

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



weekly **worker**



Politics for dummies: those with something to hide fear free and open political debate

- Drugs war failure
- SWP's factions
- Iran's diplomacy
- Left Unity conference

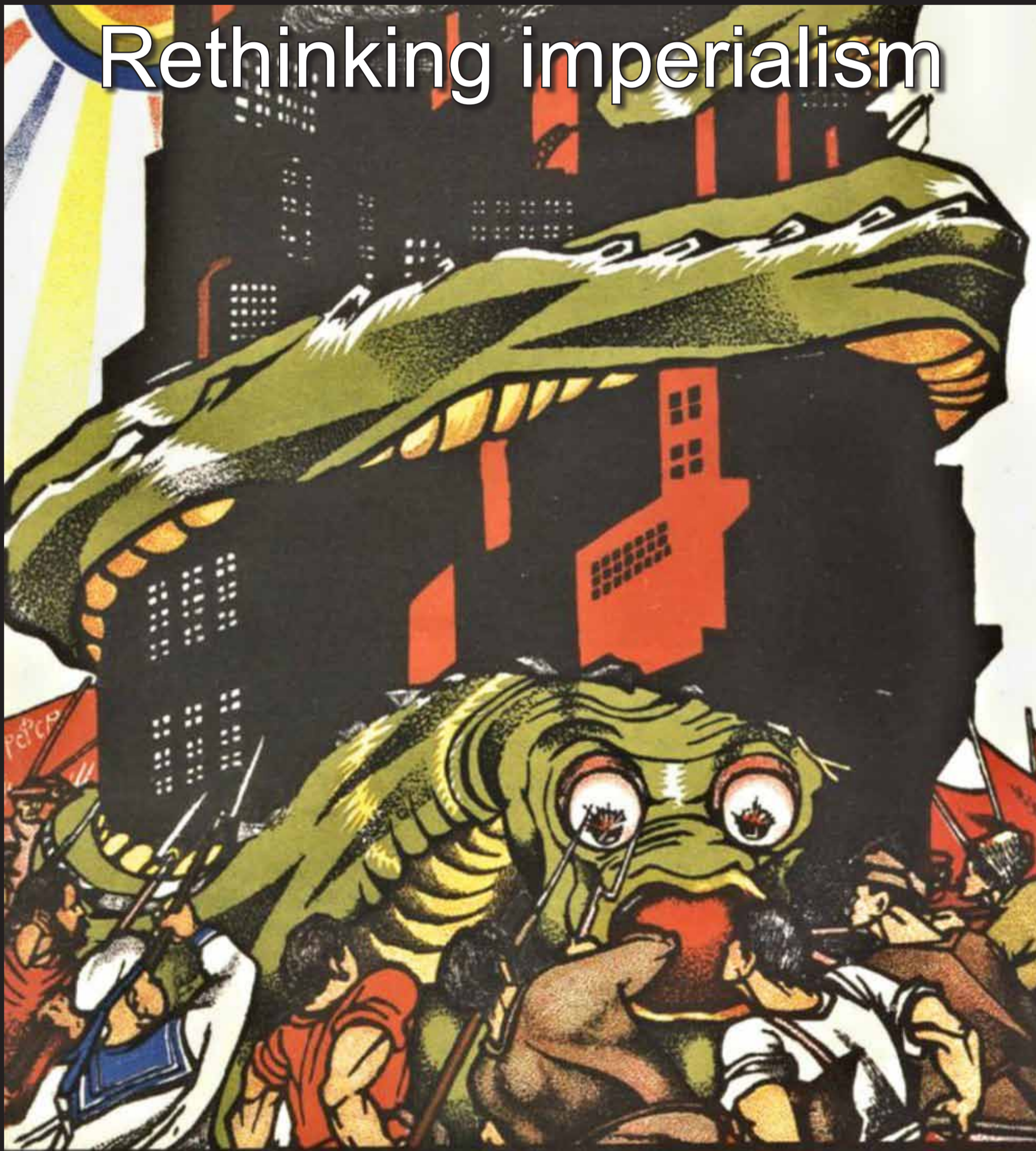
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Rethinking imperialism



LETTERS



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

Ed and Ralph

It is hard to feel sorry for Ed Miliband over his spat with the *Daily Mail*. To begin with, its article comparing Miliband to his Marxist father, Ralph, was plain stupid. How can you claim that someone who is against the monarchy or finds bigoted English nationalists exasperating is a man who "hated Britain", on that evidence alone? It tells us more about the irrational, chauvinistic mindset of the *Daily Mail* than anything else. It should have given Miliband junior the opportunity to take the piss, not feign hurt feelings over his father's reputation.

I've only ever read one Ralph Miliband book, his historical study of the Labour Party, *Parliamentary socialism*. It excoriates Labour's right wing and is scathing about bourgeois interests and bourgeois vehicles - like, for instance, the *Daily Mail*. The only thing Ed seems to have learnt from his father is that if you want to be a Labour Party careerist it is best to start on the left of the party and move right (not that Ralph expected either of his sons to act upon that!).

And if you happen to have the opportunity to attack leftwing union bureaucrats, as Miliband has done over the Labour-union link, you might even get fulsome praise from the Tories and their media and become more acceptable to the establishment. If anything has Ralph turning in his grave, it won't be the class bigotry of the *Daily Mail*, but the treacherous class politics of his son.

The *Mail* seems to recognise only one form of 'socialism', and it is anti-democratic, thuggish and authoritarian. So it automatically insinuates that Miliband senior was an apologist for the "undemocratic" Soviet Union. In fact he hated Stalinism. Although illusions in the USSR were very widespread in the 1940s - especially amongst those who were strongly anti-fascist - never for a moment did Ralph soften his criticism of JV Stalin.

By contrast, when the class struggle was acute in 1934, the *Daily Mail* came out with its notorious front-page headline, "Hurrah for the Blackshirts". Its editors did not seem to be concerned about the "undemocratic" nature of fascism - only about the threat the working class posed to capitalism. Since then the *Mail* has hardly changed its spots - it still panders to bigotry in the interest of capitalism, however authoritarian and however much suffering it imposes on humanity. It has no idea as to Ralph Miliband's real views and one suspects no interest either. Its aim was, rather obviously, to pretend that Ed is just as much of a 'leftwing extremist' as his dad, no matter how absurd an idea that is.

Then as now, the *Mail* represents the middle-brow, populist ideology of a disorientated petty bourgeoisie. It is an ideology that needs to be exposed for the rubbish it is. Not treated with respect by allowing its witterings to be taken seriously.

Phil Kent
Haringey

Demo gossip

This year's Conservative Party conference is in Manchester, a city where there is not a single Tory councillor in the 96-member chamber. Clearly the party's decision to hold it there was

always going to antagonise many in the deindustrialised north - and antagonise them it did. Over 50,000 people attended the demonstration organised by the Trades Union Congress, whose theme was the carving up of the national health service in the interests of private contractors.

The demonstration was meant to start at 11. However, as is the way of these things, we only set off at 12.15, grinding to a halt periodically as groups of people stopped outside Manchester Central, the conference venue, to give the Tories a piece of their mind. Whilst people were angry, the demonstration was peaceful - although there were two arrests during the course of the day.

In terms of the left, the Socialist Workers Party, despite the loss of members following the Delta debacle, still had the largest presence, with countless stalls along the route and numerous paper-sellers. However, it did not dominate the demonstration, as it might have done in the past - this can partly be explained by the mass desertions from the Socialist Worker Student Societies. I heard one or two demonstrators sneering at the SWP posters taped to lampposts - one woman meticulously ripped down every single one she could get her hands on. There were a significant number of defaced SWP placards, which had phrases like "Rape apologists" scrawled across them.

Other groups with a notable presence included the Socialist Party in England and Wales, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty and the Communist Party of Britain. Left Unity's presence was not as big as I had initially anticipated, with many comrades who had attended the policy conference the day before expressing dismay at the LU leadership's failure to adequately prepare for the demonstration.

During the rally in Whitworth Park it was remarkable to hear Owen Jones warning of attempts by senior Labour figures to dispose of Andrew Burnham as shadow health secretary. Owen called for Burnham to retain his post, as apparently he is against the privatisation of the NHS. I'll believe it when I see it! Comrade Jones went so far as to call on demonstrators to show their support for Burnham - he should not be removed "under any circumstances".

This was my first time selling the *Weekly Worker* and it was more successful than I had initially anticipated. I sold all but one of my copies, yet it was the manner in which I sold them which pleased me. Rather than shout 'Get your *Weekly Worker* here', instead I put a few copies on display and the name was instantly recognised, with the paper receiving a good reception. No-one remarked on it being a 'gossip sheet' and I actually ended up selling a copy to a comrade from the SWP who works at their centre in London.

When I jokingly pointed out that buying the *Weekly Worker* might be controversial for an SWP member, he responded by saying that the SWP culture of ignoring other organisations on the left and refusing to learn from them is ridiculous. The *Weekly Worker* is clearly having an impact on the wider left and people are taking serious note of what we say.

Robert Eagleton
Preston

Scandal

Ben Lewis makes some good points against Die Linke, but blunts his message at times by appearing

to offer the Stalinists friendly advice ('Principled opposition, not coalition poker', September 26). His original article even called for a vote for them ('Rotten politics and rotten terms', September 19).

In reviewing the German elections, he notes that a 'grand coalition' is most likely, "not least because the leaders of the SPD and the Greens refuse to take seriously Die Linke's red-red-green gestures". Elsewhere he expresses regret that Die Linke lost votes to the AfD (rightwing Europhobes - doesn't this tell us something about the base of support they have been cultivating?). He adds that Die Linke's hankering for a role in coalition is "an utterly hopeless perspective for a purportedly 'anti-capitalist' organisation".

This is a correct statement, of course, if made in a tone suggestive of more in sorrow than in anger. A friendly warning that the party would risk serious loss of support if it went into coalition. Don't we already have enough information to know that Die Linke is not an anti-capitalist party and would not become one with any amount of cajoling or even fear of losing seats? Their composition, dominated by old bureaucrats left over from the former political masters of the Stasi, given a political facelift by a few degenerate radicals; their role in regional coalitions administering attacks on workers.

We could add the role of leading figures such as Christine Buchholz (Marx 21) who sits on the parliamentary defence committee, or Petra Pau, vice-president of the Bundestag, who, with her party, facilitated the hasty passage of measures to bail out the banks. Most recently Pau used her access to the bourgeois media to attack the election campaign of the Trotskyist Socialist Equality Party for advocating 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. Pau knows very well what the meaning of the term is, but chose to use it unscrupulously to portray opponents as undemocratic. The SEP/World Socialist Web Site had fought a campaign on uniquely internationalist lines, including positions much closer to what the CPGB would support than are those of Die Linke.

Die Linke is now being touted by sections of the Brit left as a model for a new party. Ben Lewis's original article has drawn a few out of the woodwork to defend their heroes. They were happily counting votes and don't like to be interrupted by uncomfortable facts. In the Left Unity project the influence of Stalinism still lingers. The forces grouped around the Socialist Platform should make it clear that modelling LU on Die Linke would be nothing less than a scandal.

Mike Martin
Sheffield

Fascist fire

Paul Demarty's 'Safe spaces: Conway-Hudson school of censorship' (September 26) was an excellent article. It seems that the Left Unity bods need to watch Monty Python's *Life of Brian* to see what will become of them if they try and regulate 'free speech'.

'Identity politics' is what ruins the broad spectrum of the left (including anarchists, socialists, communists, etc), so they become a laughing stock.

Free speech for others (even if we may find it repugnant) is what counts, as we all assume we should be free to have our own particular view. This can be particularly uncomfortable if it means defending

the right of fascists to have their freedom of speech - especially for me as an Indian that grew up in London during the 1970s and 1980s.

Saying that, if a fascist is on fire, I may walk around and say: 'Well, you have the freedom now to only have to deal with white folk'. I didn't say I was a nice guy!

Hopefully, Left Unity won't become like the Euro left/greens, who inevitably morph into Labour types sitting in their plush offices and hiring PR types.

Keep up the great articles.

Bart Ahluwalia
email

Philistine

I must correct comrade Paul Demarty on his report. The fact that I was characterised as being "somewhere between a dick and an outright wanker" was not directly prompted by the subject of Syria. It was the end result of a lengthy exchange, originally triggered by a passing remark in which I dubbed the left's cult of action "philistine crap". This term was deemed "abusive", even though I had not directed it at anybody in particular. Rather, to paraphrase the immortal Inspector Clouseau, "I meant everyone, and I meant no-one".

I must also add that I appreciated the Socialist Resistance comrade's eventual reaction. His tone betrayed a high degree of emotional honesty, and it made me realise that he really believed all the things he was insinuating about the *Weekly Worker*'s pernicious tactics in the very same message. It was this acute, heat-of-the-moment honesty - which must not exist in the cotton-wool world advocated by the 'safer spaces' working group - that gave me hope that authentic communication would ensue at last. The kind of communication that allows living, breathing, intelligent human beings to learn, abandon their preconceptions and advance.

If reason wins out, we might eventually see the rebirth of a real debating culture on the left. If, on the other hand, the 'safe spaces' police forces of the world prevail, we will at best remain a sterile, eternally stagnating political subculture, emerging from every successive 'left unity' experience none the wiser.

As for the Football Association's issues with Tottenham Hotspurs chants, I am consistently struck how football culture is administered by people who, clearly, have even less understanding of the game than I do.

Maciej Zurowski
email

Disgust

Rugby Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition is disgusted at Conservative proposals to force those unemployed for more than two years to work, train or attend their job centre every single day in order to qualify for any state benefits. At a time of very high unemployment, this is yet another example of how out of touch the Tories are.

Two and half million people are unemployed, nearly 8% of the workforce. The vast majority want to work. The number of people working part time because they can't get full time employment - 1.45 million - is at an all-time high since records began in 1992. Youth unemployment stands at 21% - more than one in five 16-24-year-olds are out of work. That is a scandal, and these Tory proposals fail to address any of this.

