



weekly  
**worker**



**Die Linke tempted by  
prospect of so-called red-  
red-green coalition**

- STWC AGM 2013
- AWL pub lies
- CPGB aggregate
- Left and science

No 978 Thursday September 19 2013

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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Today - to you,  
the great silent  
majority of my  
fellow Socialist  
Platform  
members - I take  
your support as  
a given

(Nick Wrack's rotten method)

# LETTERS



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

## United front

Left Unity is now the focal point for the problem of the united front party. In Britain this was first posed in the mid-1990s with the launch of the Socialist Labour Party. Since then the battle for the united front has taken place around a variety of party-type organisations, including the Socialist Alliance, the Scottish Socialist Party, Respect, and the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition.

The working class movement is in a state of ideological flux. It is politically disoriented, economically weak and divided. The employers are on the offensive. The trade unions are in retreat in the face of mass unemployment, whilst real wages are undergoing a massive squeeze. The working class has no party to represent its interests and those political activists who recognise this lack of political representation seem unable to agree to what kind of party is needed.

Our starting point is objective conditions and the state of working class consciousness. With the globalisation of capital and the global expansion of the working class, on the face of it conditions have never been more ripe for communism. But the working class has never been further away from revolutionary politics. The working class has not turned to revolution in the UK and, if anything, is more reluctant to embrace change. The politically active section of the working class recognises this problem and rejects 'revolution'-mongering as the politics of left posturing.

Communist theory provides us with the general answers to the problem. The question is whether we can apply this theory correctly in today's different and more confused conditions. Two key ideas stand out.

First is the struggle for the united front. With the working class under attack, communists must, without any equivocation or vacillation, demand a united front with social democrats against the class enemy. The united front is a strategy in which communists propose discussions, joint actions and, where possible, joint organisation with them. In building a more effective fightback it is necessary to demonstrate in practice to the workers that it is not the communists who are sectarians, but the inconsistent social democrats. If the social democrats refuse unity they will be exposed. If they agree to united action then the working class will be stronger and the communists will gain influence.

The lowest form is the defensive united front: for example, the unity of communists and social democrats to save a hospital from closure, oppose fascism or defend pensions or wages, etc. This is the normal fare of left activity in Britain. But why should the working class confine itself to defence? Attack is, after all, the best form of defence. Why not a united front agreement to wage a political struggle against the class enemy?

The united front party is a weapon of political struggle. Despite every setback communists must keep up the fight to forge it. Communists must conduct this struggle openly in the working class movement and within the ranks of the communists themselves. In the latter case the problem is the opportunism of some and the sectarianism of others.

A united front party is, of course, a compromise. How could it not be? The communists have to 'give up' some of their programme in order to secure at least the prospect of a more effective fightback. How can we decide what to give up and what to retain? Lenin

was very clear about one of the bottom lines. Communists must retain the full freedom to explain their views in front of the working class - and this cannot and must not be surrendered in any united front political formation.

Of course, communists can help themselves secure freedom of expression by showing they are the best class fighters for unity. However, if they simply demand the communist full programme then workers will think they are divisive and not interested in the class struggle, but only in their own hobby horses. If they act like sectarians, workers will care less about their 'freedom of expression'. But if they conduct themselves in a 'responsible' way, workers will want to hear what communists have to say, even if they don't agree with it.

What else can communists 'give up' for the sake of the united front party? There is a principled means of deciding how to answer the problem. If we divide the communist programme into minimum and maximum and think of the former as a kind of transitional programme, then the answer is at least clear in principle. The communists should concentrate on the minimum programme as the means to build the united front party.

The minimum programme, correctly defined in the UK, is the democratic republican programme. It is the way to bridge the gap in political consciousness and shift the focus from Labourism to democracy. As Lenin stated many times, the struggle for democracy takes the working class towards socialism, not away from it. However, this is, of course, a contested statement. British Trotskyism has avoided the question of democracy and sees it as a minor or irrelevant issue.

Such a programme requires social democrats to shift to the left and communists to shift to the right by 'setting aside', but not giving up, the maximum programme. The minimum programme enables social democrats and communists to find common ground.

Right communism or opportunism is the abandonment of the republican programme for Labourism. Recognising the reality of workers' consciousness, this right trend has adopted the more 'realistic' politics of left Labour. There is nothing republican in Her Majesty's Labour Party. But the desire to be in touch with workers' ideas has led right-leaning communists to embrace Labourism, and Left Unity seems set to repeat the mistake.

Left communism proposes the maximum programme either as a barrier to the united front or as an ultimatum to the social democrats. The lefts, or 'maximalists', help to perpetuate disunity. Some may think left communism is a macho-aggressive personality disorder which Lenin famously called 'infantile'. It can be an independent organised tendency. It may appear as a left deviation of thought and action within mainstream communists groups, such as the Socialist Workers Party or CPGB. Revolutionary communists must therefore wage war on left communism which helps maintain divisions amongst the vanguard of the class.

Left communists never pass up an opportunity to tell the workers how wonderful and revolutionary they are and how the communist programme is so precious that they cannot depart from it, since it would be a betrayal of the revolution. They reject the united front as a compromise. They are not interested in more effective class struggle, but in making propaganda for the maximum programme. Workers are completely disgusted by this and see in communism not class politics, but the self-promotion and self-aggrandisement of sects.

The clash between right-communist opportunism and left-communist sectarianism may be farcical, but it is no laughing matter. The inevitable outcome is the hegemony of social democracy and the politics of liberal Labourism. There is a real danger that the struggle between the two 'extreme' trends degenerates into a sectarian farce, with the united front paralysed and incapable of class struggle.

The SWP was absent from the first attempt to build a united front party in the guise of the SLP. It was focused on building the SWP. Then the SWP shifted to the right and involved itself in the SA. But it opposed the SA becoming a real party and limited it to an electoral front. Then it shifted even further to the right with Respect. In all cases the SWP opposed republicanism in favour of Labourism, not least when it dabbled in the Labourite Tusc.

The Socialist Party was drawn to the SLP, but could not strike an agreement with Arthur Scargill. It embraced the idea of a political united front in the SA. It adopted the call for a new workers' party. But it continued to promote Labour left politics against the democratic case for republicanism. The last attempt was its backing for Tusc, which followed the classic, old Labour Party model under trade union leadership.

The CPGB developed its own 'left' line, which it took into all the 'united front' party formations. It condemned the united front party as a compromise, describing it as a 'halfway house'. This slogan showed a disconnection with the real world. If the working class is in retreat then halfway to where we want to be would be a huge step in the right direction.

The CPGB placed responsibility for the united front party firmly in the hands of the social democrats. If the 'reformists' form a party, the CPGB will come on board. In this they are not fighting for left unity or a united front party, but merely exploiting an opportunity to make propaganda for the maximum programme. Hence the CPGB joined the SLP, SA and Respect in order to campaign for a Marxist party. In practice the CPGB was the 'left opposition' to the united front - a position undermined when the CPGB backed Brown's Labour Party in the 2009 Euro-elections and after the 2010 general election urged members to join the Labour Party.

In Left Unity the Left Party Platform stands on the right. The ideological foundations should be characterised as Labourite because of its connection with 1945 and the Labour government that created the welfare state. It does link with socialism, but identifies with a range of special interests, such as feminism and environmentalism, and suggests a politics more like the radicalism of Respect in uniting socialist and non-socialist radicals. There is no republicanism in this.

Second, the Socialist Platform stands to the left. But it is unclear whether it stands for a united front of social democrats and communists or is really for Marxist unity and is therefore some kind of Trotskyist front. The CPGB supports Marxist unity and opposes the united front party. It is a critical supporter of the Socialist Platform and is in debate over amending it with Nick Wrack and other supporters. No doubt the CPGB will seek to make maximalist amendments. There is no republicanism here either.

As things stand, these platforms represent either Labourism or Marxist-Trotskyism. Neither propose the necessary political foundations for a united front party. There has to be another way, an alternative informed and guided by the communist minimum programme. It is too early to say whether Left Unity will succeed

in cracking the problem of the united front party or be crushed in a pincer movement between opportunism and sectarian maximalism. If it fails we will have to try again.

**Steve Freeman**  
London

## Story of O

What a dreadful article Paul Demarty has written as a critique of the equally dreadful 'safe spaces' policy of Left Unity ('Playing it safe', September 12). Rather than write a critique explaining why this policy will not work, we are treated to a silly story concerning the use of abusive and rude language on an internet discussion group. We are also informed that Left Unity has similarities, at least as far as the 'safe spaces' policy is concerned, with Maoism! The moral seems to be that "sexism, racism and so forth", as the author puts it, cannot be fought within Left Unity and the cure proposed by the backers of the 'safe spaces' policy is worse than the disease.

Given that there is now a virtual group in existence of members and putative members of Left Unity who have been deemed to be possible or real risks to the safety of other members of the organisation, a more sober discussion is in order. Indeed, despite the fact that a conference of Left Unity has not yet voted the 'safe spaces' policy as being operative, it is already being used to merry abandon. It matters not as to whether the person accused is guilty of any offence or the severity of the alleged offence; it is enough that one person voice unease for the accused to be suspended from Left Unity and denied the rights of membership. It matters not if the offence happened years or even decades ago; what matters is that everybody feels safe.

Actually, it is important that people feel safe and can trust their party comrades. But the actions of Left Unity's self-appointed morality police will not achieve even this limited goal. Rather they will inculcate a sense of false security and a level of paranoid suspicion that can only escalate with time. Make no mistake: the fact is that sexual predators will happily ignore all rules and regulations. Not for them disclosure and party discipline. Not for them meek submission to the admonitions of the morality police and their self-righteousness!

Strangely, and contrary to Mr Demarty's assertion, the 'safe spaces' policy is far from complete in its listing of various forms of oppression. It does not discuss incest or child sexual abuse, for example, and for very good reasons too. Good reasons, that is, for those who would see evil as being intrinsic to all men but those who have passed the test of the moral police. But it is these forms of oppression and abuse that point the way to the roots of sexism and oppression as lying in the family structures that were and are an inescapable part of all known forms of class society. And this, in turn, points to the road to the abolition of sexual oppression, and therefore towards the creation of truly safe spaces.

Unlike Mr Demarty, I hold that Left Unity has the right to expect high standards of behaviour from its members and does need a disciplinary code. But such a code should be proportionate and ought not be retroactive, as seems to be the fashion, but must confine itself to the actions of members in the present day. In the first instance it ought to be the responsibility of branches and districts of Left Unity to find ways to deal with disputes that are not bureaucratic.

Finally, I note that as one of those suspended and forbidden to speak to other supporters of Left Unity, I must conceal my identity as a result of the

gag order imposed on all subject to the morality police.

**Comrade O**  
email

## Dog's bollocks

Paul Demarty writes of the LU 'safe spaces' document: "It barely needs to be said that it is an embarrassing dog's dinner of a document, with barely any coherent structure, and a series of desperate attempts to address every possible grievance it is possible to call oppression in a single code of conduct. I reproduce my little parable above to demonstrate that such an endeavour is futile."

This rather describes the CPGB's attempt to amend the Socialist Platform in Left Unity.

**Ally MacGregor**  
email

## Not so aloof

I am a little surprised that Adam Buick's letter failed to elicit any response (August 29). After all, it was from a member of an organisation that is frequently berated for its sectarianism and political aloofness, yet there he is issuing an invitation for dialogue with the Socialist Platform group of Left Unity.

Comrade Buick was indeed correct about the overlap of ideas, with Socialist Platform expressing sentiments similar to the long-held *Declaration of principles of the Socialist Party of Great Britain*. I too, as a member of the SPGB, would welcome an approach from the Socialist Platform for constructive discussions on our shared positions and where we may differ.

**Alan Johnstone**  
SPGB

## Microsects

Mike Macnair's article, 'Lessons of Erfurt', was excellent, pertinent and to the point (September 5). But our sects still keep fracturing along microscopic ideological fissures.

**Mohsen Shahmanesh**  
email

## Gloomy thoughts

As ever, the *Weekly Worker* (and stamps for my wife!), via the soon to be extinct Royal Mail, remains always the highlight of the week.

Sadly, your article on the TUC, 'Hot air and the lesser evil' (September 12), left me feeling, appropriately, slightly morbid. For some reason, it reminded me of something I'd written for the old *Solidarity* 50 years ago for the Aldermaston special, printed in April 1963.

Bear in mind, it was a different world in those days. We Solidarists had, in the main, been through the old Communist Party, and progressed to Gerry Healy's Socialist Labour League, where several were literally beaten up. I'd been a CP candidate for Battersea, an active member of the strike committee at Battersea garage during the big London bus strike, where we discovered it was the union bureaucracy as much as the government proving to be our enemies (it was the *union* bureaucracy that inspired the article).

Obviously, my views on Bolshevik history would need modification today. I'd not had the benefit of Ben Lewis *et al* - was he born yet? But the reason for the 'morbid' from reading your article arose from appreciating the extent the working class/revolutionary movement doesn't seem more advanced than we believed it to be then. Hence it's sometimes difficult to maintain the same enthusiasm today. Perhaps I'm just getting too old!

**Bob Potter**  
email

# STWC

## Main enemy is at home

Stan Keable of Labour Party Marxists reports on the September 14 Stop the War Coalition AGM

Despite the war threat against Syria. Despite the temporary boost given to the anti-war movement by the August 29 parliamentary vote against a military attack on Syria. Despite David Cameron's humiliation, attendance at the 2013 annual conference of the Stop the War Coalition at Westminster University was down to less than 100. This was compared to the 200-plus in March 2012 and over 300 at the 2010 conference. That was the first year in which the Socialist Workers Party no longer mobilised its rank and file to attend, after John Rees, Lindsey German and Chris Nineham split off from the SWP to form Counterfire.

The coalition has been suffering from a lack of foot-soldiers ever since, and the appearance of new faces on local demonstrations immediately prior to the parliamentary vote was not reflected in attendance at conference. Although the SWP's Judith Orr chaired half of the conference, few SWPers were present and the organisation's *Party Notes* circulated two days later made no mention of Stop the War.

