

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



weekly **worker**



**Historical ignorance combined
with chauvinism: Matgamna's
crude tirade against Muslims**

- AWL's non-debate
- Claudia Jones
- Education for sale
- University strike

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Insiders call SWP leadership to account

LETTERS



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

Easier said

I was very interested in Jack Conrad's podcast on free schools (www.cpgb.org.uk/home/podcasts/october-20-2013-cpgb-political-report). He mentioned two main points that are particularly interesting.

I agree with him when he says that he would be keen for religious institutions to play no part in educating our children. He also mentioned that he was educated at a Church of England school, while his Jewish girlfriend went to a secondary Catholic school that seemed to indoctrinate students, rather than educate. I would also be keen for faith schools to suddenly stop existing, because they teach lies to children. However, it is very difficult to bring this about.

I am a member of the National Union of Teachers and also an elected local officer who attends the Easter conference every year. Conference is the body that makes policy and we cannot get a motion passed to do away with faith schools. In fact we do not even dare to bring such a motion, because so many members have a faith and would be offended. I would like a motion passed that asks the union to campaign for all faith schools to become non-faith schools and be brought back under local authority control.

We are stuck with all these schools because of a compromise made with the churches in 1944 - the schools already existed and the state needed them to stay open rather than pay for all schools to be started from scratch and run by the state. A compromise was also made in the NHS for different but equally practical reasons.

The waters became even more muddled when Tony Blair called for new faith academies and a whole can of worms was reopened. The Socialist Workers Party immediately supported Muslim academies because it would be unfair to Muslims not to have their own faith academies if the Christians were allowed them - a position I disagreed with. They were also chasing support from Muslims in Respect, which I always suspected was a lot to do with it. Anyway, it is all a bigger mess now, with Muslim and Christian free schools about to appear in large numbers to add to social segregation and deregulation.

What do the NUT say about free schools? Well we are against them and the deregulation, pro-business aspect in particular. Free schools do not insist on qualified teachers and this undermines the pay and conditions of all teachers. We do think that increasing resources and money would help education and that teachers should be properly rewarded. The education that children get does reflect the wellbeing of the people who teach them - this is obvious, but not the whole answer.

The state does interfere with teaching too much and this makes schools places that have become boring exam factories. State schools are even worse under education secretary Michael Gove, who has done a remarkable amount of damage in his short time in office. Ofsted is used to force teachers to account for pupils' educational progress according to levels that are largely fictional, but are measured and remeasured. Teachers' pay will now be dependent on the raising of these fictional levels from 2014.

So, yes, the state is far too

involved in education, and the interference will increase as time passes. There are mechanisms even now, however, that can at least push in the other direction to some degree. Local governors consisting of parents and teachers are capable of influencing the way schools are run. Local authorities, which are at least accountable to the local electorate, should provide support for the schools and build new ones. But we need to also raise the argument to get rid of Ofsted and testing until at least GCSE age and call not for free schools run by co-ops or the CPGB, but schools that reflect the needs of local parents, paid by the state, and reflect the most enlightened theories of education from around the world.

This, however, will take a huge movement against the current system and is easier said than done.

Steve White
email

Right up north

Paul Demarty's piece, 'The ballad of Tommy Robinson' (October 17), is flawed for want of hard facts.

I have tried to explain before that the title 'English Defence League' isn't a single constituency. It is not a single entity with a single ideology. Demarty's principal statement is that the EDL is no more rightwing today than it was last year or the year before, and Robinson's reasons for leaving it are not because he fears or wishes to distance himself from its onward rightwing (and might I say armed) trajectory. In this Demarty is quite wrong.

The EDL started specifically in opposition to what they saw as an unstoppable rise in the number of Muslims and cultural impact of Islam; as well as the growth of jihadism within its ranks here and across the world. Whatever we think of that, this fear and opposition attracted people from many races, religions and cultural groups, a majority of whom were largely white working class youth.

On Tyneside and Wearside, and in the north and borders in general, this phase was very short-lived. The EDL as such ceased to exist in the north and was essentially the National Front, and regionally-based fascist and Nazi-loving organisations, only using the name 'EDL' when they thought it more respectable when applying for permission for demos and rallies. The EDL in the north were some way to the right of the EDL in the rest of the country.

When the EDL held its national demo in Newcastle two or three years ago, Robinson was pulled from the platform by local infidels and Northern Patriotic Front members, who occasionally pose as the EDL, to beat him up and attack the rally as 'race traitors'. The slogans of the so-called EDL up here feature as much general anti-black and anti-communist venom as they do anti-Islam or, more particularly, anti-Muslim. While the EDL nationally is pro-Zionist, up here it remains anti-Semitic. Together with the conscious identity with fascism and Nazism, salutes, 'siege' heils, Nazi tattoos and chants in praise of Hitler and the Nazis, have come a growing hard core of street thugs frequently armed with percussion bombs, sticks, bottles and knives. This northern faction, in truth NF and Nazi infiltrators, now dominates this region and has spread down south to most big northern and Midlands cities.

