhaps surprising *how* dreadful his reign has been; how intolerant and repressive he has been at home, and how enthusiastically he has adopted the role of global playground bully. Even after four years of this stuff, the likes of the Workers World Party - they of the ultra-shrill anti-imperialist rhetoric, 'global class camp' theory and the rest - offered mealy-mouthed support. After all, his opponent last year, Mitt Romney, relied on dog-whistle cryptoracism to get his base energised, and Obama is black: a sufficient trigger for a left lethally addicted to gesture politics. Even Manning's most vocal supporters - the likes of the radical-liberal radio show *Democracy Now!* spring to mind - could not bring themselves to call, explicitly, for people not to vote for black America's answer to Henry Kissinger.

The most encouraging signs are simply that, in spite of the intentions of the US government, people are not sufficiently intimidated by the



Bradley Manning: courageous

experience of Manning. The most recent high-profile whistleblower, Edward Snowden, learned a very important lesson; if you are going to tweak the nose of the US state machine, do so from a safe distance. He also took the risky but, as it turned out, rewarding step of doing so openly from the off. How much harder it was to accuse Snowden of being a coward, a moral weakling, when he stood before the world and owned up to his 'crime'! (Not that it stopped various vapid, grovelling apologists from attempting to do so.)

There is a bit of information economics at work here - it takes a lot more people, and a lot more human effort, to keep a secret than to blow it wide open. In the age of billion-dollar military subcontractors, with their own lowest-bidder workforces, it is even harder. Unlike Manning, Snowden was not even a state employee. Much of the information he revealed about industrialised snooping was accessible to him in his job at subcontractor Booz Allen Hamilton.

There is another matter specific to our age: both Snowden and Manning were gifted computer specialists, with a level of technical *savoir faire* of necessity far in advance of their superiors. Those who can cure can kill - if an National Security Agency employee is a talented enough cryptographer to work for a spying agency, then he or she will be more than competent to conceal a leak until it is too late for the powers-that-

be to circumvent. This 'problem' will no doubt be solved over time; still, as Snowden and Manning show, it only takes one boffin to suffer an acute attack of basic human solidarity to cause enormous headaches for the state.

It is thus 'mission critical' for the state that more than straightforward intimidation is brought to bear on its whistleblowers; a renewed ideological offensive among the general population is necessary. There is the crude and obvious 'dark side' to this offensive, which consists in the ostracism of the whistleblowers. It did not bother Snowden, at least, who candidly admitted in his first interviews after absconding that he fully expected to be branded a traitor and a coward by the great and the good back home. So, indeed, it came to pass. Manning is plainly more emotionally fragile than Snowden, but has bigger things to worry about than whether Joe Sixpack considers him a narcissist or an enemy agent.

Beyond that, there are attempts to restore faith directly in the institutions which have been so acutely embarrassed by successive revelations. It is in this context that we have to read the very public closure of embassies throughout the Arab world in response to an ill-defined terrorist threat - it represents an attempt to show how very competent the NSA and CIA are at protecting Americans from their enemies. Perhaps 'al Qa'eda elements' ('al Qa'eda', of course, is a quantity as vague as 'terrorism' itself these days) really are targeting US embassies at present. It is nonetheless notable how regularly such scares erupt at just the moment that the general population is ambivalent about the intentions of its government. It is almost enough to make one suspect that the whole thing is a cheap publicity stunt.

Will it work? Eventually. The propagandists for the security state have their work cut out, at least. Polls suggest that the largest part of the American population have some sympathy with Snowden and believe that the NSA is out of control.

Members of both houses of congress, on the Democrat left and parts of the radical Republican right, are (for the time being) making themselves awkward for the twin party hierarchies, who are both equally enthusiastic defenders of American imperial power. Defenders of Manning, alas, are fewer and further between; but the fact that his grotesque sham of a trial should take place in the midst of the Snowden/NSA furor could turn out to be unfortunate timing from the US state's point of view.

Lessons

The lessons are clear enough: we need more than individual whistleblowers, heroic though they may be. The very right of the state to keep its affairs secret *is itself a mechanism* of ruling class domination. There are few more acute demonstrations of this proposition than the hypertrophy of surveillance, the atrocities in foreign killing fields and the cynicism of diplomatic wheeler-dealing - all exposed by Snowden and Manning, to their great personal cost. How much easier it is to get away with such things without troublesome public scrutiny! The fight to get Manning out of jail, and keep Snowden at liberty, must also be the fight to render whistleblowers superfluous by abolishing state secrecy (and, by the same token, the secret state).

There is an additional element for the American left to take on board: it does not matter if your president-in-waiting is white, black, male, female or anything else. It does not matter if millions are bewitched by fine words. By equivocating on Obama, the far left disarmed itself when, inevitably, he turned out like all commanders-in-chief to be a cynical butcher. Hopefully the lesson will be learned this time, and there will be no facile lesser-evilmism when the presidential circus rolls around again in 2016 ●

We doubt it.

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