The coalition's lack of numbers, however, is now compensated for by its gain in prestige, with official recognition by the Trades Union Congress. In 2003, although the TUC had opposed the invasion of Iraq, STWC vice-president Andrew Murray explained, it had "stood aloof from the movement". Now, in its September 11 statement on Syria, the TUC general council committed itself to "strongly oppose external military intervention" and to "work with civil society organisations, including ... the Stop the War Coalition."

As we know, Ed Miliband had agreed to back an attack on Syria, but had a very late change of mind. This, and the rebellion of some Tory MPs, can only be due to the anti-war pressure of public opinion, with sitting MPs fearing loss of votes. No doubt the campaigning by Stop the War over the years has played its part, but it is the transparent horrors of the invasions and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq which have disabused public opinion of the illusion of humanitarian intervention.

"We stopped Cameron, but Obama still plans war," proclaimed STWC's August 30 statement. But by the time they reached conference, the 'officers group' had sobered up, tempered their triumphalism somewhat, and recognised that public opinion against an attack on Syria had other sources besides their campaigning. "What produced that vote?" asked comrade Rees. "We helped. But the mass experience of war did not match the media story. And the resistance over there played its part." STWC had "mounted effective opposition". It was "not just public opinion," he argued. "Compare the privatisation of Royal Mail", which is going

ahead despite being very unpopular. And why did opposition break first here, and not in France, not in the US? "Because of the consistent campaigning of STWC," he claimed.

There were attempts from the various STWC officers to characterise the significance of the August 29 vote. Jeremy Corbyn, chairing, said the vote had been a "mea culpa" for many MPs, who felt guilty about voting for the invasion of Iraq in 2003. "We are into a historical change in relations between the west and the rest of the world," he claimed - but then hedged: "But not for ever". Chris Nineham, in similar vein, spoke of "a breakthrough in the movement". STWC had "mobilised thousands in last few weeks", he gushed. "Lindsey now gets invited onto TV. We need clarity and unity, to unite all the forces against austerity and war." All the forces? At last, I thought, Hands Off the People of Iran will be able to take its rightful place in Stop the War - not!

*Guardian* journalist Seamus Milne said that the western powers are in disarray - "but was this a body swerve, or a retreat?" Public opinion does matter, he said. The 'war on terror' had become "an orgy of torture, not human rights". It had also "revealed the inability of the US to impose its will - the limits of the first truly global empire".

The British ruling class always and everywhere does foreign policy in its own selfish, exploitative and oppressive interests - never in order to 'save lives'. What a pleasure it was to see the arrogant bourgeois persuaders, after confidently pumping out their war propaganda, suddenly brought to a grinding halt on the buffers of obstinate public opinion. As Abe Lincoln said, "You can't fool all of the people all of the time".

The famous aphorism of Clausewitz is that "War is the continuation of politics by other means". In other words, war is a form of politics. But politics is always class politics. In war, the interests of one ruling class is pitted against the interests of another ruling class. The working class is mobilised in support of our own rulers, thereby strengthening their power over us. The independent politics of the working class means opposing the foreign policy and military adventures of our 'own' ruling class, preventing them from strengthening their hold over us by exploiting and oppressing others. The main enemy is at home.

So the struggle against imperialist wars, and to end war once and for all, should be seen as part and parcel of the political struggle of the working class to supersede capitalism and class society. The anti-war struggle needs independent working class politics. And working class politics can only be thrashed out through thoroughgoing democracy - freedom of discussion, unity in action.

Unfortunately, freedom of discussion is not the method of the bureaucratic clique which runs

the Stop the War Coalition. It evidently prefers to keep conference - and local groups - free of sharp political debate. God forbid that political differences should be thrashed out openly. But their war on politics can only mean protecting their own politics from being challenged.

'Guidelines for local groups', submitted to conference by the 'officers group', waxed eloquent about the breadth of opinion in the coalition: "Stop the War represents the opinion of the vast majority of people in this country on foreign policy." This is indeed a strange phenomenon, since it is led by a variety of self-styled Marxists.

Local groups must "work hard to ensure the widest possible participation in order to reflect this breadth of opinion". Stop the War has "very wide backing, symbolised by the recent support from the TUC congress". Groups must "get as broad a leadership as possible, always looking to involve new activists".

Groups must "maximise the ... impact of ... our arguments". While we should "encourage wide discussion", public meetings should "focus on the key campaigning issues and on the main task of ending western intervention, not on potentially divisive political debates".

Well, which political debates, I wonder, are not "potentially divisive"? And what exactly are to be "our arguments", if not ones arrived at through "potentially divisive political debates"? And what if 'ordinary people' turn up to our public meetings, and start asking "potentially divisive" questions or expressing "potentially divisive" views?

Several speakers had raised issues which they thought should be linked to opposition to military attack: anti-austerity, anti-racism, immigration, defence of whistleblowers, freedom of information and the stifling of debate.

Chris Nineham, in moving the guidelines, said: "The left will have its political debates, but not inside Stop the War, because that would be divisive." Matt Willgress from North London, under the rubric of teaching us ordinary folk 'How to build a local group', explained that "people would rather lobby MPs than debate about the Syrian left with the usual suspects". Philistinism rules OK!

Nevertheless, Andrew Murray, agreeing with my assertion that "the main enemy is at home", conceded that "No-one is saying we can't debate differences, but we must keep our eye on the ball."

Sami Ramadan urged us to "distinguish patriotic resistance from terrorism in Iraq (where I was born)". The most popular platform speaker, he advised us to "celebrate a great victory - but do it quickly, as they will get back at us very soon". He congratulated the British parliament "for listening to British people, for once", and the US people "for not listening, for a change, to Fox News". The more 'peace president' Obama preached war, the more the American people wanted peace, he said. And he happily dished out congratulations to the French people, the Syrian people ("Yes, there is a democratic opposition"), the Iranian people and the Egyptian people, who all "forced their government to oppose an attack on Syria". Congrats to STWC too, he said: "Unity is the key to opposition to imperialist intervention, and support for the struggles of the people for democracy."

So steer clear of "divisive" debates ●

# 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>. Resuming on January 7.

## London Communist Forum

**Sunday September 22, 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 21: 'Piece-wages'. Organised by CPGB: [www.cpgb.org.uk](http://www.cpgb.org.uk).

## Radical Anthropology Group

Introduction to anthropology: the human revolution  
**Tuesday September 24, 6.15pm:** 'Decoding myths: *The sleeping beauty* and other tales. Speaker: Chris Knight. St Martin's Community Centre, 43 Carol Street, London NW1 (Camden Town tube). £10 waged, £5 low waged, £3 unwaged. Discounts for whole term. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: [www.radicalanthropologygroup.org](http://www.radicalanthropologygroup.org).

## Defend Whipps Cross

**Saturday September 21, 12 noon:** Demonstration, Whipps Cross hospital, Whipps Cross Road, London E11. Organised by Waltham Forest Unison: [www.unisonwalthamforest.org.uk](http://www.unisonwalthamforest.org.uk).

## Save the NHS

**Saturday September 21, 10am to 12.30pm:** Conference and rally, County Hall, Durham. Organised by Northern Public Services Alliance: [mlowden@tuc.org.uk](mailto:mlowden@tuc.org.uk).

## Remember Tweddell

**Saturday September 21, 10.30am:** Event celebrating Chartist George Markham Tweddell's life, Cleveland Trade Union and Unemployed Workers Resource Centre, 119-121 Marton Road, Middlesbrough. Organised by Cleveland Trade Unionists and Unemployed Workers Resource Centre: [office@ctuwwrc.co.uk](mailto:office@ctuwwrc.co.uk).

## Labour and socialism

**Saturday September 21, 2pm:** Debate, Calthorpe Arms, Grays Inn Road, London WC1. Labour Party Marxists and Socialist Party of Great Britain: 'Can the Labour Party ever bring us socialism?' Speakers: Stan Keable (LPM); Bill Martin (SPGB). Organised by LPM: <http://labourpartymarxists.org.uk>.

## Austerity and the alternative

**Tuesday September 24, 12.30pm:** Labour conference fringe meeting, Albert Room, Grand Hotel, 97-99 King's Road, Brighton BN1. Organised by Centre for Labour and Social Studies: [www.classonline.org.uk](http://www.classonline.org.uk).

## Red @ Bar Loco

**Wednesday September 25, 8pm:** Night of revolutionary art and music, Bar Loco, 22 Leazes Park Road, Newcastle upon Tyne. Organised by RED - Revolutionary Culture: [www.redrevolutionart.wordpress.com](http://www.redrevolutionart.wordpress.com).

## What will a socialist society look like?

**Thursday September 26, 7.30pm:** Meeting, Partick Burgh Halls. Speaker: Hillel Ticktin. Organised by Glasgow Left Unity: [glasgowleftunity@gmail.com](mailto:glasgowleftunity@gmail.com).

## Teesside Solidarity Movement

**Thursday September 26, 7pm:** General assembly, St Mary's Centre, 82-90 Corporation Road, Middlesbrough. Organised by Teesside Solidarity Movement: [www.facebook.com/TeessideSolidarityMovement](http://www.facebook.com/TeessideSolidarityMovement).

## War, what is it good for?

**Thursday September 26, 7pm:** Meeting, Rook Lane Arts Chapel, Bath Street, Frome, Somerset. Speakers include Jeremy Corbyn MP, Sami Ramadan, Dan Glazebrook. Tickets £5 (£3 unwaged). Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk](http://www.stopwar.org.uk).

## Death of the two-state solution

**Friday September 27, 7.30pm:** Talk, Friends Meeting House, 43 Saint Giles, Oxford. Speaker: Hamed Qawasmeh. Organised by Oxford PSC and Network of Oxford Women for Justice and Peace: [joytoknow@outlook.com](mailto:joytoknow@outlook.com).

## Gender and identity

**Saturday September 28, 2.30pm:** Seminar and discussion, Bishopsgate Institute, 230 Bishopsgate, London EC2. Speaker: Anja Steinbauer (Philosophy for All). Free admission. Organised by Bishopsgate Institute: [www.bishopsgate.org.uk](http://www.bishopsgate.org.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](http://www.tuc.org.uk/industrial/tuc-22405-f0.cfm).

## Save our public transport

**Tuesday October 1, 1pm:** Protest, Lower Mosley Street (in front of Water Bridge Hall), Manchester M2. Organised by the Transport Salaried Staffs Association: [www.tssa.org.uk](http://www.tssa.org.uk).

## No deportations

**Saturday October 5, 10.30am to 5pm:** National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns AGM, Praxis Community Projects, Pott Street, Bethnal Green, London E2. Organised by NCADC: [www.ncadc.org.uk](http://www.ncadc.org.uk).

## CPGB wills

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



Andrew Murray: politics, yes, but ...

## SOCIALIST PLATFORM



Today - to you, the great silent majority of my fellow Socialist Platform members - I take your support as a given

(Nick Wrack's rotten method)

# Headlong collapse into politics of the labour bureaucracy

Peter Manson reports on the undemocratic manoeuvres of the drafting group

The September 14 meeting of Left Unity's Socialist Platform confirmed the headlong collapse that four of the original drafters - Chris Strafford, Soraya Lawrence, Nick Wrack and Will McMahon - of the Socialist Platform have undergone. The platform states that the SP is not for running capitalism, but for an alternative, socialist society, yet the organisers insist on stopping short of explaining what this ought to mean: a society in transition to a classless, stateless form of organisation (communism).

Presumably in the belief that the inclusion of this aim - without which no genuinely socialist platform can be complete - might be viewed as too 'extreme' by potential supporters, the group of four (Go4) decided that it was vital to reject outright the CPGB's proposed amendments. Just a week before the meeting was due to be held, the Go4 proposed that the platform should not be up for amendment on September 14. So the CPGB amendments on human freedom - together with other changes on, for example, democracy, the extension of past gains and the European Union, plus one other amendment from Ian Donovan - ought to be subject only to an "indicative vote".

The original email announcing the meeting carried an invitation to submit amendments to the platform, with a deadline of September 1. But on September 8 a further circular to platform signatories, signed by the Go4, was sent out. This stated that, while September 14 "will give us a good opportunity to ... discuss and debate the platform statement", the Go4 were "concerned that the significant progress we have made so far in obtaining the support of so many people is not fractured or undermined by taking any decisions about the content of the statement without the fullest involvement of all who have supported the statement so far".

Although "We recognise that the statement is open to revision or amendment", the Go4 now proposed that "it would be a mistake to make any changes based on the involvement only of those who can attend the meeting". Therefore, the "central purpose of the meeting"

would no longer be the content of the platform, but "to build support for the statement" as it has come down to us from a self-appointed drafting group. A crude, bureaucratic manoeuvre - in effect it amounted to hollowing out the normal democratic process and leaving us with a plebiscite.

This was immediately followed by the suggestion that "we reconvene a caucus prior to Left Unity founding conference" - indeed "A further meeting" was an item on the proposed agenda for September 14. The message appeared to be clear: this "further meeting" before the LU conference would somehow be more representative of the signatories and would indeed be able to agree to the final wording of the platform.

But the meeting itself saw yet another manoeuvre. At the close, Nick Wrack (the platform's main author and *de facto* leader), stated bluntly that because of time, expense, etc, there would be no further meetings of the Socialist Platform before conference apart from two caucuses at Left Unity gatherings (before the September 28 LU policy conference and the November 30 founding conference). So the platform will go to conference unamended. What a surprise.

### Indicative

The meeting itself began with the bad-tempered and intolerant chair, Soraya Lawrence, announcing that the Go4's agenda, together with the alternative proposed by the CPGB, would be put before the meeting. At first she refused to hear a point of order coming from the CPGB's John Bridge, who stated that Susann Witt-Stahl, a leftwing journalist from Germany who wanted to attend the meeting, should be allowed in. She had been refused entry. When comrade Bridge was finally allowed to make his point, the chair ruled that no observers were allowed. After comrade Bridge persisted, she eventually agreed to put the question to the vote and - as is often the way with these things - the majority went along with 'the leadership' and it was decided by 22 votes to 20 to bar her (there was no discussion as to why her presence would be undesirable).