There simply are not enough jobs to go round. Latest figures show

there are 460,000 job vacancies in the UK being chased by the 2.5 million unemployed. Jobs-to-unemployment ratios are much worse in some areas - we were told by a worker from Gateshead at the TUC demo in Manchester that when a new restaurant advertised 20 new jobs, there were 5,000 applications! An annual survey by the Associate of Graduate Recruiters recently showed that many leading UK employers are receiving an average of 85 applicants per job. In July, a company called High Flyers Research reported that up to 160 graduates were chasing every job. This is despite many of these job vacancies offering very low wages

The real strategy of this Tory government is to divide and rule. A divided working class makes it easier for them to win elections. Their aim is to set workers against each other, encouraging those on low wages to support this policy and turn against those who cannot find work and instead are forced to claim benefits. If the Tories force people to work for their benefits, not only will this cheapen labour further: it will also mean even fewer real jobs will be available. Those on low wages will feel their own jobs are under threat, as unscrupulous employers look to save costs by taking on those on benefits they do not have to pay. It is low pay that is the problem, not welfare benefits.

What the unemployed need and want is full-time jobs that are permanent and pay a living wage, or adequate training that provides the skills society needs. Cutting public spending and privatising virtually everything that breathes is doing the opposite. And to make the unemployed pay yet again for a crisis they did not cause is criminal. Only last week, a task group of Rugby council reported that, when universal credit is introduced in October, some claimants with children in childcare will be worse off under the scheme. At the same time, the charity, Christians Against Poverty, suggested universal credit will lead to increased hardship and debt. Research by the TUC goes further, showing that, taken with other benefit changes, universal credit will make a massive 62% of those on such benefits actually worse off, and just 8% better off.

The Tories are once again hitting those least able to defend themselves, whilst hoping their divide-and-rule tactics succeed. We will be doing everything possible in the months ahead to prevent that.

Pete McLaren
Rugby

Repulsive

Some of us just want peace ('More than Syria in its sights', September 19). These warmongers are jeopardising everyone's future and their children's future. If the US starts one more illegal war, the politicians need to be prosecuted. Americans have opened their eyes and they are aware that they are being used by Israel. We find that repulsive and it won't continue.

Steve Krantz
email

Niqab ban

I'm sure you have seen the *Socialist Worker* article on Jeremy Hunt's ban of the niqab in the NHS ('A racist agenda that tells women what not to wear', September 24). I would very much like to know the position of the CPGB on the issue of the niqab or burqa (not the headscarf!).

A Holberg
Germany

DRUGS

Stench of hypocrisy

Prohibition is no answer, writes Eddie Ford

Mike Barton, the chief constable of Durham and the intelligence lead for the Association of Chief Police Officers (Acpo), has come out against the 'war on drugs'. He joins the growing list of senior officials and dignitaries denouncing the madness of continued drugs prohibition.

In February 2009 the former presidents of Colombia, Brazil and Mexico - all impeccably conservative politicians - declared that the war on drugs was a "complete failure" and called for a new strategy based on "public health". The current Uruguayan equivalent, José Mujica, has advocated the production and sale of marijuana under a state monopoly. Closer to home, Sir Ian Gilmore, who recently stepped down as head of the Royal College of Physicians, has urged the government to consider "decriminalising" all drug possession - and similar comments have been made by Nicholas Green QC, chairman of the Bar Council of England and Wales, believing it "rational" to consider decriminalising "personal drug use".

Writing in *The Observer* on September 29, Barton calmly laid out the facts. As a police officer for nearly 34 years, he has witnessed the "worsening problems" of drug addiction, including increased misuse of alcohol - a perfectly legal and ubiquitous drug. Since the disastrous 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act, outright prohibition has created near endless "revenue streams to villains" - who, of course, have no qualms about selling adulterated drugs on the streets if it boosts their profits. Most criminal gangs, in his experience, raise income through selling drugs. He claimed that in Durham alone there are 43 gangs involved to one degree or another in the production and sale of illegal drugs - so just imagine how many there must be in London.

In which case, Barton argued, drugs should be decriminalised and drug addicts should be "treated and cared for" - "encouraged" to break the "cycle of addiction". If misusers or addicts were able to access drugs via the NHS or something similar, then obviously they would not have to go out and buy illegal drugs - therefore cutting off the gangs' income stream. Creating a safe and "controlled environment", he continued, is a far more rational approach to the issue. If you started to give a heroin user the drug "therapeutically" then, for example, you could prevent the spread of hepatitis C and Aids amongst needle users. According to figures released on September 27 by Public Health England, 120 cases of HIV in 2012 were acquired through injecting drugs.

Quite correctly, he compared drugs prohibition to the crazy ban on alcohol coordinated by the Anti-Saloon League in the US from 1921 to 1933. Legislative insanity. The Mob's "sinister rise to prominence", as Barton puts it, was made possible by prohibition - organised crime finding itself in a position to supply an illegal drug, alcohol, for which there was almost endless demand. Now we are repeating the same mistake, he said, only this time round the fortunes acquired by the likes of Al Capone are chicken feed compared to the enormous profits made by the global drugs cartels.

Of course, by definition it is extremely difficult to calculate the money made by an illicit trade - criminals do not tend to be too keen on independent auditing. In 2005 the UN estimated that the illegal drug trade in 2003 alone was worth more than \$320 billion - about 1% of total world GDP. That is almost certainly a conservative estimate. The profit

margin for drug dealing ranges from 300% to 2,000% - a pretty reasonable return. According to data compiled by various US law-enforcement agencies, users spend \$30-\$50 a day on their habit. Nor should we forget the \$100 billion spent fighting the 'war on drugs' each year across the world. In the opinion of Richard Branson, a campaigner for decriminalisation, if the drug trade were a country then the United States of Drugs would be the "19th largest economy in the world" and if currently illegal drugs were "taxed at rates comparable to those on alcohol and tobacco they would yield \$46.7 billion in tax revenue" (*The Times*, December 5 2012).

Naturally, being a sensible policeman and not a hippy, Barton is not arguing for a drugs "free-for-all". He just wants, like so many others, an "open debate" on the question. But if the 'war on drugs' was actually intended to reduce illicit supply, admittedly a rather fanciful notion, then it has spectacularly failed on any level you care to mention. On the other hand, crime levels would markedly decrease if drugs were legalised. Surely a win-win situation.

Two days later after Barton's *Observer* article, the International Centre for Science in Drug Policy published a report detailing how prohibition is failing - illegal drugs are now cheaper and more potent than at any time over the last 20 years. Its study looked at data from seven international government-funded drug surveillance systems - examining at least 10 years of information on the price and "purity" of cannabis, cocaine and opiates, including heroin. It found that street prices had fallen in real terms between 1990 and 2010, while drug potency had increased. Yet the report also found there had been a substantial increase in most parts of the world in the amount of cocaine, heroin and cannabis seized by law enforcement agencies. The war is going well. The authors of the report also concluded that it was high time to consider drug use a "public health issue" rather than a criminal justice matter deserving of punitive action.

No plan B

Predictably, however - though no less depressingly for that - the reply from the home office and other police chiefs was dunderhead obstinacy: no change in policy, no plan B. Drugs are dangerous and must remain illegal to "protect society" and that is that. With perfect tautological logic, a home office spokesman explained that "drugs are illegal because they are dangerous" - they destroy lives, blight communities, etc. Yeah, yeah. Not that the oppressive drug laws themselves "blight" certain communities and sections of society - more like a war on society than a way of 'protecting' society. No, drugs - chemicals, intoxicants - are inherently evil and bad. A wickedness that must be stopped.

Also unsurprisingly, Acpo too has hurried to distance itself from Barton's heretical comments - way too radical, way too sane. Andy Bliss, chief constable of Hertfordshire and Acpo's head of drug-related crime, fatuously stated that drugs legislation was a "matters for parliament to decide" - buck-passing of the most abject sort - and gave a little homily about the need to be "very thoughtful about setting clear boundaries", especially for young people. Right, I see - so that's what the government and parliament have been doing for all these decades - being "thoughtful".

Of course, the lunacy is compounded by the fact that we have a recent and unarguably *successful* example of drugs decriminalisation - Portugal. In 2001 it became the first European country to officially abolish all criminal penalties for personal possession of drugs - defined as up to 10 days' supply. Now possession is an "administrative offence", as opposed to a criminal one, which means that those caught with drugs are sent to a 'dissuasion board' consisting of social workers and psychologists. Far from the country becoming a drugs tourist hotspot, as claimed - or stupidly predicted - by the scaremongers, after five years of decriminalisation Portugal found that the illegal use of drugs by teenagers had significantly declined. Rates of HIV infection have fallen sharply, and the number of people requesting therapy to get off drugs has more than doubled. Possibly as much as €400 million (£334 million) has been removed from the illegal drugs market. A definite and measurable achievement in terms of public health and general societal well-being.

Madly, those opposed to similar moves in the UK continue to use the same arguments as the opponents of decriminalisation in Portugal - regardless of the facts, the war must go on. Those whom the gods wish to destroy ...

We are all familiar with the story of professor David Nutt, the *Daily Mail's* least favourite scientist and maybe more evil than Ralph Miliband. He was sacked as the UK's chief drugs adviser in October 2009 for contradicting government advice on the harm caused by certain drugs - ie, for doing his job. Nutt outlined how taking ecstasy is statistically no more dangerous than horse riding, a straightforward empirical *fact* - and facts are not stupid things, even if they do not always explain everything. In the same article he looked at how society assesses, or not, various risks and perceived risks. Meaning, as he patiently explained, that the harm from illegal drugs has to be compared to what can be potentially inflicted when engaging in other legal or non-drug-related pursuits. For making such logical and reasonable arguments, Nutt was turned into a virtual pariah by the government and the more rabid sections of the press - illustrating yet again the sheer *irrationality* that surrounds drugs. First we had witches, now we have drug-pushers.

Given that the 'war on drugs' is not only failing, but is positively counterproductive - a war that can never be won - the question we have to ask is: why on earth are they still pursuing it? The only explanation is that it is used as a means of *social control*. It is aimed at those below and it is very rare now that a top pop star or actor is arrested for drugs use - only the poor schmucks get done. *Sir Mick Jagger* will never be arrested again - something I will bet the farm on.

Yet use of illegal drugs is just as common at the top. I wonder what the results would be if, say, delegates to the Tory conference in Manchester agreed to be tested for certain substances. I suspect many of those attending would be high on one thing or another. And the same is true, of course, for the City, BBC, newspaper offices, West End and even - heavens forbid - the House of Commons. The hypocrisy stinks ●

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ACTION

CPGB podcasts

Every Monday we upload a podcast commenting on the current political situation. In addition, the site features voice files of public meetings and other events: <http://cpgb.org.uk/home/podcasts>.

London Communist Forum

Sunday October 6, 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, part 6, 'The accumulation of capital'; chapter 23: 'Simple reproduction'. Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Introduction to anthropology: the human revolution
Tuesday October 8, 6.15pm: 'African hunter-gatherers and the moon'. 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.

Teesside People's Assembly

Thursday October 3, 7pm: Planning meeting, Saint Mary's Centre, 82-90 Corporation Road, Middlesbrough. Organised by Teesside People's Assembly: www.TeessidePA.tumblr.com.

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.

Leicester People's Assembly

Saturday October 5, 2pm to 6pm: Conference, Adult Education Centre, 2 Wellington Street, Leicester LE1. Organised by Leicester People's Assembly: www.facebook.com/PALeicester.

No to drones

Monday October 7, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education, corner Somerset Road and Farquhar Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B15. Organised by Ground the Drones: <http://dronecampaignnetwork.wordpress.com>.

Teesside Solidarity Movement

Thursday October 10, 7pm: General assembly, Saint Mary's Centre, 82-90 Corporation Road, Middlesbrough. Organised by Teesside Solidarity Movement: www.facebook.com/TeessideSolidarityMovement.

Save east London health services

Tuesday October 8, 5pm: Anti-closures demonstration. Assemble Royal London Hospital, Whitechapel Road, London E1. Organised by Tower Hamlets Keep Our NHS Public and others: <http://towerhamletskeepournhspublic.wordpress.com>.

999 Call for the NHS

Thursday October 10, 7pm: Campaign fundraising party, Forum Music Centre, Borough Road, Darlington. Organised by 999 Call for the NHS: www.facebook.com/999CallForTheNHS.

Unite against EDL

Saturday October 12, 11am: Anti-fascist demonstration, Centenary Square, Bradford BD1. Organised by Unite Against Fascism: www.uaf.org.uk.

Celebrating, not dividing

Saturday October 12, 12 noon: March against fascism. Assemble William Brown Street, Liverpool L3. Organised by Unite and other unions: www.unitetheunion.org.

Miscarriage of Justice Day

Saturday October 12, 10am: Conference, Friends Meeting Hall, Mount Street, Manchester M2. Free entry, donations welcome. Organised by United Against Injustice: www.unitedagainstinjustice.org.uk.

Socialist films

Sunday October 13, 11am: Screening, Bolivar Hall, 54 Grafton Way, London W1. Justin Chadwick's *The first grader* (Ireland, 103 minutes); and Mark Saunders' *Shaker Aamer: a decade of injustice* (UK, 22 minutes). Followed by discussion. £10 (concessions £8, members £4). Organised by London Socialist Film Co-op: www.socialistfilm.blogspot.com.

Unite the Resistance

Saturday October 19, 12 noon to 5pm: Conference, Bloomsbury Baptist Church, 235 Shaftesbury Avenue, London WC2. Organised by UTR: www.uniteresist.org.

Zero hours and workfare

Thursday October 24, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Friends Meeting House, Ship Street, Brighton BN1. Organised by Brighton Benefits Campaign and Brighton & Hove Trades Union Council: www.facebook.com/events/401129549988566.

Right to remain

Saturday October 26, 11am to 5pm: Workshop on the asylum system, Wharf Chambers, 23-25 Wharf Street, Leeds LS2. Organised by Leeds No Borders: leedsnoborders@riseup.net.

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.

SWP

At war with itself

The leadership is divided between two competing factions. Meanwhile there is the challenge presented by the official opposition. Peter Manson reports on the growing disarray

With the Socialist Workers Party three-month pre-conference discussion period now upon us, the opposition faction formerly known as In Defence of Our Party (IDOP) has officially been relaunched under the name of 'Rebuilding the Party'.

As readers will know, permanent factions are not permitted in the SWP and must close down once conference - this year being held early, over the weekend of December 13-15 - is over. But that did not happen after the last annual conference in January this year - nor after the special conference in March, which was supposed to finally "draw a line" under the whole 'comrade Delta' controversy and see off the large opposition it spawned, challenging the whole nature of the SWP regime.