So, in short, Robinson is not just making it up. He may well be in fear for his own life or, as he says, some knucklehead killing someone in the name of the EDL of which he is seen

as the leader. So the EDL is at least regionally marching to the far right and this tendency is spreading down the country.

I also don't understand why this break is a cause for cynicism. It is not impossible for Robinson to wake up and smell the class nature of Britain and the problem faced by the bulk of the white working class as being class-based, not race-based. It is not impossible his break may start a fragmentation of the EDL as a whole, which can only be good.

The CPGB and others on the left ought to be encouraging this break, opening up a dialogue with Robinson and others with a view to confronting their distorted views and perspectives, and presenting class-based politics and solutions to the problems faced by the working class as a whole.

I'm not naive. I know all too well how entrenched some of these elements are, but we ought not to dismiss the chance to open up a dialogue and nudge even these lumpen elements into a more progressive direction.

David Douglass
South Shields

Embarrassing

I do find it amusing that two leading members of the Socialist Party of Great Britain should, like myself, regard it as a huge personal embarrassment to have once been a member of the SPGB (Letters, October 24).

I think I joined for a brief period in the mid-1990s. This was in the wake of the collapse of socialism in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe, the election of Tony Blair as Labour leader and I guess I wanted to support a party which remained unequivocal in its advocacy of the replacement of capitalism by a world socialist society. And which did not hitch its star to the Labour Party as an agency of social change.

I also felt some appreciation for the *Socialist Standard* of the 1970s and 80s in educating me in the basics and fundamentals of Marxism during my adolescent and formative years.

I did soon enough leave the Clapham SPGB, probably for a number of reasons. Although some people were not wedded to the 'parliamentary road to socialism', the SPGB as a whole was and is. The Clapham SPGB believes in the 'immediate abolition' of the state, whereas the expelled and excluded Ashbourne Court SPGB hold, in line with Marxism, that the working class needs a state in order to suppress the capitalist class and implement socialism.

I also felt the notion of two SPGBs, both having identical aims and principles but completely hostile and hateful to each other, was ridiculous. There was no sense of cohesion, solidarity or even basic comradeship in the SPGB. Members can literally say and do as much or as little as they like. Most pay no dues and are completely inactive. Those who engage are fractious and seem personally antagonistic.

I still subscribe to the *Socialist Standard* but, after reading, it goes into the council recycling. It's pretty transient and irrelevant. Changes in the Communist Party of Britain resulting from the attraction of wider forces and cadres into the organisation in the late 1990s reminded me of why I joined the CP in the first place, decades earlier. That I have been a communist from my very early years and will remain a communist until the day I die.

At the time, I felt the 1977 *British road to socialism* was the updating and application of Marx's

and Engels' *Communist manifesto* to modern times and to the specific history and traditions of Britain. I am probably more critical nowadays with the wisdom of some age and experience, but I still do regard the *BRS* with a great deal of affection.

Andrew Northall
Kettering

Rape culture

An interview with the former Red Army Faction militant, Karl-Heinz Dellwo, appeared in the German daily *Die Tageszeitung* this week. What I found interesting was when Dellwo recounted his impression of the German radical left when he was released from prison in the mid-1990s:

"I can remember the conflicts around the gender question, which were in themselves necessary, but which were also blown out of proportion in how every lack of male sensitivity was likened to rape. To me, those were conflicts that made me think the old left approach had reached its end. The new approach was determined by the desire to experience something I would call reactionary: the need to triumph over others - ie, to find a psychological crutch. The left's room for manoeuvre had become smaller, so people started to fight over the small turf that was still left."

Maciej Zurowski
email

Gulags

Scrape the surface and lefties denounce lefties as 'nutters', 'loonies', etc, showing about as much understanding of personal oppression and the oppression of the psychiatric system as their hold on the dialectic.

Many thousands of people suffer treatment, patronage, enforced imprisonment and community orders every year. There is a huge problem of racism in the disproportionate numbers of black people who are sectioned, put on heavy medication or killed through restraint. Following the lead of the red tops, John Penney and Paul Demarty repeat the language of oppression and smartly say, 'So what?' ('Nutters like us', October 24).

There is something deeply wrong

with modern capitalist society that causes more and more mental health issues to those who suffer from the domination of the ruling class. Ideological dominance requires division, derision and atomisation of the class and the individual. The division between the 'sane' and the 'mentally ill' serves a function to oppress and divide us, as well as provide a market worth billions for the multinational drugs companies, with us humans as their guinea pigs.