This did not augur well for the SP's

openness and commitment to basic democratic norms. A point of order was met with outright hostility and a friendly journalist treated as an unwelcome alien. It was evident that comrade Wrack and his Independent Socialist Network had decided to oppose *everything* coming from the CPGB. They caucused before the meeting - as is their right - and ironically it would seem that various comrades had been busy on the phone whipping up anti-group prejudice. The ISN is, of course, one of those anti-group groups that unites sects of one on the lowest-common-denominator basis.

It has to be said that the attendance was very good - 44 out of 106 signed-up supporters is pretty healthy for a meeting of this kind. But, of course, allowing these comrades to change the content of the platform was just not on. Indeed, as comrade Lawrence explained, the "idea of the meeting" was to "discuss how to build further support".

In moving the Gof4's proposed agenda, Chris Strafford was for a "more patient view". It is "more democratic to have the debate over a longer period". He promised there would be "opportunities" to do that "over the next few months". The example he gave was that "the question of Europe can't be decided in one afternoon in London". No, such questions need careful consideration - in that sense he is right. But it is the duty of all to give such consideration beforehand and be prepared to take a position on them when they are put to the vote.

Proposing an alternative agenda, whereby the platform *could* be subject to change and endorsement, comrade Bridge said that, when the original drafters produced the Socialist Platform, the CPGB considered it a step forward. The usual approach of the left was not to begin with what they professed to believe in. Rather the "rotten method" was to write for "those out there". In other words keep things acceptable to the right, to the trade union bureaucracy (and ultimately to become the prisoners of the bourgeois establishment). With the Go4's proposal for nothing more than indicative votes it is clear that the "same rotten method" has been adopted. A case of one step forward and two steps back. The truth was,

argued comrade Bridge, that the platform could not be amended because the proposals from the CPGB were viewed as too radical. The excuse about absent comrades is just that. An excuse. And the fact of the matter is that the Go4 cannot legitimately claim to speak on behalf of those who absent. Nor can the CPGB or anyone else, for that matter. Meetings that are legitimately called should be viewed as legitimate.

After he had finished comrade Lawrence asked comrades not to use unpleasant phrases like "rotten method" and opened the question of the agenda up to debate.

The 'highlight' was the intervention of comrade Wrack. He assured us that this business about amendments was mere "formal democracy". As "lots of people" had been unable to come, some for very good reason, to take decisions on changing the platform would be "denying their rights". If the platform were amended "without involving all the people signed up", that would be undemocratic. So what is he proposing? A postal ballot, an email poll, a focus group? Maybe the "rotten methods" of New Labour appeal to him? But the usual practice on the left is to call a meeting with due notice, ask for motions, etc, and take votes.

Interestingly, some of those arguing in support of the Go4 appeared to have their lines crossed. One comrade stated that the platform had been "too long on the website for it to be changed" - exactly the opposite of comrade Wrack's position, that it had not been there long enough.

More independent-minded comrades saw through all this. Moshé Machover said that, if we were to accept the arguments of the Go4, there would be "no end to indicative voting". Every meeting might be deemed insufficiently representative to make a firm decision (or a decision not to the liking of the leadership, he might have added).

For his part, Ian Donovan asked a telling question: surely we will be endorsing the platform here? If so it must be open to amendments, he pointed out. No-one answered comrade Donovan's question, but the Go4 comrades had obviously thought of that one. If the statement were to be put to the meeting for endorsement,

that would mean taking ownership of it away from platform signatories, atomised or otherwise. Theoretically we might reject it and then what would happen to their "rights"? So the implication was that simply by signing up we have endorsed the platform in every respect. The Socialist Platform thereby becomes akin to tablets of stone. A credo to believe in, but not to change.

Unfortunately, when it came to the plebiscite, however, the Go4's arguments carried the day by 26 votes to 17. There were to be only indicative votes on the amendments and no vote at all to endorse the platform.

The subsequent Go4 circular put it this way: "... it was democratically decided to adopt the outgoing working group's agenda and not to amend the statement, but to allow more time for debate and discussion" (email, September 15). Except, of course, there will be no further debate and discussion on the Socialist Platform.

### Anti-imperialism

Comrade Lawrence now proposed moving on to the motion on the involvement of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty in the SP (although she had to concede that she had forgotten what 'AWL' stands for).

The CPGB had agreed a composite motion with comrade Donovan, stating that support for the AWL's "social-imperialism" was "not compatible with support for the Socialist Platform", which "opposes all imperialist wars and military interventions". Half a dozen or so AWLers had signed up to a platform to which their practical policy was diametrically opposed. Around that number were present on September 14.

In moving the motion, comrade Donovan stated that the AWL is "more rightwing" than the Left Party Platform, since it actually "preferred US imperialism to Iraq" and therefore refused to oppose the invasion of that country. The LPP in its "own flawed way has a better position", he concluded.

Typical of the liberal mentality of those opposing was Mark Boothroyd, who said he was against "bureaucratic exclusions". If the AWL's position on

imperialism is wrong, then we should "debate it out with them", he said. A comrade from Brighton added: "If the platform is incompatible with their beliefs, that's their problem." He went further than Soraya Lawrence in one respect: he had "never heard of the AWL", although "from the sound of it" he would "probably not agree with their politics".

Responding to this type of argument, Mark Fischer of the CPGB made the simple point that "within any organisation there are boundaries". To take an extreme example, we would not accept a supporter of the English Defence League, would we (not that he was comparing the AWL with the EDL)? Comrade Fischer declared: "We take this statement seriously." Which meant that we should try to ensure that people who sign up to the platform do not advocate policies that directly contradict it. Otherwise the SP would be brought into disrepute.

Other CPGB comrades argued that the AWL consistently takes up positions that are effectively pro-imperialist - it usually finds a way of arguing that it would be wrong to oppose particular "imperialist wars and military interventions". Its latest position on Syria actually proves the point. It opposes a cruise missile assault on Assad's forces, but only because this would not overthrow the regime and would have the unintended, consequence of strengthening the Islamists. Hence the main slogan for the AWL over Syria is for the withdrawal of Iranian and Hezbollah forces.

Ruth Cashman and Martin Thomas simply dismissed all of this as "lies", without, of course, bothering to elaborate. Comrade Cashman also lambasted our alleged "inconsistency". She claimed that "the CPGB approached us to join a revolutionary platform", yet now "they want to exclude us". This left CPGB comrades momentarily speechless, but it turned out that Cashman based this claim on a pub conversation she had had with a couple of CPGB comrades, who had stated that we would be looking to be part of a Marxist platform within Left Unity - although no-one had said we wanted the AWL on board (see right).

But Cashman's ridiculous claim did the trick, no doubt confirming in the minds of many of those present that 'the groups' were all a bunch of sectarians, who are willing to change their positions at the drop of a hat and will stop at nothing to do down their rivals. The motion fell by 28 votes to 15.

## Non-democracy

Nick Wrack began his speech in the next session with: "I hope now we can discuss politics." You might think we had been doing that, but comrade Wrack wanted to add to the prejudice of the 'anti-group' comrades, by implying that we had been wasting time with pointless wrangles.

In introducing the debate on amendments, he made it clear that he thought the SP could win on November 30. We already have 106 signatories against 150 for the Left Party Platform, he said. Obviously, then, if we are to garner sufficient support to overtake the LPP, we must not come over as too 'extreme' or as being overly influenced by a group like the CPGB. So "the statement, as it is, is enough to bring comrades together". In fact arguments about a "semi-state" and "withering away" (contained in one CPGB amendment) would "need patient explaining" and so should not be included.

Then comrade Wrack pointed out that the statement had only been published six weeks previously and asked: "Can anyone seriously say it's enough time to agree to changes?" He really did not seem to appreciate the ironic absurdity of that remark. By that I am not referring to the comrade who was against changes because he thought six weeks was *too* long.

If a lengthy period of time is needed to consider amendments, why does that not apply to the statement itself? Surely it is too soon to submit that too?

He contrasted the bulk of the platform signatories with the "full-timers in the CPGB who have the time" for things like considering amendments. I understand that comrade Wrack himself is a full-time barrister, yet he is able to make the time to do lots more. Indeed, as he well knows, there are thousands of political activists of all persuasions who have onerous jobs and yet have time to take their politics very seriously indeed.

Comrade Wrack claimed that the meeting was "originally envisaged" as a way to "draw boundaries between us and the Left Party Platform". That is only partially true. The meeting was "originally envisaged" as a way of debating and agreeing the SP statement *in order to* "draw boundaries between us and the Left Party Platform".

Comrade Wrack said that the "tone" of both the letter from the CPGB and Mark Fischer's *Weekly Worker* article, in response to the Go4's proposal not to put amendments to the vote, was "unacceptable". And "I take exception to being called manipulative and undemocratic". Neither of the two documents had called him "manipulative" - although, to be fair, it is not so far off the mark in relation to the way he has ensured the statement cannot be changed before it reaches the LU conference agenda.

Comrade Wrack had ensured that the CPGB's first, rather hurriedly drafted, proposed amendments to the platform, back in July, were circulated to the meeting. This was to demonstrate our alleged inconsistency, since they differed in several respects from those finally submitted a month later. He neglected to explain to the meeting, however, that we had been given just a couple of days to get our proposals off on July 29 before the SP statement was to be made public.

He also saw to it that a rather inane email was circulated from what he called a CPGB "supporter" who was unable to be present. She objected to the meeting agreeing to any amendments because that would mean "It would no longer be the Socialist Platform we signed up to." If amendments were accepted, it would mean we would have to "spend our time up to November trying to get everyone to re-sign". So it was better to stick with the current "imperfect platform".

Obviously, that was the level of comrade Wrack's argument too. It seemed to escape him that everybody had signed up to the platform *despite* the fact that they may have regarded it as "imperfect". What normally happens under such circumstances is that a meeting of supporters democratically attempts to improve it.

Of course, the proportion of those able to attend such meetings is inevitably smaller than we would like - although, as I have pointed out, 44 out of 106 is a relatively healthy figure. Presumably even if 105 turn up, then the one person who cannot make it is being denied their "democratic rights", if we are to take the argument of comrade Wrack seriously.

Finally it was time for the amendments to be moved. There was time enough allowed for them to be moved and discussed ... and it was a very revealing exercise.

As John Bridge pointed out, he, like the other CPGB movers, was "speaking in favour of communism". The final aim of Left Unity should not *just* be to bring about the end of capitalism and its replacement by a socialist version of the bureaucratic-military apparatus. As the CPGB amendment puts it, "Our *ultimate* aim is a society based on the principle of

'From each according to their abilities; to each according to their needs'. A moneyless, classless, stateless society, within which each individual can develop their fullest individuality" (my emphasis). This inspiring vision should be a central tenet for all revolutionary socialists and Marxists.

However, instead of comrades stating their objections to this and other CPGB amendments (moved by Mike Macnair, Emily Orford and Sarah McDonald), most spoke about whatever came into their heads during the subsequent discussion. No doubt it was primarily the absence of any substantive votes, but also the fact that there was a very backward type of politics on display that contributed to what was in effect a non-debate (the only amendment that was actually discussed - in the sense of ideas being exchanged - was the one relating to the European Union).

The chair, comrade Lawrence, made clear her contempt for the whole procedure when she stated during her own contribution that what really mattered was not some obscure amendments relating to distant aims, but getting out there and campaigning. Presumably in line with this rightwing philistine approach, when the motions were put to the meeting a number of comrades voted against 'on principle'. So comrades from the Go4, for example, found themselves voting against "human freedom", "full development of individuality", the proposal that "the organisations of the working class must be democratically, not bureaucratically, organised" and that we should aim not only to "defend", but "radically extend", all past gains.

Comrade Wrack himself voted against all our amendments despite the fact that he had expressed a wholly positive attitude to them as recently as August when he attended the CPGB's summer school, Communist University.

Nevertheless, all but one of the eight CPGB amendments were carried (the one on the EU being defeated by a single vote - 20 to 21). What is noteworthy, though, is not so much that the CPGB motion calling for a "semi-state" that is already "withering away" was agreed (20 to 16); or that the working class must commit itself to organising "democratically, not bureaucratically" (20 to 16); that Left Unity should have amongst its goals the "sweeping away" of the existing state apparatus (19 to 14), or that members be required to "accept" its principles and aims, not agree (22 to 14). No, what is significant is that comrade Wrack and co *voted against*. Sad to say, a defining moment. After all, an indicative vote means expressing one's view, beliefs, commitments, etc.

## Build what?

Finally, the meeting turned to organisational questions: in the words of the chair for the session, Will McMahon, "how to build" LU and the SP. Since it had been previously strongly implied by several Go4 comrades that this was what we really *ought* to be discussing, instead of wasting our time on motions and amendments, it was surprising that they had not prepared any introduction for this session. Comrade McMahon began by lamely asking for suggestions from the floor. A few ideas were forthcoming - the need to get involved in LU's policy commissions, the organising of speakers for branches, the preparation of motions for the LU conference, the necessity of an SP email discussion list, the importance of the People's Assembly ...

The meeting did indeed agree to set up two email lists (one for organisation, the other for debate) and there were 14 volunteers for a steering group ●

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# AWL dishonesty

## Dave Isaacson refutes a rather bizarre accusation



Martin Thomas: pub gossip

**D**uring the debate on the compatibility of supporting the Socialist Platform and simultaneously the Alliance for Workers' Liberty's social-imperialism, it came as no surprise that CPGB comrades were accused of telling "lies" by AWL members. It really is par for the course when dealing with such a slippery outfit that it refuses to face up to the reality of its political positions.

However, what did surprise every CPGBer in the room was that, in the same breath as accusing us of lying, AWL member Ruth Cashman went on to claim that earlier this year "the CPGB" had approached "the AWL" about setting up a "revolutionary platform" within Left Unity. Faced with widespread, visible and audible incredulity ("What?!!") from CPGBers, the comrade turned to point at me, saying that I knew all about it, as I was at "the meeting". Presumably this was meant to highlight our hypocrisy, or stupidity.