Of course, many of those involved in IDOP have since left the SWP - 100 or so resigned to form the International Socialist Network, while scores of others just drifted away. But many remained in the organisation and continued to organise, including through the *Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century* blog.

But now - temporarily - it is all above board, and the first Rebuilding the Party statement has been circulated by SWP centre. While the faction's 240-plus initial signatories undoubtedly share a variety of views, for the moment it still seems to be dominated by the 'softly, softly' approach that saw its IDOP predecessor so roundly defeated at the March special conference.

Strongly implying that the faction will obediently close down on December 15, the comrades state: "Over the next three months we hope to engage in genuine and comradely debate with all members of the party. We have asked for a meeting with the central committee to agree details of how this debate will be conducted, and the CC has agreed to meet us."

The faction is hoping against hope that this time the CC will play fair and allow it equal speaking time at the pre-conference members' aggregates - maybe the leadership will also cooperate in enabling representatives of Rebuilding the Party to be proportionally elected to conference. I am sorry to disappoint them, but this is unlikely to happen.

The RP document correctly states: "The leadership's approach to political argument has been largely responsible for the damage caused: they sought to suppress information and debate; comrades have been misled; differences within the leadership have been hidden from the membership; the scale of the crisis has been consistently underestimated."

But the comrades claim to believe that "Progress has been made", thanks to the "intense pressure" felt by the leadership, and they even state that the disputes commission report, whose findings have been published in last week's *Pre-conference Bulletin*,¹ "could provide a basis to move forward". However, as I commented last week, "Attempting to reform the disputes procedure will not cure the SWP of its bureaucratic centralism" ('Treating the symptoms', September 26).

Some of the CC's bureaucratic failings are noted by the faction: "It is impossible for the organisation to make an informed decision about the



Where have all the students gone?

membership of the CC when serious divisions are withheld from the membership - these divisions must be laid out before the party." Calling for the replacement of the leadership, it demands: "The composition of our leading bodies ... needs to reflect the fact that the political lessons of the past year have been learnt. This will require electing new ones mainly comprising comrades willing to recognise the mistakes made and work to correct them, and removing those members who have acted to frustrate and obstruct a satisfactory resolution to the disputes processes."

The October *Pre-conference Bulletin* (usually referred to as *Internal Bulletin* or *IB*) carries RP's 'Statement of intent', in which the same points are made. The "leadership's approach to political argument" is sadly lacking - it "has been largely responsible for the damage caused: comrades have been kept in the dark about key issues and misled ... The scale of the crisis has been consistently underestimated." What is needed is a "serious examination of the party's internal political culture", including its "democratic procedures" and the "scope for meaningful and frank debate within the organisation".

All that is true, but it does not really get down to the heart of the matter: by appearing to accept that the operation of particular platforms or factions should be restricted to the three months before conference, the opposition is actually giving huge ground to the CC, allowing it to continue pulling the strings covertly, unchallenged.

It is perfectly natural and healthy for comrades of like mind to come together to try and effect change within a revolutionary organisation - provided their internal campaigning does not inhibit agreed actions. But why should it? It should be a given for Marxists that the exchange of ideas actually aids our practice, whether those ideas are proposed by individuals or groups of comrades (factions). The existence of factions within the Bolsheviks did not stop the whole party making a revolution, did it?

Pathetic

The CC's response is truly pathetic. While its 'General perspective' document admits, "The SWP has faced the biggest internal crisis in the party since at least 1979-81", it seeks to downplay its seriousness by grossly exaggerating the SWP's "very successful interventions" in the class struggle: "We played a key role in Jerry Hicks' election campaign in Unite, the party moved quickly and had a high profile around Thatcher's death, we have been central to the fight against the bedroom tax ..." See what I mean about 'pathetic'?

Instead of in any way accepting the slightest responsibility for the crisis, the CC blames it all on the alleged political demoralisation affecting its opponents: "... we have ... strongly argued that the tensions in the party have been driven by much more than the DC case. They also reflect wider political questions, even if these are not always candidly acknowledged."

It goes on to explain that "austerity continues across the euro zone and Britain, and the counterrevolution gathers confidence in the Middle East. This has given rise to a 'new pessimism' among sections of the left, and this has had an echo inside the SWP." These are "the political roots of the crisis in the party", which has already seen "a series of splits towards movementism over the last six years". For example, "The politics of the group that left with Richard Seymour and who now form the International Socialist Network represent an abandonment of Leninism and a scepticism about the potential for the organised working class to resist austerity."

So the message is, there is nothing to complain about - everything is just fine in the SWP. What is more, there is nothing to be demoralised about: "... it would be a huge mistake to conclude that the process of radicalisation and revolt is in retreat on a global scale ... Whereas much of the left has viewed the events in Syria through the lens of a presumed mighty US imperialism and a (at best) puny revolutionary impetus from below, in truth what has been striking is the real limits of the US's ability to shape events in Syria, especially in the face of a popular revolution ..."

The CC concludes: "... while conference decisions will not, of course, signal the end of argument and debate in the party, the CC is also strongly committed to the view that it will mark the restoration of the collective discipline of the party

and the termination of what has been the effective existence of permanent factions. Unless the conference votes to support permanent factions, then any attempt to continue such factions outside a pre-conference period, and in defiance of the decisions of successive conferences, will lead to disciplinary action." In fact "end the existence of permanent factions in the organisation" is one of the four CC priorities for the SWP over the coming period.

This denialism is carried into all three of the CC documents contained in the *IB*. Take 'Student perspective', which simply urges comrades to recruit students and encourage them to get active, active, active. Admittedly, "a section of student members have left the organisation. However, it is also true that a number of students stayed in the organisation." And that is it.

Every SWPer knows that the overwhelming bulk of Socialist Worker Student Society supporters have now given up on the organisation - SWP comrades themselves are commenting on it in the *IB*. For example, in 'The party we need', 14 comrades state: "From having the largest SWSS organisation in well over a decade, we are now in a situation where the majority of members under the age of 30 have left the party. Where we had a multitude of large groups, we now have only two universities with five or more members and have been wiped out on most campuses ... The SWSS brand is destroyed at most universities."

Yes, "a section of student members have left the organisation".

The third CC document is entitled: 'Facing the challenge of fascism'. Yes, everyone knows that 'the Nazis' are posing a powerful threat to the working class everywhere, and it is down to the SWP and its Unite Against Fascism front to see off the English Defence League. Did you know that in Tower Hamlets a massive "5,000 joined the demonstration against the EDL"? The "sheer scale of the opposition" meant that "the police would not let the EDL march into the borough - the anti-fascist mobilisation achieved its main goal".

But "the police are not neutral" - they "see anti-racists and anti-fascists as the main enemy". That is why they "always protect the Nazis and come down hard on anti-fascist protestors". However, "One obvious subjective factor that has prevented fascism from taking hold in Britain to the same extent as in many other European countries is UAF. For 13 years it has played a central role in breaking the back of the British National Party and EDL."

The reality is that the far right remains marginal (although, unfortunately, not as marginal as the far left). The ruling class despises the likes of the EDL - it has no need of a street-fighting force when the working class, whatever the SWP thinks, is posing no threat. It will call upon fascism as a last, counterrevolutionary, resort, when the continued existence of its system is in danger. But the SWP leadership pretends not to know this. After all, the members have got to have something to do to distract them from the CC's failings.

Loyalists

An array of loyalists have come out against the faction (I say 'loyalists', but it is clear that many are no longer

'loyal' to the Charlie Kimber-Alex Callinicos leadership, which they believe has given *too much* ground to the opposition.

So we have 'Statement for our revolutionary party', signed by 99 comrades, which urges the CC to take drastic steps: "Since our last conference, some members have organised in opposition to the party, acting as a permanent group, separate from the party, in opposition to our agreed perspectives and our elected leadership bodies ... We believe that being a member of a permanent faction is incompatible with membership of the SWP. Comrades who continue to belong to a permanent faction should be expelled, to ensure they do not damage and undermine our party."

"Pete (Birmingham Small Heath)" parrots the CC line (for security reasons only the first names of comrades are published): "The development of the faction has, despite many denials, begun a process for some comrades of developing ideas which are moving away from ideas which are central to the SWP."

Meanwhile, "Ray, Dave and Alex (Liverpool)" go further: "You either accept the party's rules and structures or you don't. The actions of these members has been another blow, leaving us mistrustful of them and wondering how we can work alongside them in the future."

The trio claim that all the oppositionists on Merseyside were a waste of time in any case, preferring to moan about the leadership rather than 'getting out there'. So, "while the numbers we lost would seem to be high, the proportion of these who could be described as active members even in the broadest sense was in fact small. We strongly suspect that being part of giving the SWP and its leadership a good kicking on the internet was a lot of fun for many of these people and much more exciting than selling papers, attending meetings and demos etc, the activities expected of our members. Such people were clearly not the loss they at first might seem."

So let's just boot them out: "We don't waste our energy in long debates online or pandering to people who will not be won back this side of the revolution. We think the party nationally should do the same ... Let's see how many we are and just get on with rebuilding and put this terrible period behind us."

For "Jon (Portsmouth)", whose piece is entitled 'Why I am not resigning from the SWP', it is more a question of what else can be done, other than stick with the SWP: "Crucially it has proved *far* more successful at building a revolutionary party, quantitatively and qualitatively, than any of its rivals in Britain ... None of the other established far-left groups - SP, Counterfire, AWL, Socialist Resistance, CPGB, etc - are serious contenders ... The SWP, whatever its flaws, is where it is at and where it is going to be in the coming period."

Unfortunately Jon's vision is severely limited by what exists. Neither the SWP nor any of its rivals have been "successful at building a revolutionary party" - Britain, like every other country on the planet, is lacking such an entity. But the answer does not lie in choosing the least *unsuccessful* of the left groups and turning a blind eye to its failings, but in fighting for what is necessary: the unity of the Marxist left within a single, genuinely democratic-centralist organisation.

A couple of SWP big guns are wheeled out to defend the leadership - in a more subtle, 'even-handed' way. So we have "Paul (Tower Hamlets)", for instance. He couldn't be the same person as "Paul McG (East London)" who appears on the outgoing leadership's slate for a new central committee, could he? "Paul" writes: "More than ever we need a party precisely of the SWP 'kind'." Like

the CC of which he will soon be a member, he claims that "adaptation to the pull and politics of movementism is a key element underpinning the factional opposition".

And no doubt comrades Kimber and Callinicos were pleased when they read: "... perhaps the most important and inspiring feature of the last year is precisely how well the party has, despite its internal crisis, related to the wider struggle - from building UAF, through the bedroom tax to the struggles in the workplace and different unions."

However, "Paul" warns of a possible overreaction: "It would be a real tragedy if in an entirely correct desire to defend the party from the pull of adaptation to movementism, and from the disastrous price we would pay from a culture of permanent factional organisation, good comrades were pulled into a spiral whose centre and end point was sectarianism."

Meanwhile, among the seven comrades who signed 'Learning lessons from the past year' is "Candy (Camden)". I don't know about you, but the only person by that name I know in the SWP is national committee member Candy Udwin. Like "Paul" she and her co-authors want to appear reasonable.

True, "The experience of the last year shows why the party has always argued against permanent factions, which merely entrench political divisions in a way that is unhelpful and damaging." What is more, "The behaviour of the faction has at times been outrageous and a clear breach of all party practices and traditions, including leaking internal and sometimes confidential issues; attacking the party in public; offensive language used against comrades; secretive and underhand ways of organising."

However, the "behaviour on all sides has sometimes been found wanting". In fact, "Some of us writing this document have changed our views over the course of the year. Some argued in private for certain courses of action, but didn't challenge them in public. We now believe that it is important to be open about what we think went wrong."

So, for example, while "Votes at party conference need to be conclusive decisions", this "does not mean the end of political discussion. After the January conference it was a major mistake by the CC not to relate to the concerns of the substantial minority in the party over the disputes case." Indeed, "those who were not convinced ... had a right to their views. They should not have been characterised as only being factionally driven or motivated by 'feminist' or other incorrect politics."

So the loyalists are at sixes and sevens, and their unity is clearly a thing of yesterday. Thought, not matter how tentative, moderate or incoherent, has broken out and is infecting the entire membership.

Oppositionists

But individuals among the opposition are hitting back hard. So we have "Jim (Euston)", who notes that a "small but influential group of party members, bound together by a collective sense of denial that the party faces any problems arising from the dispute, is ... attributing all kinds of ulterior political motives to [the opposition] as evidence of its deviation from Leninism."

"Jim" dubs these comrades "the Undeclared faction", which has "been responsible for much of the destruction of the past few months. This grouping has been meeting on a regular basis since the end of last year. It has been able to exert an influence over the strategy of the central committee and the functioning of many branches and districts."

Furthermore, "The Undeclared faction is acting in conjunction with a

minority on the CC. The CC majority, while recognising the wider need to take political responsibility for the crisis around the dispute, is unwilling to draw out and resolve its political differences with this minority, and has turned a blind eye to the factional operation being pursued by it: in some districts branches have been closed down or 'merged' and comrades associated with 'the opposition' have been systematically removed from local positions."

This is undoubtedly a reference to the diehard faction around Amy Leather which we have been reporting on over the last six months or so. Though, as a CC member, comrade Leather is not amongst its 99 signatories, she is without question the moving spirit. Charlie Kimber and Alex Callinicos are deeply unhappy with her ... but fear her popularity amongst the middle cadre. They are also deeply unhappy that factionalism is now *de rigueur*. Yes, paradoxically, one might even say hypocritically, the 'ultra-loyalist' Leatherites have been secretly communicating, organising, meeting together, working out a joint factional platform ... all in the name of ending factionalism in the SWP. You couldn't make it up.

Anyway, making a telling point for the opposition, comrade Jim states: "Since a viable party cannot develop separate interests from the class, discussion of its policies must be conducted in the open, in full view of the wider movement. An important part of this process therefore is self-criticism, which has to be put before the personal pride of individuals." The problem with the SWP has been that "debate was increasingly perceived as an obstacle to engagement in the movement by some CC members". But the absence of "satisfactory internal debate" produced "simmering dissent", which "often resulted in disengagement or silence, rather than open argument".

Similarly "Dan (Norwich)" notes: "despite banning them, the SWP has had the worst aspects of permanent factions for at least six years, and probably longer. Three times in recent years the organisation has been thrown into deep turmoil due to attempts to defend the role of an individual figure in the leadership." The first two occasions that leader was John Rees, claims Dan, and the third time it was Martin Smith.