The accusation was backed up in another contribution by leading AWLer Martin Thomas. Yet, by the time Martin got round to hitting the keyboard to type up his report of the meeting, the story had morphed somewhat. No longer was it "the CPGB" talking to "the AWL", implying some official approach, but a conversation between two individual members of our organisations. Always keen to maintain his reputation for meticulous dishonesty, Thomas reported Cashman's intervention in these terms: "Ruth Cashman pointed out that only a couple of months ago Tina Becker of the *Weekly Worker* group had proposed to her, Ruth, that AWL and *WW* cooperate in starting a left platform within Left Unity. This report caused outcry among the *WW* people, subsiding into the claim that it was just 'something said in a pub'."<sup>1</sup>

It is true that Ruth, Tina and myself were sat together in a pub - on May 11 following Left Unity's first national meeting - having a conversation. Neither Tina nor myself are on the CPGB's leadership or authorised to negotiate joint platforms on behalf of "the CPGB". As an aside, it is amusing to note that, had we ever decided to use a snippet from a pub chat such as this (Ruth certainly had critical things to say about the AWL's sectarianism in past engagements with the CPGB) as a polemical tool, then we would without a shred of doubt be met with hysterical howls of derision and

charges of gossip-mongering from the AWL.

It is important to note, however, that we were not the only three around the table talking through the day's meeting. With us were Ged Colgan, a member of the International Socialist Network, and another ex-Socialist Workers Party member. Amongst the general chat about Left Unity's prospects and the proceedings of its first national meeting, Tina and I did indeed float the idea of a Marxist platform being formed within Left Unity - for those serious about developing socialist unity around solid Marxist principles. What made Ruth think this was an approach to the AWL I do not know. This certainly is not how the idea was framed. If there are AWL members who want to fight for unity around such principles, they will have to do so in militant opposition to their own group's political positions and method.

This half-formed idea of a Marxist platform was far more directed at the likes of the ISN and ex-SWP comrades, when it was raised by Tina and myself (we also mentioned some individuals who are now in the Socialist Platform). The ISN clearly has both a left and a right - with the likes of Tom Walker and Richard Seymour backing the reformist Left Party Platform and others such as Paris Thompson arguing for the ISN to support the Socialist Platform.

If any doubts lingered in the heads of AWLers, surely they would have been dispelled when within a week of this pub chat they received a reply from the CPGB's Provisional Central Committee to an official approach from the AWL to numerous groups to form a "transitional organisation" of the left. The CPGB could hardly have been more clear when we told the comrades that their "operative political method - right back to the International Communist League days - has been to launch unity offensives with other political groups, as a cover for what are in essence shabby recruitment raids". We concluded: "A thorough and open break with the sectarian method you use and pro-imperialist politics you espouse - and the leading clique which maintains both - are preconditions for any 'unity' overture from your organisation to be taken in good faith."<sup>2</sup>

Enough said ●

## Notes

1. [www.workersliberty.org/story/2013/09/14/two-and-half-months-debate-socialism-or-vote-catching](http://www.workersliberty.org/story/2013/09/14/two-and-half-months-debate-socialism-or-vote-catching).  
2. 'Pull the other one' *Weekly Worker* May 16.

**SOCIALIST PLATFORM**

# Politics of prejudice

The fear of political groups and impatience with political meetings on display at the Socialist Platform's first national meeting are deeply linked - and politically pernicious, argues Paul Demarty



Another bloody meeting: Lenin 1918

It will suffice to start with a couple of anecdotes from the national meeting of Left Unity's Socialist Platform on Saturday.

There is, first of all, the unfortunate case of comrade Susann Witt-Stahl, a Hamburg-based journalist and member of the *Assoziation Dämmerung*. She has widely reported Germany's Die Linke - for many a model for Left Unity, and for others a warning. As she happened to be spending the weekend in London - as a guest of her friend, and CPGB comrade, Maciej Zurowski - she expressed a wish to attend the Socialist Platform meeting as an observer. Uncontroversial, surely? Alas not - the mood was already tense upon her arrival, and 'group of four' comrades Nick Wrack and Soraya Lawrence refused her entry.

At one point, as comrade Maciej was explaining the situation in German, Lawrence snapped at them to "speak English". I am willing, for my part, to write that up as an unfortunate slip of the tongue. It demands explanation anyway: what on earth made the Go4 comrades so alarmed at the unannounced presence of a leftwing German journalist with no horse in the LU race at all?

I fear it has nothing to do with her at all - nor to do with the most ridiculous excuse offered, that if she was allowed in, then that would have to apply to the comrades outside from the Socialist Party of Great Britain, who were handing out leaflets. As if *their presence* was somehow intolerable! No, it is to do with us in the CPGB: it is hardly any secret that we had fallen out with the Go4 in the week before the meeting, and comrade Susann's presence was presumably interpreted as part of a devious plot being hatched by the CPGB.

This quite irrational fear of our good selves reached fever pitch when Dave Church, a long-standing activist from Walsall, upped and left when it became clear that - *quelle horreur!* - we would be acting as a disciplined bloc, and were not prepared to hide the fact. He repeatedly demanded that we

engage in the meeting as "individuals" - as if "individuals" voting and speaking in the same direction was somehow less threatening than a formally constituted group doing the same. "That's what you want, isn't it?" a comrade heckled from the floor, when Dave was finally moved to leave. Well, no, it is not - in the crudest possible reading of the CPGB's motives, we presumably want to influence people, which is all the harder if they are on the train back to Walsall and so out of earshot.

Comrade Church's position is the more peculiar, the closer it is examined. He was effectively demanding that we *lie* to him, by assuring him that we were not acting as a disciplined organisation (the CPGB's John Bridge was heavily prompted by comrade Lawrence to use the appropriately 'diplomatic' phrases, which amounted in reality to not using the first person plural). Comrade Church claimed to be familiar with the "tactics" of "the groups", but was more or less expecting us to behave like the Socialist Workers Party, whose members almost invariably turn up to meetings in the guise of one or another front organisation.

Of course, this 'group phobia' has a basis in reality. Let us be blunt - disciplined groups have an impact beyond their numbers because organising collectively is a more effective means of winning the day. If (say) 15 votes out of 50 are guaranteed to go your way, you have only 10 more to find. This should be no surprise to anyone involved in the workers' movement (try organising a strike without a union), and there is only one way to make sure a group does not drown out your 'individual' voice - join a bigger or more influential group.

For all the paranoid twitchiness about the perfidious CPGB, which is perpetually up to something untoward, it should be noted that the Go4 comrades and their immediate allies were *acting as a bloc* when it came to any vote that mattered. The Independent Socialist Network, not

officially a disciplined organisation, nevertheless caucused for the best part of an hour beforehand.

The organisers were clearly prepared for a showdown; their miserable arguments about the 'democracy of those not here' were backed up by a letter from somebody 'not here', a comrade from Cambridge, copies of which were distributed for no discernible purpose other than providing Wrack and co with feeble factional ammunition against the CPGB. It should be said that the Go4 comrades did not openly express any anti-group sentiment, and it is reasonable to suppose that, on the whole, they are not prone to it themselves. They failed to criticise any comrades from the floor who expressed this kind of petty bourgeois prejudice, however.

## Disdain

There were other petty bourgeois prejudices, too, that were sadly more universally held. Chief among these was the disdain for formal meetings. It was more or less decided by the end that holding *yet another* meeting of the platform would be an intolerable burden, despite such a meeting being trailed in advance as a sweetener for the absurd decision to reject substantive votes 'for now'.

Frankly, for many present, even this meeting seemed to be one too many. This sentiment was to be found on the lips of different shades of attendees too. One comrade complained that he was a busy man, a practising musician no less, who did not have all the time in the world to discuss politics. Soraya Lawrence equally objected to fine-grained discussion of insignificant matters such as communism and the withering away of the state; there was, after all, so much more to do, and you cannot expect ordinary people to take an interest in such rarefied discourse. Even Ruth Cashman of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, who has presumably sat in many meetings in her time, was heard grumbling about such things.

There is an element to such

thinking which is in a small way admirable - no, none of us got into this game for the sole purpose of haggling over the wording of this or that statement of aims, and impatience to get stuck into struggle hardly springs from bad intentions. It is, however, straightforwardly philistine. It is quite simple: if you do not take the meeting seriously, if you waste the meeting's time by arguing that meetings are a waste of time, then you will fuck up the struggle. You will rely on that most unreliable guide - your gut, which is to say, your unexamined prejudices.

The peculiarity of this attitude is that it flourishes most openly where it has already been victorious. Let us put this bluntly: for all the huffing about endless meetings, there are not actually very many meetings going on. This is because there is equally not a great wave of sharp class struggle going on. There is nothing from which the meetings are distracting you - sure, this or that local campaign, a slight uptick in days lost to industrial action, but we are not talking the miners' Great Strike, let alone Red October.

Consult a history book on October 1917 - of the '10 days that shook the world' the average Bolshevik leader seems to have spent 11 in meetings. Trotsky is reported to have gone three whole days without sleeping, going from one to another. There were, equally, no shortage of mass meetings to attend in the trade union struggles of the 1970s and 80s. In such times, moreover, the hostility to them is almost completely absent; precisely because the decisions made in the union branch or the political campaign have an immediate relevance - no matter how 'abstract' the points of contention might have been - to the struggle at large. The nature of the bourgeois state does not appear to be a matter of angels dancing on the head of a pin when you are planning an insurrection.

The hostility to meetings thus *only has meaning* as a philistine intervention in a meeting (or in one of our modern-day substitutes, such as web forums and social networks).

It only works as a fantasy of the important things you could be doing *out there*. Often, as soon as you are out the door, the crushing reality returns that you have nothing more important to do than darn your socks.

It is no historical accident that there should be relatively little struggle to busy oneself with, however. The workers' movement is at an organisational and political nadir. The unions are battered and cowed. The 'official' Communist Party, which once provided serious industrial mobilising capacity, wound itself up shortly after the fall of the USSR; the Labour Party was free to canter steadily to the right.

All of this has been done, moreover, precisely in the name of the prejudices at work here. The ideology of the anti-trade union laws is the defence of the 'silent majority' against the 'extremists' who unfairly pack union meetings and intimidate them into going on strike. The push for secret postal ballots, the increasing judicialisation of industrial struggles - all were done in the name of the ordinary person 'out there' who did not have the time to waste in endless meetings, nor any interest in little groups of reds and their interminable theories. The very same logic was used to justify the sharp and apparently endless right turn in the Labour Party, the ossification of its own structures, even the need for Ed Miliband to paint himself as 'his own man', floating loftily above Labour 'tribalism'.

All variants of this mindset are essentially petty bourgeois; there is an unbroken continuum from small affinity groups of highly actionist, libertarian communists, through the likes of the Socialist Platform, through the Andrew Burgins and Kate Hudsons of this world, and the SWP's get-rich-quick schemes, to ... Blairism. The impatience with meetings, with left groups and their insistence on political clarity, is not a way out of our present weakness, but a capitulation to it ●

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## AGGREGATE

# Debating Left Unity alternatives

The CPGB is considering its next moves following the political collapse of the Socialist Platform's leadership. **Michael Copestake** reports

Taking place just 24 hours after the first meeting of the Socialist Platform, it was only natural that the September 15 CPGB members' aggregate should focus on what took place, as well as the wider view of the platform and the Left Unity project.

The aggregate also discussed the situation in the Middle East - the Arab spring having turned into winter, and the left having failed to sufficiently grasp the historical, political and economic driving forces of the region that gave rise to both the uprisings and their defeat.

Leading off the discussion on the Socialist Platform in the wake of its meeting the day before, John Bridge began by outlining the bureaucratic methods which have obviously come to the fore.

The comrade first described the CPGB's attempt to amend the platform prior to its publication. An amendment from Moshé Machover on anti-imperialism was accepted (although such a clear omission could hardly have been ignored). The CPGB, however, had just two days to draft and submit amendments, which were in any case rejected without any meaningful explanation, but, crucially, with the explicit promise that a democratic meeting of Socialist Platform members would discuss and vote on amendments. An email was sent out to all platform signatories inviting them to submit such amendments, with a deadline set at two weeks before the September 14 meeting.

Of course, continued comrade Bridge, on the day there were to be no substantive votes nor even the possibility of amending the platform before the November 30 LU conference. Naive ideas to the contrary were scotched by Nick Wrack on the grounds that another meeting would be "hard to organise".

Naturally comrade Wrack expressed his outrage at this collapse into bureaucratism being criticised by the CPGB. He insisted that this was misdirected and unnecessarily offensive polemic. But on the day it became only too clear what was going on.

The idea that voting at the meeting should only be indicative was mooted by four comrades from the original drafting group just a week before the meeting. Itself a worrying sign. But the political collapse of comrade Wrack was there on display on September 14, continued comrade Bridge, in the arguments used to justify this move.

Comrade Bridge noted that the same old clichés about watering down or limiting our politics for the sake of those 'out there' or 'not here' (on whose behalf every opportunist claims to speak) were wheeled out once more. During the discussion before the indicative votes almost no-one on the side of the group of four (Go4) made political arguments against the content of the amendments. Certainly not comrade Wrack, who instead made "lawyer's arguments", identifying changes in the wording of CPGB amendments from one date to another, etc.

For her part, meeting co-chair Soraya Lawrence chose to forego the pretence of having anything serious to say and threw herself instead into bureaucratic phrase-mongering against "political hobbyists" and pleaded that we should stop talking about things that ordinary people don't care about. Another comrade complained that 'ordinary people' won't know what the word 'withering' means!

Comrade Bridge noted that, even though the votes on the CPGB amendments were only indicative, Go4 comrades still voted against them. Of course, they insist that their method is different from what we saw in the Socialist Alliance, Respect and so on: ie, voting against what you claim to believe in for the benefit of 'getting rich quick' in terms of votes, or in deference to a phantom right wing which might be alienated. So, comrade Bridge reminded us, they not only denied everybody the chance to democratically amend what they view as their own property, but also voted against all of the CPGB amendments, which include basic things like the goal of human freedom, the struggle to extend working class gains and the assertion that the Soviet Union and its satellites were not on the road to socialism. We take it from these votes that they are against communism, Marxism and revolutionary socialism ... whatever they might say on this or that platform.

Comrade Bridge reminded those present that comrade Wrack had also suddenly decided that the SP, after all, is not actually a platform for the foundation of a party, or a living thing that belongs to its supporters. No, it is just "a petition" that you merely attach your name to. This hardly bodes well for Left Unity if the Socialist Platform happens to win on November 30. Clearly the Go4 even treat basic democratic norms with contempt.

Comrade Bridge stated that he personally thought that comrade Wrack had been sincere when he spoke at a London Communist Forum and at Communist University about the importance of openly setting out our vision of communism, of starting from our actual principles and beliefs, as opposed to tailoring them for the benefit of those to the right, of saying that he found much in what the CPGB said agreeable and so on. But clearly, he added, something had changed since then. We have therefore witnessed some sort of political collapse that is unlikely to be undone in the short term. Anyway the illusion that the Go4 can win Left Unity to the Socialist Platform appears to be driving the backsliding of their method, he concluded.

As for his views on where the CPGB now stands in relation to the Socialist Platform, comrade Bridge was open-ended. It is quite possible to remain a part of it. On the other hand, it would be perfectly principled to present an alternative platform to the November 30 conference on the basis of the *majority* votes on September 14. After all, the CPGB amendments - bar one - gained a majority despite the Go4's opposition and the aiding and abetting by the Alliance for Workers' Liberty.

Mike Macnair, amongst others, noted the 'anti-group' prejudices on display and commented that the idea of not voting for what we believe 'for the sake of those not present' was reminiscent of the 'silent majority' of Richard Nixon. The idea that the 44 attending the meeting out of 106 signatories should not change the platform was a kind of internalisation of the anti-trade union laws passed over the decades, leading to the insistence on postal balloting for strikes, etc. He concluded that, although Left Unity is a project which is going nowhere, is obsessed with political correctness and is politically insubstantial, the CPGB nonetheless ought to go through this experience



**First principles**

and attempt to win people over.

Regarding the decision not to take substantive votes, Peter Manson commented that the turnout would be the envy of any trade union branch or Labour Party ward and that the idea that this was not enough to amend and endorse the platform was a joke.

For other comrades, the presence of the AWL - was problematic. The AWL's social-imperialism is clearly in contradiction to the Socialist Platform's formal opposition to "all imperialist wars and military interventions". But, exposing the low level of politics, there was an unwillingness on September 14 to actually say so. In other words, the platform does not take its own platform seriously.

Mark Fischer believed the SP meeting symbolised not just the moral decline of the left, epitomised by the unprincipled arguments of the Go4, but also the political decline, epitomised by the absence of serious arguments against our amendments.

### Middle East

The chair of Hands off the People of Iran, Yassamine Mather, opened the second session with a fascinating account of the underlying historical and political-economic forces driving developments in the Middle East.

Given events of recent weeks - more exactly the fact that the sole world superpower, the United States, having drawn a 'red line' against the use of chemical weapons by Syria, is flailing about, this should be seen as a sign of relative decline.

It is noticeable that those who apologise for imperialist interventions also have had the tendency to reduce these region-wide events to single-issue, abstract, moral questions. They are the most determined to avoid an examination of the historical background.

For example, today's politics are partially shaped by events following the collapse of the Ottoman empire and the artificial borders drawn up by Britain and France, the creation of states whose rulers tended to also be from national or religious minorities. Nasserism and Ba'athism attempted to get rid of those colonial borders, as they pursued a 'non-capitalist

road to development'. Nasserism and Ba'athism also maintained control over their peoples through a strong state security apparatus, gangs of hired thugs and the crushing of political opponents. This was not totally unpalatable to many, as such regimes also subsidised food and provided state-run health, social security and education services. This arrangement was, however, brought to an end with the collapse of the Soviet Union, leading to dramatic changes within the Arab world.

We must be clear, the comrade went on, that US policy in the Middle East is guided by political concerns. Its allies in the region include strategically important oil-producing countries. Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Qatar have small populations and basically rentier economies, which can be used in turn to control the other states in the region. We have seen this in the past through the offering of loans as a means of control, for example, backing the Muslim Brotherhood (till the high command coup in Egypt).

The financial crisis of 2008 has only exacerbated the structural problems in the Arab world - the

imposition of International Monetary Fund programmes and loss of income from contract workers leading to the reduction of food subsidies, increased unemployment and the privatisation of state industries.

Part and parcel of this has been the establishment of 'free trade zones' and 'qualified trade zones' - which have privileged access to US markets. However, there is a catch. There must be an agreed level of trade with Israel - boycotting Israeli goods is out of the question. The advantages of dollars outweighing pan-Arab solidarity in most cases.

Comrades agreed that comrade Mather had made an illuminating contribution. There was some discussion about the role of economic factors in the initial uprisings - was the poverty that resulted from the removal of food subsidies a force that had driven people forward or held them back? Comrade Macnair, however, noted that the military coup in Egypt was likely undertaken partially to nip economic discontent in the bud: to undermine the trade union movement whose members had become disillusioned with both the Muslim Brotherhood and the regime.

## Fighting fund

### Do what we can

I had a pleasant surprise yesterday when a veteran supporter of the *Weekly Worker*, comrade TM, walked into the office and handed over £160 in crisp £20 notes. TM is concerned that he can no longer do quite as much as he would like - but at least he can help us financially right now.

And it goes without saying that we are grateful. That sum represents over 10% of what we need to raise in donations each month: ie, £1,500. Added to that, there were two cheques for £20 in the post - thanks to KS and TF (the latter adding that amount to his resubscription).

However, there was just one

PayPal donation from among our 9,279 online readers last week - thank you, comrade AL for your £15 gift. Finally four above-average standing order contributions to our fighting fund brought in a further £135 - DW, JD, SP and MM are the donors.

All in all, a good week, the extra £350 taking our running total up to £906. In the words of comrade TM, "We must all do what we can for the best paper on the left."

**Robbie Rix**

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

## GERMANY

# Rotten politics and rotten terms

This weekend's elections will be a test for Die Linke, argues Ben Lewis, especially when it comes to the coalition-making that will follow

As Germany prepares to go to the polls on September 22, there are enormous issues that confront both Europe's most important power and the continent as a whole. Given Germany's dominance of institutions such as the European Central Bank, the commission and so on, there is a sense in which the outcome could have more of an impact on the populations of Spain, Greece or Portugal than their own national elections, especially in light of the EU's recent attempts to 'delegitimise' elected governments not intent on fulfilling its demands.

Yet, as is so typical of bourgeois politics in this particular period, there appears to exist a kind of inverse relationship between the seriousness of the political matters at hand and the level at which these problems are addressed in political discourse, campaigning and the media. Even in the more serious sections of the German media, the parties' battle for hearts and minds has hitherto been characterised more by silly gaffes than by serious strategic debate and ideas. In public at least, Eurobonds, the possibility of a banking union or the role of Germany in Europe have thus taken a back seat to things like the 'Stinkefinger incident' (Social Democrat Peer Steinbrück pictured sticking up his middle finger on the cover of a leading magazine), infighting within the Free Democratic Party that is currently governing in coalition with Merkel's Conservatives, or the Green Party's suggestion that Germans should enjoy a meat-free 'veggie day' once a week.

## Common agenda

It is hard to tell what exactly lies behind this *Politikverdrossenheit*, this voter apathy and indifference towards the political process in times of such upheaval and change across Europe. It may reflect the simple fact that there appears to be very little to choose between the two forerunners for office - the CDU and SPD - and their preferred coalition partners. Fundamentally, both major parties are agreed on the need for austerity in the form of low wages, 'labour flexibility' and increasingly harsh sanctions against the unemployed.

Indeed, the foundations for this contemporary 'common sense' agenda were laid by the SPD (and the Green Party) in the form of the neoliberal 'Agenda 2010', of which Merkel's proposals are a mere continuation. It says everything about the current outlook of the SPD that Peer Steinbrück, its putative replacement for chancellor Angela Merkel, was one of the chief architects of Agenda 2010, alongside Gerhard Schröder, the German, and ever so slightly less self-serving, version of Tony Blair. The SPD has even attempted to market its 'vision' for Germany under the title of ... you guessed it, 'Agenda 2020'. Wow.

Chancellor Merkel, the continental queen of austerity, remains popular. This is in part thanks to the hard yards put in by Schröder and Steinbrück in imposing Agenda 2010 on the trade unions. The organised working class has by and large passively endured Merkel's austerity agenda, including the freeze on wages and living standards that, or so it is claimed, lies behind the exports-based German economic 'recovery'. However fragile this may be, and however much it has come at the expense of the peripheral countries of the EU, it is undoubtedly true that, as of yet, austerity has hit nowhere near as hard as in Greece, Portugal or Spain. Merkel has thus had



Coalition lines

a relatively easy ride.

There is also very little between the parties when it comes to imposing austerity *abroad* - ie, across the euro zone - despite the hollow exchange between Merkel and Steinbrück on this very matter in their recent televised debate (the latter labelled Merkel's strategy "disastrous", whereupon Merkel pointed out that the SPD had voted for it from the outset).

The German electorate is probably all too aware of the fact that, in the possible absence of a clear outcome, the two main parties may even end up being forced into a 'grand coalition' anyway, as they were in 2005. This outcome would certainly upset their supporters and not come without certain costs to both. Yet, as we draw closer to September 22 with things still tight, that possibility is starting to be broached in the German media.

After all, last Sunday's Bavarian results have highlighted how this most boring of elections might just have us all glued to our television screens. Hopefully presaging the fate of the Liberal Democrats on these shores, the German 'liberal' FDP, upon whom Merkel depends for the moment, took a hammering, receiving barely 3% of the vote. This may reflect some of the 'particularities' of Bavaria, not least the near dominance of the Christian Social Union. Yet if the miserable showing of the FDP, which has stumbled from internal crisis to internal crisis, is replicated on a national scale, then the party would not even make it past the (extremely undemocratic, purportedly anti-totalitarian) 5% hurdle to win representation in the Bundestag. Would this happen, then it would be bad news for Merkel.

Should it not make 5% of the vote, then the FDP could join such luminaries of the electoral process as the rightwing, anti-EU Alternative For Germany (AFG) and the Pirate Party. However, AFG appears not to have been very successful in seeking to pinch votes from CDU rightists disgruntled with bailing out so-called 'lazy Greeks' when there is the alternative of returning to the halcyon days of the Deutschmark. Even the Pirate Party, once hailed by some as a glorious example of the supposedly 'new' politics in the age of Facebook and the 160-character sound bite, appears to have hit the rocks.

## Tolerate

What of the other parties? It is to the tried and tested Green Party that the SPD is turning for a loyal government partner. When pressed on the matter of a 'grand coalition', leading Social Democrat Sigmar Gabriel retorted: "We are fighting for red-green - nothing else."

The fate of the Green Party should be of interest to the left, in that it underlines how there is nothing like the lure of office to undermine both

the principles and supporter base of a petty bourgeois party. It may have taken Joschka Fischer, former leading Green Party parliamentarian, just over 30 years to be transformed from a leather-jacket-sporting '68er' clashing with police into the foreign minister overseeing the bombing of Kosovo, but the Green Party's fate was sealed much more quickly. The Greens' claim to uphold environmentalism, peace, social justice and other nice things evaporated into thin air when they first sat on a ministerial chair.

They may be the most successful Green Party in Europe, but their credibility as a force for any kind of serious change has been irreparably damaged. As Joachim Jachnow argues in *New Left Review*, "The Greens may still play king (or queen)-maker in Berlin. There was a time when that prospect might have caused anxiety in Washington, but the Greens are the American embassy's favourite German party nowadays. And why not? The Green Party has reduced the struggle for radical reform to the small change of 'organic' and 'fair trade' consumerism. The harmless memory of a dissident past now serves as an inexhaustible source of legitimacy, not just for their own actions, but for German power and the state apparatus itself".<sup>1</sup>

Plagued by the 'veggie scandal' and now by accusations of paedophilia against its leader, Jürgen Trittin,<sup>2</sup> the party is losing more and more support - so much so that it is now polling between one and two points below the left party, Die Linke. Its predicted 10% share of the vote could, in circumstances where *both* the preferred coalitions of the SPD and the CDU proves to be arithmetically impossible, and where government pretenders are looking for help onto the throne, turn out to be an important player.

Can Die Linke go the way of the Greens? It has always insisted that there are "red holding lines" that will determine whether it plays a part in coalition government or not. Yet that is far removed from any kind of commitment to fundamentally changing the system. Instead of utilising its share of the vote to expose the pro-capitalism of the SPD and the Greens, several leaders of Die Linke are making it rather obvious that these "holding lines" are both flimsy and not particularly red.

In a recent interview with the *Berliner Zeitung*, Die Linke co-chair Bernd Riexinger extended a conciliatory hand to the Greens and the SPD: "If there is a majority against Merkel then I will not rule out any option." There is now talk of "tolerating" a red-green government - ie, voting with the SPD and Greens to form a government and elect a chancellor, but not becoming part of that government. Riexinger is certainly not asking a lot in exchange: "a minimum wage, fair pensions, social security, an end to cuts

in social services - that would be the minimum programme of a government that we would support".<sup>3</sup> Quite aside from the obvious shortcomings and lack of ambition involved in such a strategy (*all* of the major parties, with the possible exception of the FDP, now see the need for a minimum wage), Riexinger's memory appears to be short: in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Berlin, so-called 'red-red' local government alliances between the SPD and Die Linke's forerunner, the Linkspartei, did little other than provide 'left' cover for "cuts in social services".