"In each of these cases, networks of allies mobilised to defend the individuals concerned, because they were seen as somehow central to the party's strategy. Meanwhile, different networks mobilised on the other side. Members were, as always, forced into basic questions of who they trusted more, which of the leadership you thought was *lying to you least* (this was certainly the judgement I had to make as a full-timer based outside of London in 2009)."

According to comrade Dan, "What you know becomes dependent on who you know, what you believe dependent on who you believe. This gives all the worst aspects of permanent factions - the blind personal loyalties, the entrenched differences, the culture of patronage - without even the political clarity that comes with acknowledging their existence."

He goes on: "At the January conference we even had the preposterous spectacle of 'the faction that was not a faction' - meetings of CC supporters, from which others (including some CC members) were excluded ... It has been obvious for anyone who wants to look that similar meetings have been taking place throughout this year, orchestrated by a minority on the CC, with the majority turning a blind eye to it."

"Barry (Bradford)" and "Mick (Barnsley)" take up another line of attack: "One thing that is clear is that the party's structures are not 'fit for

purpose'. One place that this is obvious is the 'three-month rule' on strategic and theoretical discussion and the frantic and futile attempts to proscribe online debating. This particular cat is well and truly out of the bag and cannot be stuffed back in. The point is not to ban something that is unbannable, but to manage the process in the interests of the entire party." This is echoed by "Adam (Bury and Prestwich)", who declares: "The party should have an internal forum where such discussions can be had in a 'constitutional' manner."

But for comrades Barry and Mick there are many other democratic failings, including the notorious slate system: "The problem with that method of electing the central committee is that no-one (unless you are in a very select loop of personal associates) has a clue as to who on the central committee is actually proposing actions and strategies that are at fault and then persuading a majority of the others to go along with them. By the same token, we have no idea who remains unconvinced and outvoted, nor what concerns are voiced. This makes it impossible for the party membership to decide who should remain on the central committee, who should be replaced, and who should be the replacements."

Two prominent oppositionists have pieces in the *IB*. The first is Mike Gonzales - "Mike (Glasgow North)" - whose article, 'Who will teach the teachers?',² finally sees the light of day in an SWP publication (in an amended form) months after it was rejected by *International Socialism* and was then posted on the internet.

Then there is Pat Stack, who chaired the disputes committee for the Delta case, writing in the *IB* as "Pat (Euston)". In 'Time to do the right thing' he says of the DC: "... the original procedures were largely drawn up by me. At the time I felt them to be a real improvement on what went before, but I have to admit when it came to this case they were simply not fit for purpose."

Comrade Stack admits: "I made a mistake and I acknowledge it, and have done everything within my power to rectify it, in so far as I can. Now I am asking, urging, pleading even, with the leadership of our party to do the same." What was that about deaf ears?

Frenetic

I must say that the level of critique from oppositionists is much better in this *IB* than what we have come to expect.

For example, "Rob (Croydon)" notes the SWP's "sectarianism", which "means we increasingly operate on the assumption that the SWP is the revolutionary party - a smaller version of the German Communist Party. This fails to recognise the size of the revolutionary left, our implantation across the working class and the size of the audience looking to our ideas." He adds: "The party maintains itself through a routine which is increasingly internally referenced and geared at maintaining an ageing membership with a lower level of political activity. Specifically, we jump from one centrally organised event to another in order to maintain momentum."

On this theme, "Ian (Bury and Prestwich)" criticises "repeated calls for frenetic activity and blind obedience to a leadership which is not clearly and democratically held to account". In comrade Ian's opinion, despite what the CC says, "the downturn continues". The task is to "prepare for the upturn", "so that "we can benefit" when "it eventually arrives".

He slates the leadership for its ludicrous slogan, "All out, stay out", back in 2011, in the run-up to the coordinated strike in defence of public-sector pensions on November 30: "If we had been serious about 'All out, stay

out!' comrades would have tried to win votes in their workplaces to make that happen. Comrades didn't, because they knew that, while the *idea* was popular, this was not where the argument was at in their own workplaces."

In similar vein, "Simon (Huddersfield)" complains: "... all too often discussions in the SWP of 'the state of working class organisation' or 'the state of the class struggle' in Britain become falsely polarised into a caricature of debate between 'optimists' on one side and 'pessimists' on the other. And, of course, no-one ever wants to be labelled a pessimist, do they?"

Comrade Simon comments: "The response from many (including even the current CC) to this questioning about where exactly we are in 'the class struggle', has unfortunately been to accuse comrades who are asking awkward but pertinent questions of having already ditched, or being about to ditch, 'the Marxist theory of the centrality of the working class'."

Likewise, "Andy (Leicester)" states that since 1995 "the general strategy of SWP could be characterised as claiming that every strike and demonstration is the most important event and requires our complete support and attention. We must be optimistic about the possibilities, but being overoptimistic has brought enormous problems."

Then there is "Mark (Tower Hamlets)" and "Amy (Cambridge)", who in 'Whither *Socialist Worker*?' state: "Shouty headlines, over-used slogans and the panacea of the general strike liken it to a paper of abstract propagandists. This stands diametrically opposed to the reality of what comrades do with the paper: using it to keep up regular activity in localities, an opportunity to speak to people about politics and maintaining political relationships with key activists in the area."

Members purged

Finally, there is an interesting contribution from "Mike (Leeds City Centre)", whose report is headed 'Note on recruiting and retaining members in Leeds District SWP'. Mike informs comrades about the Leeds "re-registration effort earlier this year".

As far as I am aware, there has been no national attempt to look into the accuracy of SWP membership lists. But in Leeds the comrades decided to actually check out each name they had been given by the Vauxhall HQ. Mike reports: "Leeds District began 2013 with 201 registered members in the five branches. As a result of systematic contacting we currently have 73, plus 12-15 who are likely to re-register, making a maximum of about 88."

So how could this state of affairs come about? It has nothing to do with the recent resignations. Mike explains: "The most important reason is that the database has not been kept up to date for as long as five years. There are members who joined as long ago as 2007 who have never paid subs and no longer have valid contact details; members who cancelled a direct debit or standing order as long ago as 2007; members who transferred out years ago, etc."

In other words, the whole thing is a shambles. So, when the leadership produces its official membership figures next month (they usually feature in *IB* No2), just remember Mike's words. If Leeds is anything to go by, we should start by reducing the total by about 60%, and that will give us an approximation of the number of SWP *contacts* or *supporters*, as well as the actual activists ●

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Notes

1. The bulletin is available on the CPGB website: www.cpgb.org.uk/assets/files/swpinternalbulletins/IB1sept2013.pdf.
2. See www.cpgb.org.uk/home/weekly-worker/online-only/teaching-callinicos-a-lesson.

THEORY

Rethinking imperialism

Was Lenin right when he called imperialism the 'highest stage of capitalism'? Mike Macnair believes he was very wrong

I should begin by saying that this is very much 'work in progress', not the finished article. Aspects of it are certainly unorthodox and may well be controversial. It is also no more than a sketchy introduction to some of the issues involved.

In 2004 I engaged in a debate with the Alliance for Workers' Liberty on the question of imperialism, in connection with the Iraq war. The political starting point was that we in the CPGB were outright defeatists in relation to the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq. We headlined: "Rather defeat for US-UK forces than their victory."¹ That is, though we had no expectation that there would actually be a military defeat of the invading British and American troops, we said as a matter of politics that the defeat of the British and American troops would be preferable to their victory. The AWL weaselled on this question, and made statements along the lines that - to paraphrase - the US is 'reconstructing the Middle East along bourgeois democratic lines' or is 'creating the conditions for capitalist development in the Middle East'.

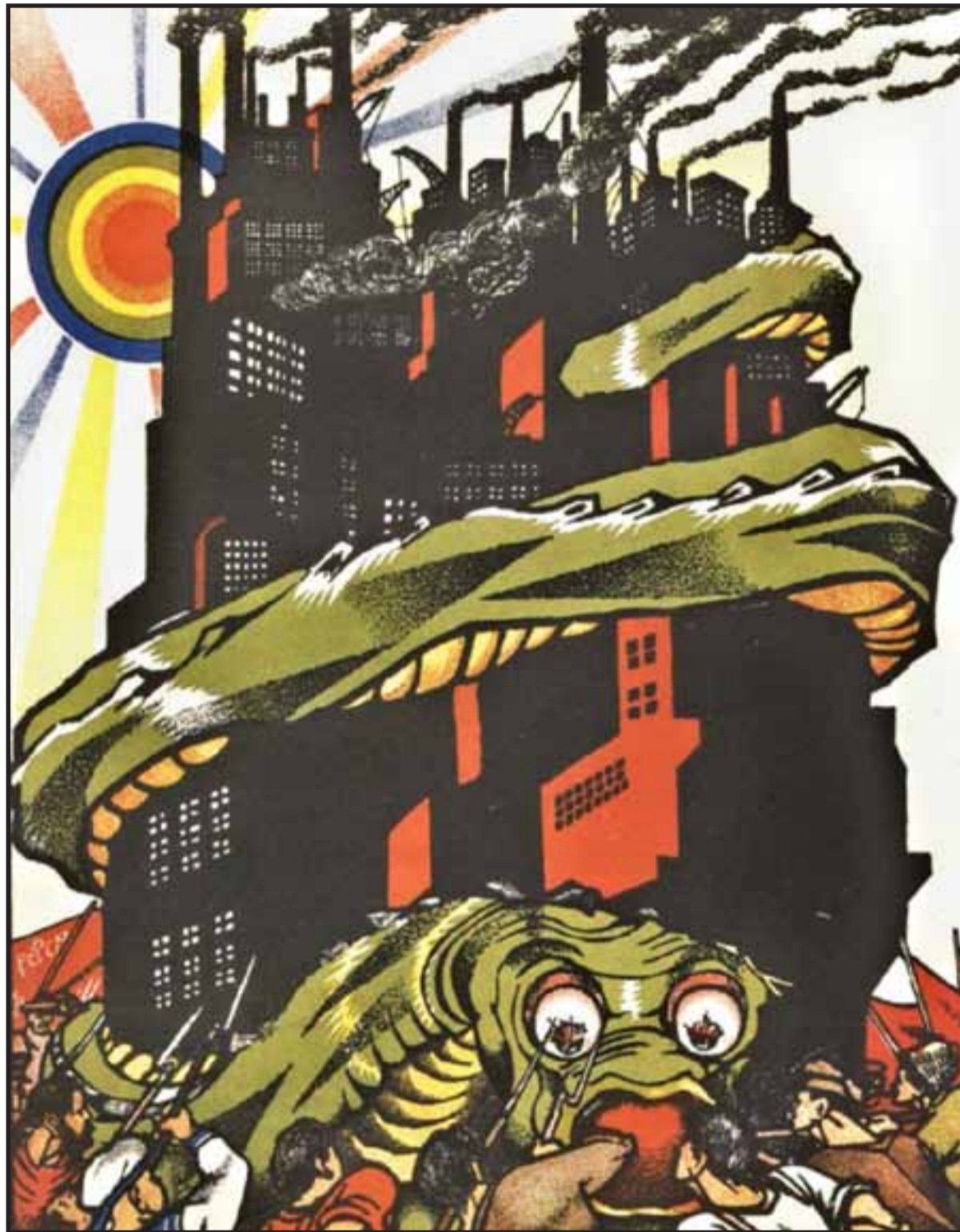
On the other hand, we did not say, unlike the Socialist Workers Party and others on the left, 'Victory to the Iraqi resistance'. The 'Iraqi resistance' was a conceptual amalgam between two very different forces: Ba'athist guerrillas mounting attacks on US troops; and mosque-based militia in different localities attempting to control space on the ground. We were not particularly for their victory, but we were for the defeat of the United States.

The debate with the AWL, and the critique of 'Victory to the resistance', led into the question of the theory of imperialism. The AWL has in essence adopted the line of Kautsky's infamous 1914 article on "ultra-imperialism". The idea was that the core imperialists have overcome inter-imperialist contradictions by forming international cartels (United Nations, and so on), under which free trade is enforced. In the AWL view there remain "paleo-imperialists": ie, old-fashioned nationalists opposed to the core 'cartel'. Hence the military interventions of the US and its allies represent simply the enforcement of free trade, and the working class does not have an interest in opposing it.

By contrast, the SWP view on imperialism is essentially the application of the absolutely orthodox doctrine of the 'anti-imperialist united front', as formulated by the Third Congress of the Communist International. So the theory which underlies the SWP's line can be summarised as: 'Lenin's *Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism* is still true'. In a series of articles in 2004 I wrote mostly about historical developments since 1918 and the problems they pose for both AWL-style and SWP-style interpretations.²

More recently, Richard Day and Daniel Gaido have published *Discovering imperialism*, which gives us much more in-depth understanding of the debates in the Second International before Lenin's *Imperialism*, beginning in 1896-97.³ And earlier this year we published *Karl Kautsky on colonialism*, a translation by Ben Lewis and Maciej Zurowski of a dreadful series of articles by Kautsky from 1898 about 'colonial policy', with my own highly critical introduction to the translation.

Kautsky argued that colonialism and imperialism were against the interests of industrial capital; and that when industrial capital is in the political saddle, as it was in Britain from the



Anti-imperialist united front ... tried and failed

repeal of the Corn Laws in 1847, there is a decline of imperialism, and indeed a free-trade *anti-imperialism*. He claimed that in the late 19th century imperialism *revived*, due to the colonialist activities of the *continental* European powers, where the landlord class and the state bureaucracy were still in the saddle. Russia provides his classic example, but protectionism - which is central to his argument - also in his view animated French and German territorial acquisitions. British late 19th century imperialism is, he argued, merely a defensive response to continental imperialism.

The obvious big hole in this argument is that, when industrial capital in the United States got into the saddle in the 1861-65 civil war - as against the agricultural producers on the basis of slave-based agriculture in the south - the *first* thing the industrial capitalists did was to introduce protectionism. Quite rapidly after victory, moreover, the US started building large fleets and engaging in imperialist operations. And indeed in German politics of Kautsky's time, it was not the Junker class, but heavy industry, which stood behind the navalist-colonialist lobby.