Gregor Gysi, leader of Die Linke's parliamentary fraction, went even further. He rejected SPD/Green Party accusations of being an "unreliable government partner", stating: "If it came down to it, we would be more disciplined than the SPD."<sup>4</sup> Fear not, capital! Riexinger's co-chair, Katja Kipping, who has been regarded as being on the left of the party, and whose election was seen as an embrace of the 'social movements', simply repeated the conditions outlined by Riexinger, adding only the need to stop German combat missions abroad. The fact that she also assured her readers that "ministerial posts are not decisive for us" and that "we do not merely want to avoid the worst, but to change something" does nothing to obviate the absolute dead-end strategy of the left administering the capitalist state.<sup>5</sup>

## Anti-capitalism

Only the most naive should be surprised by these developments. Some of Die Linke's demands for a (paltry) minimum wage of €10 an hour, a 'Robin Hood tax', a basic pension and so on, together with its level of support, political 'breadth' and Sunday school nods in the direction of "democratic socialism in the 21st century", will certainly have excited many an advocate of 'broad anti-capitalist parties'. Yet Die Linke's pro-capitalist, social democratic outlook has been obvious for quite some time.

Die Linke's 30,000-word programme<sup>6</sup> is a fudge of epic proportions. Vague platitudes and generalities substitute for clear politics and principles. The odd 'anti-capitalist' bone is thrown to the left of the party, but the main question - under what conditions Die Linke would enter a government - is consciously, studiously, cynically tip-toed around.

Nothing more could really have been expected. Die Linke resulted from the coming together of a section of the former ruling 'official' Communist Party in the German Democratic Republic and a split in the middle ranks of Germany's trade union movement in the west, which in part came as a response to the Schröder 'reforms' outlined above. It did, however, provide an opportunity for revolutionaries to fight within it for working class independence and Marxism.

Yet, both in Germany and abroad, most of left has simply *tailed* the reformist outlook of Die Linke, sowed a whole number of illusions in the nature of the party and held it up as some kind of a 'model' to which 21st century revolutionaries must aspire. Take Marx 21, the group within Die Linke dominated by the German section of the Socialist Workers Party's International Socialist Tendency. Marx 21, whose members now have become Die Linke MPs and have served as loyal lieutenants in the party's bureaucracy, have fawned over the allegedly "clear anti-capitalist character" of Die Linke's programme.<sup>7</sup>

Excuse me? Moreover, according to Wladek Flakin, the coalitionist fever spreads far beyond the leadership of Die Linke. Apparently, Janine Wissler of Marx 21 has argued that forming a government would be OK "if the terms are right".<sup>8</sup>

Taken abstractly, of course, there is nothing wrong with such an approach. There would be no problem in forming a government based on a clear commitment to dismantle the German capitalist state. Moreover, *if* the SPD could be convinced to join a government based on the arming of the masses, the abolition of the standing army, the socialisation of production and so on, then any serious revolutionary would be mad to dismiss such "terms". Yet this is Germany September 2013, not June 1920. The terms, as things stand, are wrong. Die Linke's election material has made it patently clear that it is not out to win a majority for the revolutionary transformation of society.<sup>9</sup>

It goes without saying that all communists and partisans of our class should call for the biggest possible vote for Die Linke this weekend. A big vote for a party of the 'left', however fuzzily defined and strategically forlorn, can provide some cause for hope across Europe. Yet in calling for such a vote it would be criminal for us to remain silent about the true nature of the project, about the reality behind the purportedly 'anti-capitalist' rhetoric and about the current leftwing fantasy of joining capitalist governments as some kind of 'step towards' socialism and human liberation.

Whatever the result of Sunday's election and the governmental forces that crystallise as a result, for those of us involved in the discussions around the outlook of Left Unity and the fight for a principled political alternative in Britain and beyond, Die Linke should serve as a *warning*, not a model. Fudge and compromise are invariably in the interests of the right ●

## Notes

1. J Jachnow, 'What's become of the German greens?' *New Left Review* May-June 2013.
2. The allegations refer to a manifesto written by Trittin over 30 years ago. As I have not seen the pamphlet, it is unclear whether it simply called for the abolition of the age of consent or actually, as claimed by newspapers like *The Daily Telegraph*, sought to "legalise paedophilia", which is, of course, a different matter altogether.
3. Riexinger would also like to see Germany's trade unions "moderate" such discussions between the SPD, the Green Party and Die Linke: [www.berliner-zeitung.de/bundestagswahl-2013/bundestagswahl-2013-linker-an-rot-gruen-merkels-gemeinsam-stuerzen,20889098,24133766.html](http://www.berliner-zeitung.de/bundestagswahl-2013/bundestagswahl-2013-linker-an-rot-gruen-merkels-gemeinsam-stuerzen,20889098,24133766.html).
4. [www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/koalition-nachder-bundestagswahl-2013-gregor-gysi-fordert-riesenruck-von-der-spd-um-rot-rot-gruen-moeglich-zu-machen/8621644.html](http://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/koalition-nachder-bundestagswahl-2013-gregor-gysi-fordert-riesenruck-von-der-spd-um-rot-rot-gruen-moeglich-zu-machen/8621644.html).
5. [www.neues-deutschland.de/artikel/832925.ministerposten-sind-fuer-uns-nicht-entscheidend.html?str=kippping](http://www.neues-deutschland.de/artikel/832925.ministerposten-sind-fuer-uns-nicht-entscheidend.html?str=kippping).
6. Now available in English at [www.die-linke.de/fileadmin/download/dokumente/englisch\\_die\\_linker\\_programm\\_erfurt.pdf](http://www.die-linke.de/fileadmin/download/dokumente/englisch_die_linker_programm_erfurt.pdf).
7. <http://marx21.de/content/view/1549/32>. For similar illusions closer to home, see the International Socialist Network's amendments to the Left Party Platform's proposals for the founding conference of Left Unity in November, which talk of how parties like Die Linke have, "at their very best", "shown that anti-capitalist political parties are possible": <http://international-socialist-network.org/index.php/ideas-and-arguments/organisation/left-unity/233-proposed-draft-amendments-to-left-unity-platforms>.
8. However, comrade Flakin does not provide a reference for this quote. His article makes some very good points against running a capitalist government, but his call for an active boycott of the elections amounts to rather absurd leftist posturing. See [www.klassegegenklasse.org/klassenkampf-oder-regierungsbeteiligung](http://www.klassegegenklasse.org/klassenkampf-oder-regierungsbeteiligung).
9. A recent Die Linke election poster cries out: 'Revolution? No, just in touch with the times' - and then proceeds to list a series of the economic demands I have discussed in this article: [www.neues-deutschland.de/weiteres/fotogalerie/?sid=530#0](http://www.neues-deutschland.de/weiteres/fotogalerie/?sid=530#0).

# IRAN



Military posturing

## More than Syria in its sights

There has been a dramatic change in the politics of the Middle East, writes **Yassamine Mather**

The events we are now witnessing in the Middle East, the “United States’ accidental diplomacy” regarding Syria<sup>1</sup> and renewed talk of the resolution of Iran’s nuclear programme were unexpected a few weeks ago. Having declared that the use of chemical weapons was the “red line” the Syrian leadership should not cross, the US has now accepted Russian proposals for a ‘diplomatic solution’.

If the original decision to launch a ‘limited military strike’ was unpopular, retreating from it has proved as unpopular and, both in the US and beyond, critics claim that the climbdown is an expression of indecision, of weakness. Of course, there are no guarantees that the agreement between the US and Russian foreign ministers struck on September 14 will lead to any kind of the resolution. Disarmament is a conflicted process at the best of times, but in the midst of a civil war, with both sides accusing the other of unleashing chemical weapons, with the state and sections of the opposition unleashing gratuitous violence against civilians, it is unlikely that the current deal will be the end of the affair.

A series of unexpected events left the US administration with little choice. First, there was (and is) some cynicism in most western countries regarding claims of justifying war on the basis of ‘weapons of mass destruction’. The Iraq war created distrust even amongst the most die-hard supporters of imperialism. Austerity and the continuing effects of the financial crisis have also played a part in generating a mood of opposition to a Syrian war. The result is that parliamentarians in the UK voted down Cameron’s attempt to join a rapid US attack and all the signs were that Congress was unlikely to endorse Obama either. In many ways the Russian proposal for a compromise, a few days after the US had tried to gain the support of allies at the G20 conference, saved the administration from further humiliation. Probably that is why it was accepted, even though no-one can be under any illusion that it will end

the Syrian conflict.

Against this, and irrespective of the specifics of the Syrian conflict, US backtracking will have international repercussions. According to the *Washington Times*, Obama’s “red line” vow turned a lighter shade of pink, with secretary of state John Kerry saying a US military strike “might” be necessary if talks led by Russia fail to compel Syria to turn over its chemical weapons.<sup>2</sup>

In the Middle East, mainly amongst America’s Sunni allies, the Gulf emirates, Saudi Arabia and Jordan, as well as the jihadists in the Syrian opposition, there is anger. Meanwhile at home, Republicans who had given their support for military action are not pleased with the retreat. Some have argued that, by attempting to deal with too many issues, ranging from humanitarian intervention to restraining ‘Iranian aggression’ and ending its nuclear programme, the administration lost its way.

There is no doubt that many Republicans were sold the idea of supporting the attack on the basis that it would send the right warning to Iran. According to senator John McCain, “This is really about Iran and their continued development of nuclear weapons. If we stand by and watch chemical weapons being used, what signal do you think that sends to Iran and North Korea?”<sup>3</sup>

Doubtless, Obama, in advocating a limited military strike on Syria, was also thinking about Iranian nuclear capabilities: “Failure to act would embolden Assad’s ally, Iran.” He later added that recent negotiations over Syria could still deter Tehran from building nuclear weapons, even though the US had not used force to address the chemical weapons crisis in Syria.

So could it be that the threat of limited military action against Syria was a warning to Iran all along? Certainly over the last few weeks Iran’s tone regarding its nuclear programme and the possible resumption of talks with the US has changed considerably.

Since late August, the new government in Iran has embarked on a major diplomatic offensive. In the last couple of weeks alone we

have had, for example, president Hasan Rowhani’s Jewish New Year message. A twitter account in the name of the Iranian president (by all accounts with his permission) was used to state, in English: “As the sun is about to set here in Tehran, I wish all Jews, especially Iranian Jews, a blessed Rosh Hashanah.” Contrary to Israeli reports, there has been no denial by the presidential office that this was a genuine tweet. Clearly an aide sent the message, but there seems little doubt that Rowhani was aware of it and approved. Later Iran’s foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, in a twitter exchange with the daughter of Nancy Pelosi, the US congress minority leader, distanced himself from Iran’s last president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who had called the holocaust a “myth”.

### Change of heart

So why the change of heart in Tehran? What has made Iran’s clerical dictators keen to compromise? First of all, the effects of sanctions. The country is on its knees. For years Iran’s rulers deluded themselves that oil exports and the banking system would go unaffected.<sup>4</sup> They were mistaken and the US has won the cold war against the Islamic Republic. Sanctions have indeed brought the country’s economy to a virtual standstill. There is a shortage of basic food and medication. Iranians drive dangerous cars, because spare parts are unavailable, and they fly in aeroplanes using inadequate, faulty, old components. Premature babies die because incubators can have ‘dual use’ (apparently the technology can be also used in nuclear plants) and so it is difficult to repair them. Children also die from out-of-date, dangerous vaccines, again because the correct vaccines cannot be imported. Iranian patients die because of shortages of surgical equipments and drugs.

The car industry, petrochemicals and a large part of manufacturing have come to a standstill and as a result more than a third of the population is unemployed. The rate of ‘growth’ is -5.4% and the population is understandably angry both with

western powers which have imposed sanctions and their own rulers whose nuclear policies and adventurism have provided imperialism with the excuse. The election of Rowhani was an expression of the desire for change in foreign policy. The new government is now desperately trying to make the right noises. However, before anyone gets too excited, it should be noted that last week Iran’s supreme leader warned the new government not to trust “foreign powers”. Iran “should not be duped,” declared ayatollah Ali Khamenei. And at the end of the day he is the man who will make the decision about nuclear negotiations. Khamenei later added that he is “not against diplomacy”, but he remains unconvinced that the US wants a resolution of the nuclear issue.

Khamenei and the more conservative factions in the Iranian majles (parliament) are also reminding Rowhani that previous overtures to the US did not yield results. In 2003, when Iranian and US interests over Iraq converged, president Mohammad Khatami (like Rowhani a ‘reformist’), managed to convince the supreme leader to accept a series of proposals for better relations with US. The package included acceptance of tighter controls by the International Atomic Energy Agency in exchange for “full access to peaceful nuclear technology”, and a policy change to Israel in return for a withdrawal to 1967 borders. According to a number of political memoirs written by high-ranking US officials, Washington flatly rejected the overture.

So the last attempt at diplomacy, far from bringing about a rapprochement, left Iran as part of the ‘axis of evil’. Apparently this incident had a deep psychological impact on Iran’s supreme leader.

So, while the presidential office in Tehran has launched a diplomatic offensive, US officials point to an intercepted message urging attacks on the US embassy in Iraq along with other targets if a military strike on Syria occurred. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, Qasem Soleimani, head of the Revolutionary Guards’

Qods force, pulls the strings of the Iranian-supported Shiite militias in Iraq.

Rowhani, however, insists that in the event of a military strike against Syria, Iran will only send medical aid: “If something happens to the Syrian people, the Islamic Republic of Iran will do its religious and humanitarian duties to send them food and medicine.” For his part, the supreme leader has warned that the US would be making a big mistake if it attacked and would “definitely suffer” as a result. But the reality is that, for all the talk of retaliation, Iran is in no position to make the US “suffer.” Everyone knows that the supreme leader’s comments amount to no more than the threat of a minor action by Hezbollah or a limited militia operation in Iraq.

The Israeli government is keen to pour cold water on any rapprochement between the US and Iran. Netanyahu’s response to the tweeted peace messages was clear: “I am not impressed by the blessings uttered by a regime that just last week threatened to destroy the state of Israel.” He warned the ‘international community’ not to be “deceived” and called on it to focus instead on Tehran’s ‘continued pursuit’ of nuclear weapons. That is why the pro-Israeli press in the US and elsewhere has concentrated on the more antagonistic messages coming out of Iran regarding the possible implication of US intervention in Syria.