Because Kautsky was essentially

the historian working in the Second International (the entry of Marxism into university history departments is largely a product of the Third International), the subsequent writers on imperialism mostly *assumed* Kautsky's 1898 *historical* schema, in which Britain in the 1850s ceased to be imperialist - and so sought for an explanation a *new* rise of imperialism in the 1880s and 1890s. This was not Kautsky's explanation in terms of the traditional control of the old classes, but one which was tied into the general theory of crisis and breakdown, which was widely held in the Second International: the theory of a general breakdown of capitalism on the basis of the underconsumption of broad masses, producing a tendency in capitalism towards ever greater crises. According to this account (which was most developed by Parvus before Hilferding) this secular tendency forces the capitalists to restrict production by introducing cartels. Because cartels are vulnerable to international competition, they imply protectionism. Protectionism in turn implies that states need to increase the total territory held behind their protective tariff barriers. Hilferding at quite a late stage of the discussion, in 1910, added the concept

of finance capitalism as unproductive and predatory.

Then during World War I several different people - Gorter, Trotsky, Lenin, Zinoviev, Bukharin - theorised the origin of the war in terms of the development of monopoly capitalism. Lenin's is the sharpest of them - what he did was to redefine the word 'imperialism' to mean 'monopoly capitalism' - "the highest stage of capitalism". This is a Humpty Dumpty definition: 'When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean.' Lenin has redefined imperialism as meaning the substance of *his* explanation of the phenomenon.

Out of Lenin's work come two views about the world. One is that the world is bifurcated between a small number of overdeveloped capitalisms defined by monopolies and finance capital; and, on the other hand, the rest of the world, which is subordinate. There is no hierarchy of states - some at the top, some in the middle and some at the bottom. There are just two types: imperialist countries and those who are preyed upon. But it is also a theory according to which, because it is tied in to underconsumptionism and the general breakdown, only a narrow

stratum beyond the monopolists - what he calls the labour aristocracy - benefits in any sense from imperialism. Both the working class and the petty bourgeoisie, the small businesses, have interests opposing the big monopolists, which are now the incarnation of imperialist monopoly capital. In Lenin's time we did not get these conclusions fully drawn out, but the *logic* of Lenin's analysis is the alliance with the national bourgeoisie in the exploited countries; and in the imperialist countries the broad democratic alliance, including the petty bourgeoisie, against 'monopoly capital'. These conclusions were indeed drawn by 'official communism'.

Kautsky's argument was absurd. It was simply not true that there was a non-imperialist period of British capitalism, or that high industrial capitalism of the middle 19th century was retreating from imperialism. Britain was not pursuing protectionism in the form of tariffs, but what are now called 'non-tariff barriers' were very extensively used throughout the British dependencies during the period when Britain was talking very loudly about free trade. Britain continued to acquire territories throughout this period. The idea of a non-imperialist period of British capitalism - and hence a non-imperialist period of capitalism in general - was nonsense. It was Kautsky's nonsense in the first place, but as a result it became the nonsense of most of the actors within the Second International who debated this issue. Hence also Parvus's nonsense, Hilferding's nonsense, Lenin's nonsense.

Imperialist history

Using the language of 'imperialism' was a product of British politics in the 1870s, and particularly of Benjamin Disraeli, who set out to construct a pro-imperialist bloc. In doing so he shifted the meaning of the word 'imperialism'. In the political discourse of the 1860s this meant what we would now call Bonapartism - the creation of a strong-state imperial regime around a single individual. Particularly 'imperialism' in France meant the imperial rule of Napoleon, and of Louis Bonaparte as his 'heir'.

Disraeli shifts the word into an analogy with the Roman empire, as it was in the later Roman republic and before 212 AD and the *constitutio Antoniniana* (Antonine decree) which gave Roman citizenship to most of the free inhabitants of the empire. Before the *constitutio Antoniniana*, Rome had citizens, who had, in theory at least, political rights, and there were Roman citizens spread out all over the empire. The *provinces* were governed by imperial governors, but their inhabitants had no direct political rights. Beyond the provinces were the *socii*, the allies, who were governed by their traditional rulers, but whose foreign policy was controlled by Rome. So, for example, king Herod in Palestine was an ally outside Rome's borders, but under Roman control.

In Disraeli's imagery there is an analogy with Britain, which has colonies - parts of India, South Africa, and so on - which are directly controlled by colonial administrators, but it also has allies like Argentina and Chile, which, while subject to British imperial hegemony, are not directly controlled and administered by Britain. Britain conceives of itself as a great world empire: Rome on a larger geographical scale. It was that *British* imperial project, rather than Louis Bonaparte's imperial project, which was imitated

by the French, by the Germans, by the Italians, and so on, creating the age of European empires which ran down to the 1950s and which still has relics of one sort or another today.

Disraeli, however, was building political ideology on an earlier *practice*. Global wars did not begin in 1914. We might rechristen as 'World War I' the series of wars which took place between 1689 and 1714, the Nine Years War of 1688-97, the War of the Spanish succession 1701-14. 'World War II' is, then, the war, beginning in the colonies in the early 1750s (Carnatic wars in India from 1751, French and Indian war in North America from 1754), which became known as the Seven Years War between 1756 and 1763. 'World War III' is then the series of wars between 1792 and 1815 that begins with the British subsidising the Austrians and so on to attack France with a view to rolling back the French revolution. 1914-18 would then be 'World War IV'.

These are wars fought about global territory, about the control of trade. These are wars fought about the control of colonial plantations, the great sugar plantations of the Caribbean contested by naval operations between the British and the French, and about control of Indian trade contested between British and French East India Companies and their client states in India.

A step further back is the Dutch Republic. The Dutch revolt began in 1568. In 1602 the Dutch United East India Company was formed, which created a colonial regime in Indonesia, which seized seaports in Sri Lanka, which asserted control over large parts of Indian Ocean trade, which attempted to seize Brazil from Portugal. Look at the Dutch maritime empire on a map, and it is the same sort of *shape* as the later British empire, but without anything like the same level of territorial acquisitions.

Just as the British had their direct colonial possessions but also their *socii*, so the Dutch had their subject states which were lent money to buy arms, and so on. For example, there was the tsarist regime in the 16th and 17th centuries, or the kingdom of Poland in the same period - its economy was shifted towards serf-worked agriculture, producing grain for export to feed the cities of the Netherlands.

Push back beyond that. The Portuguese colonial empire, the seizing of Malacca in 1509, the foundation of Goa in 1511, of Macau in the 1530s, the attempt of the Portuguese to assert a commercial monopoly over Pacific Ocean trade, the development of Brazil as a sugar plantation economy. Who provided the finance for this? Was it financed out of the developed domestic capital market or the thriving capitalist agriculture of Portugal? Not in the least: there was neither. It was funded by Italian, and in particular Genoese, financial capital.

Further back again, into the late Middle Ages. The Genoese state had its own little sugar plantation colonies. The Venetian state likewise had sugar plantation colonies in Cyprus and in Crete: physical capital was exported in the form of watermills to run the first-stage processing of sugar, and capital for imported slaves who do the work, rather than peasants.

So this phenomenon of organised imperial subordination of other territories - which then leads to their economy being adapted to serve that of the dominating territory - goes back to the beginnings of capitalist states, even when they are interstitial, proto-capitalist states like Venice and Genoa.

Also visible, from the time of the interstitial, proto-capitalist states on, is the phenomenon of the rise and decline of top-dog states. In the late Middle Ages Venice defeated Genoa in a series of Mediterranean-wide wars and enjoyed brief hegemony in the Mediterranean. The Dutch became in effect the top-dog state through the 17th century. In 1688, Dutch invasion

made possible a British capitalism backed by a central bank, an organised financial market and a rule-of-law state - an ally in the Dutch war with France. But in the course of the wars of 1688-1714, the English became too powerful to be held in Dutch leading-reins. Hence during the 18th century, Dutch industry suffered relative decline compared to English industry and the Dutch economy became dominated by financial capital. We can in fact see the same thing earlier on, in Venice and Genoa in the 17th century: the former dominance in shipping and productive activities is displaced by financial operations. In Venice, as we see in Britain in the later 20th century, tourism becomes a major economic activity. The tendency to the displacement of dominance in industry and shipping by financial capital was a striking feature of Britain from the late 19th century and is a present feature of the US.

Non-capitalist empire

Is this just another way of saying that the practice of empire goes a long way back into history? No. In the case of the Roman empire, the Han or Tang dynasties in China, there is a sharp dividing line between the citizens who live within the boundaries and the 'barbarians' who live outside. But the social relations of production are more or less spread uniformly across the area controlled by the state within the boundaries. The ruins of Roman villas in southern England are economic entities of exactly the same sort that you can find in France, in southern Spain, in Italy, and in the Danubian provinces as well. And the same is true (with somewhat different particular forms) of the old Chinese regime.

So this phenomenon of institutionalised inequality, in which the economy of one territory is adapted to serve the economy of another, is not a characteristic of antique empires. Nor is it a characteristic of the use of the word 'empire' in the Middle Ages. The word 'empire' in the Middle Ages means one particular empire: 'the Holy Roman Empire', supposedly founded by Charlemagne by the coronation of Charlemagne, king of the Franks, as the western Roman emperor by the pope in 800AD. To be an imperialist or a *Ghibelline* in the Italian city-states was to support the holy Roman emperor and oppose the pope.

Equally, feudal territorial expansion in the Middle Ages - for example, the expansion of the English into Scotland and Wales - does not create a subordination of the Scottish or the Welsh economy to the English economy. It creates the Anglicisation of Wales, so that the Welsh economy effectively becomes part of the English economy. It creates in Scotland an imitative feudal regime, which copies the fundamental elements of English state, but which is for practical purposes its equal. The same is true of German feudal expansion. It either creates Germanisation or imitative feudal regimes in Poland, Bohemia, Scandinavia and so on.

The phenomenon we now see as 'imperialism' is rivalries between capitalist states, in connection with holding territories in economic as well as political subordination. This is a feature of capitalism *wherever there is a capitalist state* - even an interstitial, proto-capitalist state. It is not, in contrast, a feature of antique empires or of feudal territorial expansion. Wherever there is a capitalist state there will be capitalist imperialism. It is not a feature of capitalist decline - it is a feature of *capitalist political rule* as such.

Why does the existence of capitalist states carry with it the structuring of the world into a hierarchy of states - that is, the formation, rise and decline of hegemonic powers, and the formation of relations of state-to-state subordination,

which are not just created by formal colonisation, but also by indirect subordination?

Political economy of the state

The answer to this question will necessarily involve dealing with another one: how does the state fit into Marx's critique of political economy? We do not have an answer to this from Marx, since his critique of political economy was unfinished. The hints he gave in his early work are actually useless, because they merely attempt to transpose the dialectical move that Hegel makes from civil society to the state in the *Philosophy of right* onto the development of the state out of the capitalist political economy.

I start with the very basic idea that we have to understand both class arrangements and the state in terms of the social division of labour. What underlies everything is the material social division of labour: the way society is organised to carry on necessary activities. At this level we also have to start with the supposition that states are not *morally* necessary, produced by 'natural' nationalism, and so on. A state is simply a very successful protection racket, which has a *sufficient preponderance* of organised armed force to be able to extract protection money, called 'tax,' from the inhabitants of the territory.

That said, however, if the state was just a protection racket people would not put up with it for more than a limited period of time. Why they do arises in a sense out of private property. Against all the critiques, Engels is right in *The origin of the family, private property and the state* that the family, private property and the state are phenomena which arise together. Engels' *particular narrative* of the process is too late in the historical development, because it is based on the emergence of the Greek and Roman city-states, by which time the state had already been in existence for two thousand years or more (and the family and private property probably longer).

The state does arise out of private property, however. To take a single example: how can there be private property if it is inaccessible? Alongside private property there must be public ways and spaces, and a large number of other public, collective activities of one sort and another. When the state emerges, it takes over these common, 'sacred or public' activities. The fact that the state takes over the common activities enables it to survive and not simply collapse as an illegitimate protection racket.

Capital presupposes the state. It arises out of feudalism - it is an illusion to suppose that capital arose out of something called 'petty commodity production', or that capital arose directly out of non-class society, or that the narratives about the individual and the society that are implicit in the first three chapters of *Capital* represent any historical reality. Capital arises out of societies that already have a state.

A state is necessary in order for money to exist. It is necessary in order to have money exchange rather than gift exchange, where it does not matter what the relative values are. Even more, for capital to rule society there must be abstract capital, capital what makes possible all civilisation. For capital to be the source of all civilisation there must be rentier capital, abstract capital, and the idea that 'money is fructiferous'. That is necessary for capital to rule as a class, to enjoy the same kind of rule that the feudal ruling class or the slave-owning elite had in prior societies. This, in turn, requires organised financial markets; and organised financial markets *depend on* the market in state debt securities.

That is why capital presupposes the state. Nonetheless, the capitalist state is necessarily subordinated to capital

because of the *forms* of that state - the central bank, the public debt, the 'rule of law' - which differ from the forms of the public power in feudalism and classical antiquity.

Particular capitals

It is also subordinated to capital because particular capitalist states are dependent on a particular group of capitals. The capitalist state does not represent capital in general. It represents the group of capitals which created that state or which continue to support that state. In Britain that meant at first tobacco, sugar, slave-trading, textile and shipping capital. These were the capitals which backed 1688, and which created the new financial markets in England in the 1690s.

The capitalist state exists for three reasons. First, the state is constituted as an institutionalised debtor through the central bank and the financial markets. This makes it dependent on its *creditors*. Second, the 'rule-of-law state' displays a new form of institutional corruption. In place of gifts to individual officials necessarily come both the 'free market in legal services', with the effect that 'deeper pockets' tend to win in litigation, and a paid legislator: either a parliament in which, at the end of the day, capitals are represented by paid politicians in proportion to political contributions, mimicking the joint-stock company, or a single-person auctioneer of policies, like Louis Bonaparte, or Mussolini or Saddam Hussein.

Third and most important is the capitalist reorganisation of warfare - what has been called the 'military revolution' which took place between the 14th and 17th centuries. This was a *capitalist* reorganisation of warfare, in which *artisan* armaments production by blacksmiths and local builders of castles is replaced by *industrial* military production: shipyards producing large vessels capable of carrying cannon founders, industrial-scale production of small firearms and so on. This military revolution has the effect that if the state of Ruritania is dependent for arms supplies on the state of Atlantica, then Ruritania is militarily, and hence politically, dependent on Atlantica. But this goes further. In order to maintain its military independence Ruritania has to have not just an arms industry, but also a sufficiently balanced economy that it can stand off blockade without catastrophe. The state therefore has to support capitals within its territory against 'foreign' competitors.

The alternative military line - as with Dutch policy in the 17th century, British policy between the 18th and the 20th century, and US policy since 1945 - is to have a big enough navy to defeat any other two navies. But if a state is able to achieve that status it is in effect the top-dog state. And the consequence is that its currency becomes the world number one currency, because holdings in it are *safer* than holdings in other currencies. The currency of the number one military state automatically tends to become the world reserve currency.

Because of their dependence on particular capitals, states are necessarily mercantilist. There is not and never has been a 'genuine' free-trade state unless it is a dependency of some other state. So the free-trade policy of the US before 1861 resulted from the fact that it was a dependency of Britain.

British free-trade policy in the 19th century resulted from the mercantilist interests of the shipping industry. Dutch free-trade policy in the 17th century resulted from the mercantilist interests of the Dutch shipping industry. There is no such thing as a capitalist state which is committed to free trade in any other sense than this: as a form of dependence on another state (pre-1861 US), or as a mercantilist policy in the interests of a dominant shipping industry. There can, of course, be a state which is *practically* intensely protectionist, but *ideologically* promotes free trade in order to push it

on everyone else: this is the character of the US today.

Implications

What are the implications of this phenomenon for the political economy more generally? First, every state's interests are defined *against* the dynamics of capital, which tends to produce both polarisation between rich and poor, and episodic crashes. In the first place, the greater the degree of polarisation, the harder it is for the state to extract revenue. The state primarily extracts revenue from the *relatively* poor; it is much harder to do so from the very rich, who can afford the best lawyers (and so on). It is practically impossible to extract revenue from people who are unemployed, street peddlers, and so on. Second, crashes tend to increase polarisation (it is mainly the savings of financial *outsiders*, not insiders, that are lost and *small* businesses, not large ones, that are ruined). Further, the state's expenditures on defence and infrastructure are in effect a fixed charge that has to be paid, come rain or shine in the economy, like corporate debt. And if a crash bankrupts *domestic* capitals in an *international* market, the state will be made dependent on another state for arms, and so on. So both polarisation and economic cycles are against the interests of the state.

But the problem this poses is that, to the extent that the state successfully intervenes against polarisation and cycles, it *slows up* the operation of the economic dynamics of capitalism and tends to have the effect that old technology is preserved and not driven out of business. So the Dutch, for example, in the 19th century were very slow to utilise steam technology because the economy was still dominated by windmills and the use of peat for fuel, and transport by barges. In the same way, the British textile industry down to the 1960s continued to operate with late 19th century industrial technology.

The higher up states are in the international pecking order, the more effectively they can counteract capitalist dynamics. But the *effect* of counteracting capitalist dynamics is to drive their own economy out of industry and into finance, because the preservation of the old technology would be to make their industrial economy uncompetitive compared to other producers.

Hence the phenomena of the decline of former hegemonies: the shift from shipping to finance in Genoa, or in the 18th-century Netherlands and in late 19th and early 20th century Britain from industry to finance; and now, in fact, a shift from industry to finance in the late 20th century in the United States - it has not yet gone very far in the US, but is clearly already begun.

My underlying point, therefore, in this necessarily sketchy overview, is this. Suppose we make the effort to try to actually integrate the state among the categories of the political economy. Suppose we do so not in a way which thinks of the state as an abstract entity that enforces laws standing above all capitals, but rather one which approaches the state as a concrete aspect of the material division of labour. By doing so we have a chance of grasping the historical dynamics which the ideas of imperialism and so on were trying to grapple with. We may be successful if we do so in ways which address the weaknesses of the historical accounts developed in the 'classical' debates on imperialism before 1914 - accounts assumed to be sound in the renewed debates on imperialism in the 1960s and 1970s ●

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Notes

1. *Weekly Worker* March 20 2003.
2. *Weekly Worker* July 29, August 5, August 12, September 23 2004.
3. Leiden 2011. See my review, 'Imperialism before Lenin', *Weekly Worker* March 8 2012.

IRAN

Hassan Rowhani's honeymoon continues ... but for how much longer?

Telephone diplomacy riles Israeli hawks and Iranian conservatives

Immediate results from the thaw in US-Iran relations will be few and far between, warns **Yassamine Mather**

Last week's phone conversation between the presidents of the United States and Iran, the first direct talks between the two heads of state in more than 30 years, has been the cause of major controversy amongst conservatives both in the US and the Islamic Republic.

Although both countries have declared a willingness to work together to "break the deadlock" over Iran's nuclear programme, in hindsight it is easy to understand why Hassan Rowhani avoided a handshake or a 'casual meeting' in the corridors of the UN with Barack Obama. He did not have permission for a face-to-face meeting and there is some dispute as to whether or not he had the supreme leader's blessing even for the now (in)famous phone call. According to Javad Zarif, Iran's foreign minister, supreme leader Ali Khamenei approved of everything he and Rowhani did, and Hossein Naghavi, a 'reformist' spokesperson on foreign policy in the majles (parliament), claimed the president had received "the necessary permission from the system" for his telephone diplomacy with Obama. "System" is considered by most commentators to be code for 'supreme leader'.

Khamenei's foreign affairs representative was at the airport to welcome back Rowhani - another sign that overall the supreme leader was happy with the outcome. State TV only showed pro-Rowhani demonstrators at the airport, so the Iranian people only found out about the eggs and shoes thrown at the presidential vehicle from the western press and media. Having said that, Khamenei is a complicated character

and it is possible that those voicing opposition to Rowhani might also have been prompted by the supreme leader's office.

Khamenei is making sure that, whatever happens, he will not be blamed if things go wrong. That is why general Mohammad Ali Jafarione, the commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guards and a close ally of Khamenei, said on September 30 that the telephone diplomacy was "a tactical mistake". Probably the same can be said about Hossein Shariatmadari, a notorious rightwinger and editor of the Tehran daily *Kayhan*. He was derisive: "Mr Rowhani has not achieved anything in New York ... the telephone conversation with Mr Obama was the most regretful part and the biggest advantage Iran ... gave to the rival."¹

Obama was clearly delighted, calling the week's negotiations between representatives of the two countries a "unique opportunity" to seal a deal: "I believe we can reach a comprehensive solution."

But that was before the visit of Binyamin Netanyahu. During a meeting with the Israeli premier the US president assured Israel that a military option on Iran remains on the table. A week is long time in politics, but in terms of US foreign policy it seems to be getting longer by the hour. The reaction from Tehran was swift. Foreign minister Zarif wrote on Twitter: "President Obama should avert contradiction in order to win the confidence of the Iranian people. Flip-flop and contradictory positions will destroy trust and discredit the United States. President Obama's presumption that Iran has

entered negotiations due to his threats and illegal sanctions is an insult to a nation, bullying and wrong."² Reacting to Netanyahu's claims that Iran was building a nuclear bomb, Zarif was quoted as saying: "For 22 years Israel has claimed that Iran's nuclear programme will reach military capability in six months and they keep repeating the same lie. How many six months is that?"

Of course, Rowhani and Zarif have every reason to be concerned. The conservative factions of the Islamic Republic regime have been very active in the last few days - not just seeing to it that shoes were thrown at the presidential convoy, but preparing a more serious challenge, referred to by former 'reformist' president Mohammad Khatami as "threats of the return of terror". The protests were not spontaneous, said Khatami, but staged. "Their number was few, but their power is plenty" (I assume this is a reference to the serial political murders during his presidency, when secular writers, translators and political activists were assassinated by 'rogue' elements of the ministry of intelligence).³

Misconceptions

Clearly both states are keen to press ahead with nuclear negotiations as soon as possible and if Islamic conservatives and hawks in the US are both kept at bay we can expect some progress in that area. However, before anyone gets too excited, let me point to some of the current misconceptions being propagated by both sides:

- The Iran-US conflict is all down to Iran's nuclear programme. Not true: US sanctions predate the nuclear

issue. Iran has long been a US enemy. After all, the country dared rid itself of the shah's regime, the main ally of the US in the region. Just as bad from a US point of view was the taking of American hostages and support offered by the Islamic Republic to Hezbollah and Syria. The nuclear programme was always an excuse which would allow the US to bring this 'rogue state' to heel.

- US-Iran negotiations have only become possible because Iran persevered with its nuclear programme. This is what supporters of the Islamic Republic, including pro-Rowhani forces, have claimed, but it is completely false. The comparison that comes to mind is that of a customer who takes a hand grenade to a bank in order to discuss his overdraft. It might draw attention in the short term, but it is hardly likely to resolve the problem with the account.

- Nuclear negotiations will pave the way for better Iran-US relations. Another myth. The US's Arab allies, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, are already raising further demands: for example, curtailing Iran's role in the region, starting with Syria, then Iraq and Lebanon.

There is even renewed talk about the islands in the Gulf whose sovereignty is disputed. The United Arab Emirates has called on the UN general assembly to pressure Iran into settling the dispute over Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs. A spokesman denounced the "continued Iranian occupation". This is in line with the position of the Gulf Cooperation Council, which has declared that the UAE owns the islands (although they are

uninhabited, they are strategically important because of their position close to the Strait of Hormuz).

Bargaining

Both the Iranian and the international left have in the past shown considerable confusion regarding the nuclear issue. Deluded western and Middle Eastern 'anti-imperialist' supporters of the last Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and his crude anti-western rhetoric, went as far as defending the 'Iranian bomb'.

While others have stopped short of that, there seems to be growing support among sections of the reformist left deluded by nationalist sentiments for "Iran's right to nuclear technology". They ask, why shouldn't Iran want to become a regional power? After all, it is the most important country of the Gulf. Such classless analysis is beyond disdain. I have said before, it is criminal for a country that claims it cannot pay its employees (even before recent sanctions), where many public-sector workers have not been paid for months, where 60% of the population live below the poverty line, to spend billions of dollars every year on dodgy, unreliable, black-market technology to keep its nuclear programme progressing for the sake of 'national pride'.

The Iranian left's illusions about the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty should also be confronted. As Iranian socialist Reza Fiyozat has written, "This treaty - the biggest international lobby on behalf of the operators of nuclear power plants and military contractors - seems to have completely gone over the heads of those among the western left who, through their

positioning *vis-à-vis* Iran's regime, support and venerate the NNPT.²⁴

For the talks to succeed, the US will have to distance itself from Netanyahu's demands and take a position similar to that of the European Union. The EU is keen to see the back of international sanctions mainly due to its own economic interests. However, Catherine Ashton, the EU's 'high representative' for foreign affairs and security, is taking a conciliatory position regarding talks with Iran planned for October: "I would like to get to Geneva with the best possible atmosphere ... and that means, in all sorts of ways, we need to show willingness and good faith to sit down and talk and expect the same in return."

But the two sides are still a long way apart. The Iranian regime has no intention of closing down any of its plants. It is adamant it will continue to mine, process and enrich uranium up to 20% (a figure that allows a jump to weapons-grade material within a few months).

Israel and American hawks want Iran to: stop all uranium enrichment; remove existing enriched uranium from the country; close the Fordo enrichment plant near Qom; and halt the development of its reactor at Arak, Iran's plutonium plant. The EU would accept Fordo if Iran allowed regular inspections (so far it has not mentioned the removal of existing nuclear material) and is taking a softer line on Arak.

The Fordo plant is buried deep underground and so cannot be destroyed by conventional means. But for ordinary Iranians it represents a serious danger. Fordo is located on a notorious geological fault line and, of course, is a prime target for bunker-buster air attacks. The possibility of attack or earthquake keep many awake at night. There is no doubt that revolutionaries

should call for the immediate closure of this facility - not because of US and Israel demands, but because of the risk it poses to the population.

What about the plant at Arak, again close to Tehran, where an estimated 14 million people live? Arak is a heavy water production and reactor plant. Iran claims it is undertaking research there involving the development of radioisotopes for medical and agricultural purposes. However, the US insists that the plant is used for producing weapons-grade plutonium. The demand for Arak's closure or even inspection by the International Atomic Energy Agency will be another source of conflict.

Why is 20% enrichment of highly enriched uranium (HEU) important? The fissile uranium used in nuclear weapons usually contains 85% or more of uranium-235. However a crude, inefficient weapon can be produced with uranium enriched to just 20%, the minimum for weapons-grade. In that sense Iran's boasting about 20% enriched uranium contradicts its repeated statement that it would never develop nuclear weapons, as they are anti-Islamic. This will also become a difficult point in any negotiations, as the Islamic Republic is unlikely to agree to reduce either current levels of uranium enrichment or its stockpile of HEU.

The one question that goes unmentioned by all sides is the disposal of nuclear waste - a major problem in highly developed countries, let alone somewhere like Iran. All indications are that the authorities are taking major risks. The Bushehr plant, one of its largest nuclear power plants, uses Russian-made fuel and its radioactive waste is allegedly returned to Russia, travelling thousands of kilometres. There are, however, persistent rumours about it being buried in the central Iranian desert. That would be par for the course. The Islamic regime has

proved both unable and unwilling to pay serious attention to basic health and safety issues, whether in the workplace or society at large. Add to this the secrecy and corruption, and no-one in their right mind should trust Tehran to follow the basic safety precautions necessary when it comes to nuclear waste and radiation.

Sanctions

The demonstrators who welcomed Rowhani were not interested in international relations. They were concerned with the economy. What they want to know is how quickly sanctions can be removed, how soon prices will go back down.

Most of the severe sanctions, including those directed against financial institutions, have taken years to be fully implemented. Contrary to what the majority of Iranians believe - and indeed contrary to what the Rowhani government promises - the removal of sanctions will not come about overnight. Some of the UN embargoes imposed on Saddam Hussein following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait are still in place, 22 years after the first Gulf war and 10 years after US occupation of Iraq and the coming to power of another government! This is partly because all the conditions set in the original sanctions, including compensation to Kuwait, have not been met. So you can see why no-one should expect the reduction (never mind the removal) of sanctions against Iran to happen overnight. In addition, the passing of any US legislation to implement such a move would inevitably be hindered, if not prevented, by both Republican and Democrat hawks.