In the midst of all the threats of war and promises of peace, it is quite clear that, as far as the US and its allies are concerned, negotiations will have nothing to do with the suffering of either ordinary Syrians or Iranians. It is all about furthering imperialism’s strategic interests in the region.

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### Notes

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## SCIENCE

# Why is the left so afraid of science?

Our struggle to overcome capitalism requires solid scientific foundations, argues **Chris Knight** of the Radical Anthropology Group

**R**ecently, the reviews editor of *The Times Higher Educational Supplement* asked me to review a book written by "somebody like Chris Knight" - a radical anthropologist. It was about the financial crisis of 2008-09. The book turned out to be Janet Roitman's *Anti-crisis*.

Here is the final paragraph:

In the words of Umberto Eco, reflecting upon the narrative paradox of political action-packed superman, 'time as a structure of possibility is in fact a problem of our moving toward a future'. Eco is fascinated with narrativity in superman, in which through multiple, truncated and necessary trajectories, flashes, reversals, setbacks, duplications, parallels of occurrences and reprises, the concept of time breaks down, events lose a notion of temporal aggression, as in a dream. But a dream, surely, just like history, is a cosmically unnoticeable event: there is no spectator, no witness, no inauguration day.<sup>1</sup>

Roitman's basic argument about the crisis is that - like everything else - it is a 'narrative device'. If you think this is utter gobbledegook, wait until you read the rest! Apparently, this research falls into the category of 'critical theory'. And apparently, critical theory comes from Karl Marx, because Karl Marx was quite a critic of various theories, as we all know. It makes you despair. I really do not know what to do about the review. Maybe I will write some kind of spoof, because that is probably all it deserves.

But I want to focus on the left, and why these days it seems so afraid of science. I thought I would begin with *Anti-crisis* because the book is emblematic of so many cutting edge people - especially students who have been to university and got into Foucault, Deleuze, and various other (all very radical) French philosophers. These people are, needless to say, a million light years away from science. They constantly invoke Marx, but I cannot myself see any connection.

One of my current interests is *time* and how it is measured. As Karl Marx put it, "In the final analysis, all forms of economics can be reduced to an economics of time".<sup>2</sup> So it seemed to me quite important to understand how time is being measured and manipulated for us today, which brings me to another book, called *24/7*, by Jonathan Crary. Its theme is that the capitalists want to screw us all the time. We used to have our Sundays, our time for sleep and our holy days. These breaks have now been taken away from us. In Britain, Sundays are now for shopping. Many workers do not even get overtime for Sunday working. So the basic idea of *24/7* sounded interesting.

But when I began reading the book it turned out to be the same kind of gobbledegook. No information, no fieldwork, no geographical or historical survey, no enlightening analysis. Just a stream of ultra-radical consciousness. The book does nothing at all to document the loss of our rest days, holidays or leisure periods over recent decades in different parts of the

world. Like *Anti-crisis*, *24/7* turns out to be yet more postmodernist 'critical theory'. Again, let me quote the final lines of the last paragraph:

It is possible that, in many different places, in many disparate states - including reverie or daydream - the imaginings of a future without capitalism begin as dreams of sleep. These would be intimations of sleep as a radical interruption, as a refusal of the unsparring weight of our global present, of sleep which, at the most mundane level of everyday experience, can always rehearse the outlines of what more consequential renewals and beginnings might be.<sup>3</sup>

You might think this kind of stuff has nothing to do with leftwing activism or political theory. I am inclined to agree, but unfortunately hostility to science infects almost the whole of the left.

### Definition

So what is science? I like the definition provided by Leon Trotsky: "Science is knowledge that endows us with power."<sup>4</sup> To me that is correct. Yet, as soon as you start thinking about this definition, you realise it contains some ambiguities. Which people are "us"? It seems to me that we need to clarify. "Us", for Trotsky, means all human beings, cutting across class, gender, race and so forth. Knowledge that is empowering for humanity is science. Knowledge that empowers your own sectional interests against the rest of humanity is ideology. Of course, a huge amount of knowledge falls into that category, as Marx most brilliantly pointed out.

Yet if that is so, where does the working class fit in? Why did Marx and Engels place such stress on the international proletariat? They did so because the notion of 'all humanity' is just too abstract. You have to base yourself on some concrete, living

embodiment of universal interests. What Marx and Engels meant by 'the proletariat' was not this or that group of workers, but (as they expressed it) that

class which is the antithesis of class, that class which cannot liberate itself without liberating all humanity.

Marx maintained that knowledge must be based on some social constituency. The more narrow your constituency, the more sectional the interests being served, the more inevitably your knowledge is going to take the form of ideology. Conversely, the broader your constituency, the more universal the interests served, the closer you will be to the ideal of science. If you are working for a corporation, if you are working for a state with its own separate interests, your work will be biased and, try as you might, it is going to be very difficult to maintain your scientific integrity.

I have always thought it important *not* to say, as some kind of mantra, that 'Marxism is a science'. What people actually mean when they say this is: 'I am a Marxist, so therefore what I am doing is science'. I much prefer Engels' formulation: "... the more ruthlessly and disinterestedly science proceeds, the more it finds itself in harmony with the interests of the workers"<sup>5</sup> Engels is saying we have to do science quite independently of politics. Yes, Lenin did stress *partiinost* (putting the party first). In politics, there may be a case for that. But the party itself will not be revolutionary unless it is based on the most revolutionary kind of knowledge there is, which is genuine science. If that has not been happening, then instead of subordinating politics to science you are doing the opposite: putting politics first. Certainly that is what Stalin did, giving state endorsement to Lysenko and his ridiculous nonsense about the inheritance of acquired characteristics.

Marx and Engels did

*not* advocate subordinating science to politics. They insisted science comes first. If it is genuine science - pursued ruthlessly for its own sake - then that is the best service that can be rendered to the proletariat. If you are not putting science first, then in my view you are not even a Marxist. Marx, after all, was a *scientist*. His special contribution was to extend the principles of science into areas where no-one else dared go - beyond mathematics, physics, chemistry and biology, all the way up to society. Obviously that is difficult, because, as soon as you enter the human social sphere, you come up against politics in a particularly virulent form. Take, for example, today's climate science with its so-called 'inconvenient truths'. Faced with immense political pressure, you need courage to stick to the science. But, whatever the difficulties, it is the science which has to come first.

### Tipping point

I have often spoken and written in the *Weekly Worker* about developments in science over the last century and have concentrated on what happened immediately after World War II. Before then, there was a widespread feeling that science was in a sense intrinsically linked to progressive political forces. What happened after World War II was that imperialism managed to turn things round in a rather big way. Unfortunately, few Marxists even noticed it was happening at the time. From about 1950 on, under the banner of something trumpeted as the 'cognitive revolution', there occurred a subtle redefinition of science. The effect was to insulate - to quarantine - science in a separate compartment, so that activists could no longer derive political inspiration from it.

A key figure here was Noam Chomsky, well known for his writings exposing the criminality of US foreign policy. In his other role as a theoretical linguist - funded ironically by the Pentagon - Chomsky was a key figure in this 'cognitive revolution', which in a sense trumped Marxism. I would like to provide a few quotes here, because I think they help explain how and why the left became so alienated from science.

"Science," according to

Chomsky, "talks about simple things ... As soon as things become too complex, science cannot deal with them ... Human affairs are way too complicated."<sup>6</sup> When an activist asked him about the connection between his politics and his science, he stated bluntly:

There is no connection. Rather, the search for theoretical understanding pursues its own paths, leading to a completely different picture of the world, which neither vindicates nor eliminates our ordinary ways of talking and thinking. ... Meanwhile we live our lives, facing, as best we can, problems of radically different kinds, far too rich in character for us to be able to discern explanatory principles of any depth, if these even exist.<sup>7</sup>

Of course, this is a direct attack on Marxism. Chomsky is saying you will never find a scientific explanation for anything of direct interest to human beings. Chomsky argues that when Newton discovered gravity his great contribution was to refute those predecessors - such as Galileo and Descartes - who believed that the world could be scientifically understood:

Newton disproved them. He showed that the world is not intelligible to us ... And by the time that sank in, which was quite some time, it just changed the conception of science. Instead of trying to show that the world is intelligible to us, we recognized that it's not intelligible to us.<sup>8</sup>

Reality must forever remain unintelligible. Only our own theories are intelligible. What Chomsky means here is that Newton discovered gravity - action at a distance - which, from a mechanical standpoint, is occult and mystical. Fortunately, however, few people let this bother them. The topics of most interest to us are our own feelings, relationships and social problems. But such matters are far too complex for science, which can only cope with simple puzzles. On this basis, Chomsky managed to completely rubbish the whole idea of making sense of our lives.

As a pivotal figure in the 'cognitive revolution', which received massive US state, corporate and other institutional support, Chomsky successfully discredited Rousseau, Marx, Durkheim and the entire project of social science. For Chomsky, Marxist-inspired historical or social science is "mostly a joke". As this notion took hold, 'scientific socialism' became widely perceived as no more than a sad misunderstanding - a contradiction in terms.

### Language

For imperialism, it was extremely important to prevent us from using our access to education to put the big picture together and expose the schemes of those who rule and exploit us. Emerging from World War II as the dominant superpower, the US



**Noam Chomsky: science - but not for society**

# What we fight for

military-industrial complex loved the 'cognitive revolution' because it turned materialism on its head.

Let me sum up the message of this so-called 'scientific revolution'? In five words, here is the basic idea: *It's all in the mind*. Chomsky was the first to seriously propose a revamped version of phrenology - bumps in the head - as the best way to explain what it means to be human.

Language, according to Chomsky's new theory, is a 'computational module' located somewhere in the brain. Having 'explained' language in this way, he went on to explain various other things - science, for example - by invoking additional modules. According to Chomsky, if you are a scientist, it is because your brain incorporates a special device known as the 'science-forming capacity'. And so on. The whole of human history and culture can be explained by the fact that humans have the necessary 'cognitive modules' installed genetically in the head.

An advantage of this idea was that it could be presented as purely *natural* science, hence correspondingly non-political. Chomsky was well aware that the people who fund research in universities do not want to be accused of financing subversion of any kind. So if what they are funding can be construed as pure natural science, without any social ramifications whatsoever, then they feel much safer. Chomsky was able to win extraordinary institutional resources for himself and his colleagues by convincing sufficient US corporations and funding agencies that what he was doing was this thing called 'pure natural science', more or less like mathematics or physics.

There was a good reason why Chomsky needed to separate his science from his politics. Any contamination of one by the other would have prevented him from pulling off this incredible double act - retaining his Pentagon-funded scientific employment, while, in his spare time, acting as an anti-militarist commentator, journalist and activist.

## Left science

My view is that this huge change in the 1950s did have a very subtle effect on the left. It may not have been discernible to Marxists at the time. Yet it was decisive in the left's abandonment of Marx's and Engels' project to establish a revolutionary movement based on science.

Instead of this, the left tends to seize on one aspect of Marx's work - the idea that social being determines consciousness and that, as a result, the theories that prevail in society reflect the dominance of the *class* that prevails. If you give this an extra twist, you end up with the view that is so prevalent on the left: namely that everything is just a power game: there is no such thing as truth, so don't worry about graphs or figures or data. You can ignore all this because, as everybody knows, knowledge is socially constructed.

So what about climate science? Is this just socially constructed ideology? If you were to follow Chomsky, you would have to say it cannot possibly be science because the problems it addresses are not simple enough. It is complex, so probably it is all a joke. No, Chomsky will not quite say that, but the implication is there. I am always surprised that people simply do not get climate science. As soon as you look at a graph of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions over the course of time, you can see it shooting up exponentially, much like the consumption of energy, population and so forth.

My friend, Oliver Tickle, who writes on climate science for *Labour Briefing*, warns that the politicians and government advisors are giving up. To an alarming extent, they are telling us to adapt to the prospect of a

4°C rise in global temperatures. If this happened, the collapse of the polar ice caps would become inevitable, bringing long-term sea level rises of 70-80 metres. All the world's coastal plains would be lost, complete with ports, cities, transport and industrial infrastructure, and much of the world's most productive farmland. Global geography would be transformed, much as it was at the end of the last ice age, when sea levels rose by about 120 metres to create the Channel, the North Sea and Cardigan Bay out of dry land. Weather would become extreme and unpredictable, with more frequent and severe droughts, floods and hurricanes. The Earth's carrying capacity would be hugely reduced. Billions would undoubtedly die. But there is worse. Why would rising temperatures stop there? If they shoot up by 4°C, what happens at 6°C warmer, or perhaps even 12°C?

It is important (as Gabriel Levy points out) not to cause panic or alarm, but the idea that we have infinite time is also dangerously irresponsible. We need to find some way of translating the science into action. Suppose the international conferences of all those climate scientists became politically legitimised and empowered - accorded the right to insist on action. If they stuck to the science, they would come up with all kinds of politically inconvenient solutions - inconvenient to capitalism, that is. One would be the slogan, 'No borders!' You cannot deal with this crisis within the confines of a country like Belgium, Brazil or Britain - it is a global thing. Another would be 'Private property is not sacrosanct!' Just because you own half the Antarctic or vast stretches of rainforest, that does not give you the right to whatever you can extract from it.

The world's scientists have the knowledge about what needs to be done. Chomsky says science should be tucked away, insulated from political activism. He himself combines both roles, but insists this is OK because he keeps his activism separate from his science. Surely the opposite is needed? Anarchists sometimes say, 'Never mind the theory - let's have some action'. But 'mindless activism' is not something to be proud of. If you detach scientific understanding from your activism, mindless activism is what you will get. The same separation will mean tongue-tied science - scientists told to keep quiet, to report back only to their funding agencies, to keep activism at arm's length for fear of being political.

The scientists should be encouraged to speak. They should be invited to address meetings of the labour movement and make their case for what needs to be done. Obviously, there would be heated debates about the way forward, but the science must come first. We cannot allow politicians - so often lobbied and corrupted by oil companies and so on - to distort the message. Science needs to come first. If international science did come first, and was given a political voice, then I do not doubt what that message would be: we cannot afford free-market capitalism to run wild. It is ruining the planet.