However, European Union institutions have begun to move over a number of new sanctions on Iranian banks and corporations. On September 16 the Luxembourg-based General Court ruled that embargoes against the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines (IRISL) cannot be justified, as there is no evidence of its alleged involvement in nuclear proliferation. The court's ruling means the removal of "restrictive measures" on all Iranian shipping firms connected to IRISL.

Moreover, the psychological effects of better Iran-US relations are already improving aspects of the economy. Following his own experience of a long trip to the US, Rowhani is promoting the idea of direct flights between Tehran and major US cities. For its part, the US has returned to Tehran a historic treasure, a silver griffin rhyton, which had been seized by customs a decade ago. And after a lot of discussions in Tehran it is very likely that Ayatollah Khamenei's website will be toned down. Any easing of sanctions will certainly reduce the power of rightwing Mafia-type groups associated with the Revolutionary Guards, who profit enormously from the black market.

None of this is likely to change the daily lives of ordinary Iranians in the near future, however. Manufacturing will take years just to reach pre-sanctions levels - Iran's car and petrochemical industries have now lost most of their outlets and it will be very difficult to find replacements in the current economic climate.

Having said that, the alternative - continued sanctions and the threat of a military attack - is even worse. Contrary to what 'left' supporters of regime change from above keep saying, this level of hardship does not lead to revolutionary opposition. Far from it: poverty saps the energy of workers and deprives them of the ability to engage in class struggles ●

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Notes

1. www.ft.com/cms/s/0/2f2effb6-28e5-11e3-ab62-00144feab7de.html#axzz2gY9IV4RZ.
2. www.presstv.ir/detail/2013/10/01/327020/obama-flipflop-destroys-trust-zarif.
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4. http://dissidentvoice.org/2007/10/an-anti-imperialist-case-against-iran%E2%80%99s-nuclear-program.

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Fighting fund

Where's my paper?

A good number of readers have told us that they didn't get last week's paper (September 26). On the face of it a mystery. All were delivered to the main sorting office in central London on Thursday evening at the normal time. Royal Mail has assured us that there was no problem at Mount Pleasant and that there have been no delays elsewhere as far as they are aware.

We know that some received the paper the next day. Others Saturday. Nevertheless, a week has now gone and still many are without their *Weekly Worker*. Obviously we apologise for this. However there almost certainly has been an outbreak of unofficial action by CWU members. Indeed we have got reliable reports of protests against harassment and increased workloads that began in the south-west. Under such circumstances we would ask readers to show both patience and solidarity. Patience with our inability to get the paper to you - but also solidarity with postworkers. Be ready to support their picket lines, protest meetings and demonstrations. The CWU is balloting for a national postal strike over settling its 2013 pay claim and changes to job security, conditions and pensions that will undoubtedly come with privatisation. There will surely be a majority vote for action. So, given government intransigence and a bellicose Royal Mail management, further problems

should be expected. Quite possibly a complete shut down.

But three positive things did come for us from Royal Mail this week though: three cheques for our fighting fund, which helped us to achieve - just - our £1,500 target for September. Thanks, LH (£50), GR (£20) and SP (£10). Add to this a total of £175 that we received in standing orders in the last few days of the month, plus a £10 PayPal donation from MC, and you have the extra £265 that took our total to £1,513.

Nothing has yet been delivered in the post for our October fund, but I can report the normal start-of-the-month burst on the standing order front - £196 received in just two days. So we are well placed to reach our target in October too - but only if a lot more readers take out standing orders or use Pay Pal. If we have rely on Royal Mail we will could well face severe financial problems.

Web readers - there were 10,654 of you last week - must be wondering what the fuss is about. A big slice regularly download the paper Thursday morning. That is often before our printers have even started the presses rolling. Either way, the whole operation costs money ... and that is why we need the support of all our readers ●

Robbie Rix

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

LEFT UNITY

Well-meaning naivety

Robert Eagleton reports on the Manchester policy conference

The September 28 Left Unity policy conference at Friend's Meeting House in Manchester was attended by around 100 comrades - which was good, considering many members felt that having a discussion on the policy of a new party before its founding conference was putting the cart before the horse.

The day was split up into three sections, within which there were parallel sessions; the three sessions I attended throughout the day were on the economy, electoral strategy, and the future party's constitution.

Over the course of the conference I noted the well-meaning, confused naivety on display and witnessed the disheartening spectacle of the extremely bureaucratic 'safe spaces' policy in action. However, I also saw the majority of female speakers opposing the artificial promotion of women to senior positions in the future party through positive discrimination. Whilst the conference was more of a talking shop than anything else, it did motivate people and allowed comrades to debate face to face rather than via the internet.

Nice and safe

The first session I attended was a discussion on the economy, co-chaired by Peter Green and Salman Shaheen. Unlike the other sessions, this one was divided into two parts, but I only stuck around for the first of them, as I wanted to make the session on electoral strategy. The economy session had around 40 people in attendance and began with a quick history of Britain's economy since 1945 (when I say 'quick', I mean 68 years of economic history compressed into a five-minute introduction). The economy commission has published a document asserting that the past 30 years of neoliberalism have favoured the 1%, against the interests of the 99%, whilst prior to this the Keynesian approach of successive governments from 1945 till around the early 1980s amounted to simply managing capitalism - presumably in a more neutral way.

In one sense the commission report is to be commended, in that it recognises "the limits of Keynesian attempts to simply boost demand" as a way of resolving economic crises, but it went on to call for "radical supply-side measures, which will shift resources away from the 1%". Simultaneously it advocated "planned production for need, not profit", contextualised in an economic system which is "based on the principles of democracy". So, on the one hand, there is the hankering after the social democratic consensus of old; on the other, hints of a new mode of production/social organisation.

About 30 minutes into the session a man called Andrew entered the room, with Bianca Todd of the national coordinating committee in hot pursuit. She was insisting that Andrew leave the room, as there had been a "complaint" made against him and he was consequently in breach of the 'safe spaces' policy. Andrew refused to leave and argued that a complaint had in fact been directed against Bianca herself. The cameras recording the session were quickly turned off and it was only after co-chair Salman explained that all chairs had been given prior warning not to allow Andrew into any of the sessions that he finally left. When one woman asked why he was not allowed in, Salman told her that he did not know the specifics of the complaint and that anyone who was concerned should speak to Bianca.

Once the interruption had been dealt



Quotas are not our method

with, and comrade Green had finished reading out the economy commission report, the floor was opened up for a general discussion about what should be included in the document. At least one third of those who contributed to the debate described themselves as Marxists, which caused Peter to guffaw every time. When one woman mentioned the phrase "class-consciousness" he looked to the sky in exasperation. One would have thought that someone who used to be a Socialist Workers Party member would be less hostile to revolutionary ideas. Sadly, tolerance is a virtue Peter appears to lack and his condescending outbursts whenever someone voiced support for Marxist theory no doubt made many Marxists present feel uncomfortable - I even considered challenging his attitude as a contravention of the 'safe spaces' policy!

Left Unity needs to accept it is inevitable that people will fall out when discussing politics. It is almost guaranteed that people will have differences and that these divisions will not always take the form of polite conversation, but I would suggest that we on the left are used to being offended. I know that I can be quite blunt myself, to which some people take offence, despite the fact that the last thing I want is to upset them. I dare say the majority of offence which is caused through discussing politics is accidental and the type of response outlined in the 'space spaces' document is not just disproportionate, but totally counterproductive.

There were several positive contributions to the commission's report, with calls for an end to the mindset that capitalism is natural, the replacement of capitalism with socialism and cooperation with Marxists to achieve that. On the other hand, there was the demand for international action to prevent capital from fleeing the UK, and calls for tax reform and a maximum wage. One comrade felt that the inclusion of the phrase "democratically planned production" in the commission's report sounded too Sovietesque. Another thought that the "left sects" were trying to impose "their brand of socialism" on the project (this followed a contribution from a comrade who declared that she was from the International Bolshevik Tendency). Overall, however, the discussion was better than I had expected.

Due to the meeting's late start and the interruption halfway through, it was felt that there was not enough time to discuss the draft tax policy

and it was decided to carry it over to the next part of the session on the economy. After a quick glance at the draft policy statement I decided to give the discussion on whether the 50p tax band should be reintroduced a miss - likewise whether VAT should be cut to "the EU minimum of 15%" - and made my way to the session on elections.

Should we stand?

This meeting discussed how Left Unity should approach elections. On entering the room, I was surprised to see that Andrew was present - I guess the "complaint" against him must have been either resolved or dropped. This meeting panned out differently to the previous session.

The discussion began with a debate as to whether we should stand in the European elections. There was a feeling among those present that we should not consider doing so due to the £5,000 deposit needed to contest each region and the 2.5% vote share needed to retain said deposit. There was also a debate as to whether or not Left Unity should stand in local elections - what if we were compelled to either pass a cuts budget or else allow our councillors to suffer serious legal ramifications? I would say that the majority were in favour of standing in local elections, however - and most people seemed to think that Left Unity ought to field candidates in the 2015 general election, with dues noises about concentrating resources on targeted seats.

I argued that as a party we should use elections as a platform to spread our socialist message, that Left Unity councillors should be prohibited from voting for a cuts budget and that as a rule of thumb we should only form an electoral pact with working class candidates who were explicitly anti-cuts, such as those from the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition and Respect.

My contribution opened up major divisions, with some arguing that we should be prepared to make an electoral pact with the Greens, as well as leftwing Labour politicians such as John McDonnell. Some also argued that a Left Unity council should pass a cuts budget if it meant that not doing so would result in councillors breaking the law. Others are opposed to the very idea of revolution and clearly hope Left Unity will be an exclusively electoral party.

Ultimately an indicative vote showed that there was a narrow majority who opposed formulating electoral strategy before we even know what sort of party will be formed and

what platform adopted.

What sort?

The final session I attended was on the proposed constitution for the new party. Roughly 50-60 members attended this meeting and the debate was squeezed by the very tight schedule. Richard Murgatroyd chaired this session and after all three draft constitutions had been disseminated and a brief introduction as to what was going to be debated the discussion got underway.

The first issue debated was whether or not Left Unity should adopt a policy of 'One member, one vote' (Omov) when it comes to party conferences or whether it should be based on a delegate system. All three draft constitutions stated that Left Unity should operate on an Omov basis until the membership rises above 2,000. One comrade argued that Left Unity should operate on a delegate system as soon as possible, since Omov allows well organised minorities, wealthy members and "professional activists" to dominate the conference, which would not accurately reflect the wider membership politically. Those who spoke in favour of Omov said that it allowed political minorities to be heard, as conferences based on delegates would invariably lead to minority platforms not being properly represented.

Myself and several other ex-Greens (the Greens are the only significant electoral party in the UK which operates on an Omov system) warned those present just how exclusive and undemocratic Omov can be and I went on to argue that perhaps Left Unity should adopt a system which allocates each platform a certain number of delegates, depending on their support within the party, as well as delegates from local branches. Comrades literally gasped at this suggestion, with Richard laughing and saying some would certainly find that suggestion controversial. I have no idea why. Surely that would be the best way to operate a delegate system?

I can only assume that those people who are opposed to this way of organising think it will enable "the sects" to take over Left Unity. But surely platforms should be embraced as a way of allowing like-minded people to come together and organise. Surely the basic principle of allowing a minority the possibility of becoming the majority is a good thing? Surely comrades must be able to see that hostility towards platforms, and those members of Left Unity who are also in

a sect, is tantamount to the same hostile regime they fear will be imposed on them if they allow the revolutionaries to organise? Thankfully it appeared, from the few contributions there was time to hear, that a good number of those present did not want Omov and preferred a delegate system (albeit without reserved places for platforms).

The other notable division was around positive discrimination for women, when it comes to electing the national committee. Two of the three draft constitutions argued that at least 50% of the NC should be female. One comrade pointed out that by insisting on having a leadership made up of at least 50% women you would invariably create a situation where over 50% of the committee was female. Two women responded with sarcastic comments like "Oh, well wouldn't that be a shame?" But three other women argued against reserved places. One made an impassioned plea not to adopt a policy of positive discrimination, as it could undermine the role of women in the organisation by making any high positions they hold appear tokenistic. She went on to declare that she wanted to be in an organisation where men could sympathise with the struggle women face, which she believed would be the case if Left Unity becomes a truly socialist party. In that case you would not need women artificially elevated to senior positions to keep women's issues on the agenda, as men would already be championing them.

She concluded by making the observation that, whilst there were only five women in the room, there were absolutely no black people at all, and if Left Unity insists on adopting a policy of positive discrimination in favour of women then they should also adopt a policy of positive discrimination in favour of members from ethnic minorities and the LGBT community.

Get involved

Whilst I obviously disagree with the doomed attempts to create a fairer capitalism advocated by many, whilst I oppose the oppressive 'safe spaces' policy, the positive discrimination many comrades are calling for, the emphasis on electioneering and the views some express on whom we should make electoral pacts with, I recognise that at the moment LU provides a site for arguing for left unity on a principled basis. I am not a sectarian, which is why I am willing to engage seriously with Left Unity, whereas others have written it off before it has barely begun.

I know that the people involved in the organisation are sick of the status quo and want an alternative, however naive some of their ideas. We need to argue forcefully for the principles of working class rule and human emancipation espoused by Marxism, but we will never win the debate if we do not take Left Unity seriously. As Marx said in *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered".

Whilst the Left Unity policy conference was essentially a talking shop with a few indicative votes, it is important that the left engages with this initiative. Getting involved at such an early stage is important, as the project is currently very fluid in terms of ideology - which allows communists the opportunity to have a real impact if we organise effectively ●

POLEMIC

Politics for dummies

Paul Demarty asks why so many on the left are afraid of talking politics

Slightly bizarre news comes to us from Leeds, where there has been an almighty kerfuffle in the Left Unity branch.

Two comrades - Nick Jones and Mark Renwick - took it upon themselves to stage a coup. In an uncanny echo of those local authorities who have summarily fired thousands of people and invited them to reapply for their old jobs on radically worse terms, the comrades took over the all-important Facebook group and expelled everyone they did not like.

Fortunately, and quite inevitably, the whole wheeze backfired immediately; control was reasserted by the LU hierarchy and angry locals, and the *status quo ante* appears to have reasserted itself. Details are pretty hard to come by, but it seems that Jones and Renwick were offended by the rudeness of 'the sects'; one assumes that there was perhaps a heated discussion on one thing or another, out of which they came off worse.

What do *they* think, then? A quick browse through the social media presence of each reveals striking similarities - principally, Facebook walls cluttered with apparently endless photos of people on demonstrations. (The Left Unity Leeds Facebook page drowns similarly in such 'contributions' from the two comrades.) They also appear keen on Die Linke, and are signatories to the Left Party Platform, whose leading lights appear to be thoroughly embarrassed by the whole affair - as well they might be).

These are people, obviously, for whom the important thing is to get out there and build the movement, to go to (and photo-document to glazed exhaustion) every demonstration: the abstruse chatter of 'the sects' will only be off-putting to 'ordinary people', and is thus an abusive liability. What this actually means, however, is that *talking about politics* is off limits, since people have violently different and strongly held political convictions, which quite inevitably lead to discussions becoming heated.

This fear of talking politics is a common feature of many morbid symptoms. For the 'safe spaces'/identity politics brigade, discussion is reduced to a procedural matter, an infinitely slow approach to the perfect environment, when everyone will be equally capable of engaging in discussion. What matters is not what you say, but how you say it; not substance, but style.

To this, we may add the 'people out there' argument, where comrades involved in the movement are silenced in the name of those who might, one day, be attracted to it. There is a notable subvariant of this: the 'let's not talk about dead Russians' line, because, after all, 'ordinary people' do not care what Trotsky said to Kamenev in the Smolny on such and such an afternoon in 1922 ...

The 'dead Russians' argument highlights something significant. To be blunt, it always seems to slip off the tongues of those who backed the wrong Russians. Arthur Scargill, George Galloway, Robert Griffiths of the Communist Party of Britain: all have sneered at the left's historical obsessions, but all are Stalinists. There is certainly plenty of bile directed against Trotsky and Lenin in broader society; but there are many oddball opinions on Koba himself, one of the

twin demon figures of bourgeois 20th century historiography.¹

For the most part, all those species of lefts who fear talking about politics have 'something to hide'. Left Unity is something of a laboratory experiment in this type of politics, and the results are exactly as you would expect. Andrew Burgin was a member of the Workers Revolutionary Party, the craziest Trotskyist group in living memory. Kate Hudson is ex-CPB. Both are formerly of Respect. Indeed, the most ardent opponents of serious political discussion tend to be members of Socialist Resistance, and thus *presently* Trots.

There are also individuals such as Mark Perryman, whose latest contribution to the LU website is an obsequious 'review' of an essay by Stuart Hall and Alan O'Shea on "common sense", defined by the authors as "a form of popular, easily-available knowledge which contains no complicated ideas, requires no sophisticated argument and does not depend on deep thought or wide reading".

While "we might imagine Nigel Farage and Ukip as the past and present masters of the 'commonsensical' in politics", Perryman delights at the possibility of a 'progressive' common sense: "Take a fondly remembered victory, the poll tax, or the beginnings perhaps of a new win, the bedroom tax. A common-sense argument against the unworkable injustice of these taxes linked to their hugely effective renaming for what they are by their opponents."²

Run of the mill leftisms of this kind are common enough, but Perryman has been here before - he is a former Eurocommunist. For 'Farage', read 'Thatcher' - it is the same guff that he, Hall and the rest of that sorry gang were rehearsing 30 years ago, down to the dubious Gramsci references. One improvement we must note is on the matter of the poll tax - this is now a "fondly remembered victory" so far as Perryman is concerned, a rather healthier attitude than the utter hostility to poll tax protests he expressed at the time.

Nick Wrack, the most prominent leader of the rival Socialist Platform, who likewise reverted to appeals to the 'people out there' at the SP's September 14 meeting, was once the editor of *Militant*. The core leadership of the Socialist Platform also includes former members of Workers Power and, alas, the CPGB. Everyone, it turns out, has a history! Including, naturally, Nick Jones and David Renwick - both of whom are late of the Socialist Workers Party.

What we have here is a lesson in the politics of shame. The comrades, whatever their particular bugbear - the esoteric language of the left, the irritable arguments, the 'dead Russians' - are *embarrassed* by their politics. In the case of a hidebound Stalinist, so they ought to be (although they ought not to be allowed to get away with it). In the case of former and current Trotskyists, it is more disappointing, but ultimately a logical outcome of the history of Trotskyism, an unstable combination of spontaneism and 'hard' Bolshevism, which has spawned in its wake a substantial residue of atomised individuals who regard themselves as Marxist but are now hostile to organised leftwing groups.

We have consistently called such elements the 'flotsam and jetsam' of the left. No more apt metaphor is possible. Their movements are strictly heteronomous, determined by currents



Those with something to hide ...

they do not control. Flotsam is officially defined as a floating piece of a wrecked vessel; jetsam as cargo that has been jettisoned in troubled waters. Almost all the 'independent' lefts in this country are likewise fragments of a dissolved organisation, or have been rudely cast overboard.

The ideology of these individuals is the bastard lovechild of residual - and sincere - attachment to their socialist opinions and petty bourgeois philistinism. One side of their brains, as it were, considers the other cultish and a bit weird.

This, fundamentally, is the role of the 'ordinary person' in all this nonsense. It has nothing to do with 'ordinary people' as they actually exist. Rather, the 'ordinary person' functions as a kind of imperious superego - a *projection* of the comrade's own distaste for the meat and potatoes of far-left existence, which in reality (and necessarily, in our current weak state) involves an awful lot more jaw-jaw than class war-war.

The far left talks a lot. In meetings, in pubs over a few beers, in squats over a substance of your choice, on paper sales between the curt dismissals of the general public. 'Opinions are like assholes,' goes the popular web refrain: 'everybody's got one.' This is healthy - the left is at its greatest remove from reality when it allows itself to believe that the next demonstration is *the* big one, is at its most insular precisely at the moment it believes itself to be looking outward. 'Ordinary people' are a projection; the left looks outwards and sees only itself.

And ordinary people talk too. In my own humble experience, people try not to say anything stupid about politics - which means they have to *think*, and organise their thoughts in such a way that they will not be blown over in a gentle breeze. Where the guilty left imagines that only some technical problem with their politics prevents the breakthrough, the result is inevitably *patronising* to

the outside world. There is no magic formula that the broad masses will automatically take to heart. They do not stand passively waiting for ready-made answers. Indeed, they have very pertinent questions for anyone who wants to convince them of socialism, a good many of which are about certain dead Russians.

When people first come into the left, the general rule is that they are the most keen to discuss politics. Having been taught from the cradle that socialism was a bloody failure, the freshly minted leftwinger is apprehensive and eager in equal measure to understand why it might not be next time around. They are not scared of, but enticed by the "complicated ideas" that Hall and Perryman want to deny them. Those who are turned off by the highfalutin talk disappear back into mainstream society. Only the wounded veteran has the anti-political prejudices we are discussing - tired of the talk, but in it too deep to look away.

We may return to Perryman and his "common sense". The practical outcome of Eurocommunism, it is now indisputable, is Blairism; the technocratic manoeuvres of pollsters and spin-doctors are simply Euro premisses stripped of the Gramscian jargon. Mainstream bourgeois politics has increasingly been reduced to the level of gulling people into believing the test-tube-baby party leaders share the prejudices of 'the country'. They, too, are ashamed - of the utter vacuity of their actual message. The right wing of Left Unity has arrived, for all intents and purposes, at Eurocommunism; but on a smaller scale. They ought to remind themselves what lies at the end of this road ●

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Notes

1. See J Conrad, 'Dead Russians' *Weekly Worker* March 29 2009.
2. <http://leftunity.org/making-the-case-for-a-progressive-common-sense>.

What we fight for

- Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.
- There exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called 'parties' on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed 'line' are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.
- Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members should have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.
- Communists oppose all imperialist wars and occupations but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question - ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.
- Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, 'One state, one party'.
- The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.
- Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.
- Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally.
- The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote.
- We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.
- Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.
- Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women's oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.
- Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin's Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.
- Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism - a system which knows neither wars, exploitation, money, classes, states nor nations. Communism is general freedom and the real beginning of human history.

weekly worker

**Report is a
challenge to
working class**

The problem is capitalism

The United Nations-endorsed Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released its working group report on climate change on September 30. The scientists tell us that they are 95% confident that global warming is caused by human-made pollution. Thomas Stocker, co-chairman of the IPCC, said: "Climate change is the greatest challenge of our time." Indeed, it "threatens our planet, our only home".

This is the fifth such report since 1990. A lot of the material in it is not new - in fact some of the articles it cites are from journals published up to five years ago. But what it does is firm up its estimates of 'climate sensitivity': that is, how much temperature rises can be attributed to increases in carbon dioxide.

The headline statements from the report are:

- Warming of the climate system is unequivocal and since the 1950s many of the observed changes are unprecedented.
- Each of the last three decades has been successively warmer at the Earth's surface than any preceding decade since 1850.
- Over the last two decades, the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets have been losing mass, glaciers have continued to shrink almost worldwide.
- The rate of sea level rise since the mid-19th century has been larger than the mean rate during the previous two millennia.
- The atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide have increased to levels unprecedented in at least the last 800,000 years.
- Human influence on the climate system is clear.¹

The report does not say anything about the melting of the permafrost, or acidification of the oceans, although two more reports will be released in 2014 addressing climate-change adaptation and mitigation.

In response bourgeois politicians came out with the usual 'something must be done' reaction. US secretary of state John Kerry said: "If this isn't an alarm bell, then I don't know what one is. If ever there were an issue that demanded greater cooperation, partnership and committed diplomacy, this is it." EU climate chief Connie Hedegaard said: "If your doctor was 95% sure you had a serious disease, you would immediately start looking for the cure ... Why should we take bigger risks when it's the health of our planet at stake?"

However, the report comes at a time when there has been little movement towards a political agreement on climate change - international talks have ground to a halt. The next top-level governmental meeting is due in Warsaw in November, with the aim of developing a framework for an agreement on global CO₂ emissions by 2015. It may be too little, too late.

The impacts of climate change include droughts, floods, changes in agricultural yields and production, the compromising of food security and health through malnutrition, the spread of infectious diseases, food poisoning, changing migration patterns, infrastructure damage and



Global problem ... no national solutions

species extinction. In short, it is those with the least means to mitigate the effects of climate change that are most likely to suffer.

However, for the climate sceptics all this is of no concern. In anticipation of the report, the *Daily Mail* headlined with "And now it's global cooling! Return of Arctic ice cap as it grows by 29% in a year" (September 8) and *The Daily Telegraph* with "Global warming? No, actually we're cooling, claim scientists" (September 8).

Three weeks later, the same paper invited former chancellor Nigel Lawson to give his reaction to the report in an article under the headline, "Climate change: this is not science - it's mumbo jumbo", in which he called the IPCC "a politically motivated pressure group that brings the good name of

science into disrepute" (September 28). Lawson, of course, is chair of the Global Warming Policy Foundation, a charity that persistently pours scorn on the science of climate change, but is quoted widely in the *Mail* and the *Express* as well as the *Telegraph*.

It is, of course, a peculiar sort of "politically motivated pressure group" - consisting of 209 lead authors, 50 review editors and more than 600 contributing authors from 39 countries - that is sponsored by just about the entire international bourgeois establishment.

Climate sceptics have also seized on the 'missing heat' - the rate of warming over the past decade or so has been less than climate scientists predicted, given the continued increase in carbon emissions. However, the mystery of

the missing heat is easily solved - it is to be found in the oceans: according to one study, 30% of ocean warming over the past decade has occurred below 700 metres, which is unprecedented over at least the past half century.² The IPCC report also estimates that over 90% of carbon dioxide is absorbed into the oceans.

The international bourgeoisie may be prepared to organise the studies, but it is not exactly rushing to take action. In Britain, the Tories even refused to set a 2030 decarbonisation target for the power sector in the Energy Bill and they give tax breaks for oil and shale gas development.

David Cameron promised he would lead the "greenest government ever" under the slogan, "Vote blue, go green", but now has an environment secretary who does not believe anything untoward is happening. Owen Paterson told a fringe meeting at the Tory conference: "We should just accept that the climate has been changing for centuries."

The real problem for bourgeois politicians was expressed by chancellor George Osborne in 2011 when he said: "We're not going to save the planet by putting our country out of business". Interviewed by *The Times* prior to this year's conference, he said: "I want to provide for the country the cheapest energy possible, consistent with having it reliable, in other words as a steady supply, and consistent with us playing our part in an international effort to tackle climate change ... But I don't want us to be the only people out there in front of the rest of the world. I certainly think we shouldn't be further ahead of our partners in Europe."

In response to Osborne's last budget Green MP Caroline Lucas argued for "Plan G" - a billion-pound investment in a 'green economy'. And in her response to the IPCC report she argued for a "rapid transition to renewables and a clean, secure, jobs-rich, low-carbon economy."³ This is echoed by much of the revolutionary left, which, together with umbrella groups like the Campaign Against Climate Change, demand "One million climate jobs".

The problem with both this and Lucas's proposal is that they are offering what are in effect national 'solutions' to an international problem.

If there is one thing that should set revolutionaries apart from bourgeois politicians of all stripes, it is surely internationalism. An international collective effort is required to solve the climate crisis, but the bourgeoisie is incapable of mounting it.

Capitalism is the problem. When the IPCC talks about pre-industrial levels, that means the levels that existed prior to the development of large-scale capitalist production. It is obvious: capitalism is driven by its need to make a profit, to expand its capital. That means constantly expanding production, irrespective of genuine human need. For individual capitalist producers it is a zero-sum game. If they do not expand they go out of business. That is why George Osborne has got a better grip on reality than Caroline Lucas when it comes to the possibility of applying remedies under the current order.

No capitalist state is going to give up a competitive advantage. The capitalist solution will be to individualise the problem by forcing the working class to cut back on energy usage - for example, by investing in the latest green gadget. As with the banking bailout, it will be the millions, not the millionaires, who will be expected to get the system out of a hole.

We are the majority, and it is only our class that can solve the problem of climate change. Only our class can create a world based on production for need, not for profit. Until we build a working class movement on a European and global scale, emissions of carbon dioxide will continue to increase and the possibility of catastrophic climate change will become ever more acute ●

Simon Wells

Notes

1. www.ipcc.ch/news_and_events/docs/ar5/ar5_wg1_headlines.pdf.
2. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/grl.50382/abstract>.
3. www.carolinelucas.com/blog/2013/09/27/ipcc-climate-report.

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