Often, we talk about looking to the next generation. Maybe they will come up with new ideas to sort things out. Wouldn't it be rather sad for that generation if they were told by the scientists that any efforts of theirs would be too late, because the tipping point was passed in, say, 2017? We have no idea what the effects of this runaway process might be.

## Fear of genes

Let me come to another example of the left's hostility to science. As an anthropologist, I know more about evolutionary science than about climate science. In my view, the reaction of pretty much all of the left to the revolution that occurred in

the life sciences in the 1960s, with selfish-gene Darwinism, was tragic. If you talk to anyone in the Socialist Workers Party or the Socialist Party, or any of the other groups for that matter, they will tell you that 'selfish gene' Darwinism is Thatcherism, capitalism, sexism and all the rest of it.

Richard Dawkins - a brilliant scientist, but a complete idiot when it comes to anything political - explains that genes are 'selfish' in just one technical sense: they replicate themselves. A gene which does not do this - a gene which replicates the competition - will not be around for long. The point of selfish-gene theory was to solve a genuine puzzle. Suppose you accept Darwinism as 'the survival of the fittest'. Suppose you also accept that some components of animal behaviour are natural and instinctive, passed on genetically. Then, on that basis, you cannot explain altruism or cooperation. Suppose, for example, you are a soldier in World War I and throw yourself on a grenade to save the comrades in your platoon. You would not pass on your genes because you would be dead. So, if there exist instincts for altruism or solidarity that are part of human nature, you just cannot explain how they could possibly have been transmitted down through the generations.<sup>9</sup>

Robert Trivers was one of the founders of selfish-gene theory. Far from being a rightwinger, in his early days he was a Black Panther sympathiser, whose politics to this day have remained probably more anarchist than anything else. He points out that, before we had selfish-gene theory, 'race' was a respectable concept in biology. One reason was that people tried to solve the altruism problem by invoking 'group selection' and, in particular, race. The notion of 'survival of the fittest', they said, applied not to competing individuals, but competing groups - which in biology meant races. The idea was that racial conflict and competition would result in the victory of those racial groups whose members were most altruistic, self-sacrificing and all the rest of it. During the 1940s and 1950s, under the influence of 'ethologists' like the Nazi-sympathizer Konrad Lorenz, this kind of idea was taken for granted by most evolutionary biologists.

To demolish this whole notion, Trivers took the puzzle of primate infanticide. From time to time, male primates (baboons, and even chimpanzees) will take to killing small infants. From a 'group selection' perspective, this seems terrible. If you are killing little infants, you are threatening the future of the race! Now, the supporters of 'group selection' came up with a solution. Far from acting selfishly, they argued, those infanticidal males were doing a service. They were regulating population growth, keeping numbers down to avoid food shortages and starvation in the future. Killing infants was altruistic, done by males for the long-term benefit of the race.

I will not go into all the details here, but Trivers points out that this whole theory was complete nonsense. The females - mothers of the little infants - fought valiantly to protect their offspring. So why is it just males who act for the good of the species, while females keep doing the wrong thing? Furthermore, why do the males only kill those particular infants who must have been fathered by somebody else? If you are trying to keep the population down, why not kill your own babies? As scientists investigated, it became more and more clear that those infanticidal males were not being altruistic at all. They were helping to ensure the immortality of their own genes. As a new dominant male takes over a harem of females, he kills the young infants - fathered by his deposed rival - to stop the female breast-feeding and to begin her menstrual cycle again, so that he can

mate with her and produce offspring.

This is what Trivers has to say: "Species advantage reasoning... tends to elevate one individual's self-interest over that of the species, thereby tending to justify their individual behaviour."<sup>10</sup> Lorenz and many other biologists in the days before selfish-gene theory claimed that war in the human case is 'hygiene', because we human beings also face overpopulation. I cannot express how reactionary all that stuff was. In Britain, Winston Churchill was an enthusiastic supporter of similar ideas, telling Asquith in 1910: "The unnatural and increasingly rapid growth of the feeble-minded and insane classes, coupled as it is with a steady restriction among the thrifty, energetic and superior stocks, constitutes a national and race danger which it is impossible to exaggerate." Churchill urged the British government to start compulsorily sterilising "the feeble-minded and insane classes", deeming this necessary to preserve the vigour of the race.<sup>11</sup>

It was not until the arrival of selfish-gene theory that all this came to be exploded as rubbish biology. If a poor person is producing more babies than a rich person, then by definition that person is fitter, because fitness is *defined* that way. Instead of trying to justify infanticide - or indeed war - selfish-gene theory allows us to see such behaviour for what it is.

To conclude, I make a plea. If we wish to understand human origins, then we do need to know how genes work. The left is infected by a ridiculous fear of science, in particular when it comes to genetics. Why fear genetics? In a recent article I wrote for the *Weekly Worker*,<sup>12</sup> I showed how modern genetics has vindicated Engels, proving that hunter-gatherer women across Africa chose to live close to their mothers for tens of thousands of years. Modern genetics has proved that early human kinship was matrilineal, with a bias towards matriline - quite contrary to everything that was thrown at Engels for saying that in the 19th century.

There is no more revolutionary form of knowledge than science. It is intrinsically revolutionary and, incidentally, intrinsically internationalist. We have to remember that. If we believe in science we should not only recognise that in our programme, but we should *do* science. Everybody can be a scientist. Nobody is in a better position to understand capitalism than a trade unionist, for example, who is suffering from its effects. There is no reason why we cannot all be scientists.

This is why I am totally against Chomsky's argument that science is somehow beyond our ken, and irrelevant even if we could understand it. That is completely reactionary nonsense. Not only should we go back to science: we should base the party we want to build on science ●

## Notes

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9. For more on this, see C Knight, 'The science of solidarity' *Weekly Worker* August 3 2006.
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11. M Lind, 'Churchill for dummies' *The Spectator* April 2004.
12. See C Knight, 'Anthropology and women: genetic evidence is richer than stale party line', *Weekly Worker* July 11 2013.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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# weekly worker

**Lib Dems  
remain united  
... for the  
moment**

## Desperate to avoid wipe-out

Nick Clegg has resorted to claiming that coalition government is a virtue in itself, writes **Eddie Ford**

**L**iberal Democratic nerves are beginning to fray. You can see why. In some polls, they trail in fourth place behind the United Kingdom Independence Party - which could conceivably come a close second, or even first, in next year's European elections. For instance, the latest *Opinium/Observer* poll puts the Lib Dems on a miserable 7%, compared with a vote share of 23% at the 2010 general election and scores of more than 30% in the run-up to polling day.<sup>1</sup> Remember the heady days of Cleggmania?

Anyway, the party faces a possible wipe-out at the next general election, maybe going back to the days when you could fit the entire parliamentary party inside a taxi cab. At the very least, given the vagaries of the quasi-democratic 'first past the post' electoral system used for Westminster elections, it will see a significant reduction in its parliamentary presence.

Those on the left of the party are uncomfortable, to put it mildly, with the fact that they find themselves in bed with a rightwing Conservative government. Reflecting this, party membership has fallen from 65,038 to 42,501, something Clegg readily admits - an honesty, it does have to be said, that stands in marked contrast to the fantasy membership insisted upon by the Socialist Workers Party central committee. Inevitably, this fall in membership has contributed to an operating deficit of £410,000 in the latest annual accounts.

What next for the Lib Dems? Two recent polls shed an interesting light on its possible future direction. According to a poll conducted by the relatively influential *Lib Dem Voice* blog, 76% of party members think a hung parliament is the "most likely" outcome of the 2015 general election - and 39% expect the party will be part of a coalition government again.<sup>2</sup> Assuming that the outcome the next general is another hung parliament, 54% of Lib Dem members want to see some form of arrangement with Labour. By comparison, only 21% want to see a continuing governmental arrangement with the Tories. Meanwhile, according to a *Guardian/ICM* poll, 56% of Lib Dem voters would prefer to form a coalition with Labour, compared with 22% who want to maintain the current coalition with the Conservative Party.<sup>3</sup>

But, whatever the poll tea leaves say, coalition politics is unpopular with swathes of the party - some of whom loathe the Tories even more than they did before entering the coalition. As the Glasgow party conference showed, there is what passes for a conscience in the Lib Dems ... but it is quitting.

### Angst

Expressing the angst of many Lib Dems, Sarah Teather - former minister of state for children and families and MP for Brent Central - announced her intention not to stand for the next parliament. She said the coalition's approach to immigration and welfare left her feeling "desolate" and "catastrophically depressed", lamenting that Clegg seems to be leading a party that no longer appears passionate about "social justice and



**Nick Clegg: mania long gone**

liberalism". Rather, she thought, he constantly panders to public opinion and the "reactive pursuit" of the latest poll findings. She might be right.

Such sentiments were aired in Glasgow. Indeed, Vince Cable, the business secretary, laid into the Tories with relish - leading many commentators to chatter excitedly about him being 'off-message' and going feral in his native Glasgow. He accused his coalition partners of peddling "cynical" and "ugly" politics, almost as though the Lib Dems were in a "coalition with Ukip". After a few years pretending not to be the nasty party, Cable continued, the Tory Party was reverting to type - we now have "dog-whistle politics" orchestrated by that Australian Rottweiler, Lynton Crosby. Warming to his theme, he commented that the list of people the Tories disapprove of is getting longer by the day - public sector workers, especially teachers; the unmarried; people who do not own property, etc. In fact, he argued, the Tories' "core demographic excludes pretty much anybody who wouldn't have qualified for the vote before the 1867 Reform Act": they have become "Tea Party Tories" and this is "not our kind of politics", Cable declared.

He also delivered a rebuff to those who think the UK economy is undergoing an economic renaissance. Cable feared instead that we are witnessing the beginning of yet another unsustainable

housing bubble, fuelled by runaway London property prices and Osborne's 'help to buy' scheme - the bankers and speculators are "rediscovering their Mojo". Dubbed a Jeremiah by Cameron, the business secretary reminded conference that the *Old Testament* prophet was right because he warned that Jerusalem would be overrun by the armies of Nebuchadnezzar and joked that in his own "book of lamentations" he outlined how Gordon Brown's New Jerusalem was "overrun by an army" of estate agents, property speculators and bankers. The only problem now, he added, is that the "invaders" are back and have a "bridgehead" in London and the south-east of England - they "must be stopped".

More concretely, he called for "action" on zero-hours contracts, the Office for National Statistics having estimated that around 250,000 workers are on such contracts - though some think the total figure is much higher. Cable also told conference that he had instructed the Low Pay Commission to carry out a study on what economic conditions would be needed for the minimum wage to rise more quickly than it has in recent years without costing jobs. Furthermore, he said, there was a need to tackle "reckless" directors (the Pavlovian response of the Institute of Directors, quite predictably, was that Cable's focus on rogue directors could place "unfair burdens" on corporate enterprises).

These sorts of comment were widely interpreted, correctly no doubt, as a barely coded warning to Clegg that he should not become too close to the Tories in advance of the general election and any potential future negotiations with Labour over power-sharing. Cable appears to be positioning himself as the flag-bearer of the party's left.

There were other rumblings of discontent. The Social Liberal Forum tabled two amendments to Clegg's main motion, one calling for the economy to be "rebalanced" by borrowing more money. Another wanted a total removal of borrowing limits for councils to boost social housing and a wider remit for the Bank of England to boost employment and incomes. One SLF activist was loudly cheered for saying that Lib Dems should not "collude" with Osborne's cuts.

Responding to the criticisms, Tim Farron, the Lib Dem president, strongly urged members not to retreat from austerity at the 11th hour - arguing that it would be a "huge irony" if the party backed away from its "staggeringly tough decisions" just as economic recovery is "starting to take hold". In the end, Clegg and his supporters won the day with relative ease - conference deciding to "stick to the plan" of deficit reduction (ie, continued austerity) and even voted to *retain* Trident, albeit a "scaled down" version.<sup>4</sup> Bang goes another Lib Dem principle. The only slight upset for the leadership was that conference voted for a "review" of the bedroom tax, one delegate, Richard Kemp - leader of Liberal Democrats in Liverpool - denouncing it as "evil".

Slightly sweetening the pill, Clegg promised - and we all know how reliable his promises are - that Lib Dems would argue in 2015 for "more fair taxes" and reject any Conservative argument for reducing the deficit "purely" through spending cuts. In a rather feeble attempt to put a little bit of clear yellow water between the Lib Dems and the Tories, Clegg indicated that his party will put "at the heart" of its next manifesto a

pledge to take everyone on the minimum wage out of income tax altogether. He announced in his closing speech on September 18 that every child at infant school in England will receive free lunches as from next September - the *quid pro quo*, however, being that the Tories will be allowed to introduce a marriage tax allowance. Apparently, this clearly showed the "dividing line" between the Lib Dems and the Tories - the latter's priority was to "help some families over others" with its tax break for married couples, whilst the Lib Dems wanted to give *everyone* a fair chance. He also warned again that the Tories would pursue "ideological cuts" if they were left to govern by themselves. The Lib Dems are a "restraining" force on extremism, right and left.

Faced with such discontent within the ranks, Nick Clegg is desperate to hold the line - the coalition government is here to stay right up to the day of the election - and beyond that as well, if the votes fall in the right way. A message hammered home on the BBC's Andrew Marr show on September 15, Clegg arguing that the creation of another coalition government in 2015 was the only way to achieve "balanced politics" and a "sustainable recovery". During the interview, though naturally he never explicitly said so, it became fairly clear that a second term in partnership with David Cameron was his favoured option - dismaying many on the left of the Lib Dems. Labour would "wreck the economy", Clegg claimed, and the Tories would provide the "wrong kind of recovery". So Clegg and Cameron, like partners in crime, are in this together right to the bitter end ... and maybe beyond ●

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### Notes

1. www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/sep/07/poll-cameron-miliband-syria.
2. www.libdemvoice.org/hung-parliament-lib-dem-poll-36227.html.
3. 2013/sep/16/voters-confident-economy-guardian-icm-poll.
4. *The Scotsman* September 18.

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