Such abuse should simply be denounced and not supported by usage on the left. Paul Demarty's 'shock jock' approach is demeaning to himself and others he intentionally offends. It is not part of our therapy to accept the derogatory labels that the bourgeois media and bourgeois psychiatric system impose on us. 'Swallow the pill,' Demarty says, 'accept the labels'. No, no, no, no! This is no advance of left culture.

The gulags exist here! They practice forced medication, forced imprisonment (for your own safety) and electric current therapy. In the name of ...?

Ex-service user
email

Barbaric PCS

Boycott Workfare has heavily criticised the Public and Commercial Services union for allowing its members to implement benefit sanctions on claimants of jobseekers' allowance, resulting in the cutting, suspension and stopping of benefits. Many claimants are then pointed to food banks by the jobcentre.

This has occurred with the connivance of the PCS leadership, which is controlled by the Socialist Party in England and Wales and the SWP. SPEW have even wheeled out PCS vice-president John McNally in its defence. The PCS inaction reminds me of members of the SS who defended themselves by saying, 'I was only following orders'.

Sixty thousand claimants a month are having their JSA cut, suspended or stopped, my nephew being one of them. I've often wondered why PCS members in my local job centre willingly carry out such barbaric acts.

John Smith
Cambridgeshire

Fighting fund

Do it now!

"I was one of those who had to go to my local sorting office to pay a £1 penalty for an underpayment of 9p postage!" writes comrade OG. "But it was well worth it when I read that a legal settlement had been reached and there was enough in the appeal fund to pay the solicitors."

So OG has sent us a £15 cheque by way of celebration - not to mention four stamps for large letters to avoid any future surcharge. Well, actually, Royal Mail shouldn't have demanded that surcharge on the September 26 issue - week in, week out, they have been delivering the *Weekly Worker* sent out in exactly the same way with no problem. So why did someone suddenly decide that the envelopes were 'too thick' that week? We don't believe they were.

Anyway, OG's cheque plus stamps adds £19 to our fighting fund total for October, to go with two other cheques from RT and GH (for £25 and £20

respectively), two £10 PayPal donations (thank you, PL and SD) and, last but not least, no less than £187 in standing orders over the last seven days - thanks to DC, PM, JT, DS, PM, CC, RL and AR.

An excellent effort, but, with only one day remaining in October as I write, we have not quite made our £1,500 target. The £267 raised this week takes the total to £1,306, so, unless there are a few more cheques in tomorrow's post, we need a lot of readers to either go onto our website and make a PayPal donation or make an online bank transfer (account number: 00744310; sort code: 30-99-64). So if you want to help, act quickly. Do it now!

Meanwhile we'll be putting in a strongly worded complaint to Royal Mail.

Robbie Rix

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

CPGB

Hopes, fears and prospects

The members' aggregate on October 26 discussed both Left Unity and the SWP. **Michael Copestake** reports

As we move closer to the November 30 founding conference of Left Unity as a full, membership-based political organisation, it was John Bridge who surveyed the scene.

Despite the fact that Left Unity has around 700 paid-up members, he observed, it is worth remembering that it is still on a lower level than either the Socialist Alliance or Respect. And that applies to its politics too. In the following discussion Mike Macnair commented that, whereas the SA and Respect drew together, by comparison, politically coherent and organised sections of the left, which allowed both of these groups to punch above their weight, Left Unity will in all likelihood bring together mainly atomised individuals.

We should also note Left Unity's apparently frail and combustible character, added comrade Bridge. Whereas those previous unity initiatives had problems, given the sectarian behaviour of the larger left groups, LU will be handicapped by the 'anti-sectarian' - that is, anti-group - sectarianism of many of its individual members. Some could be described as the "political walking wounded", burnt by their previous experience at the hands of such groups.

So what are the obstacles making LU unlikely to take off as a type of old Labour formation? In addition to the fact that the actual Labour Party continues to exist and all previous attempts to compete on its terrain have failed, comrade Bridge added that, importantly, we must also consider other UK-specific factors. In the first instance, there has been neither a reconfiguration of a substantial part of the old 'official communist' movement into a new party, nor has there been a significant left break from the Labour Party itself which could form the basis for an alternative party formation. (Later Moshé Machover, a visitor at the aggregate and a friend of the CPGB, emphasised the role of proportional representation in those European countries where new parties such as Die Linke and Syriza have achieved some level of success, whereas under the UK system of 'first past the post' it is extraordinarily difficult for new parties to break through.)

Comrade Bridge argued that the organised left groups remain on the whole peripheral to the LU project, with the exception of Socialist Resistance, which seems to have an uncanny knack for placing itself at the heart of broad party formations - the fact that it is prepared to abandon what remains of its revolutionism within them partly protects SR from the anti-group sentiment.

Comrade Bridge went on to give his view of the various LU platforms. Workers Power's Class Struggle Platform outlined not the fundamental aims and principles it called for Left Unity to adopt, but a series of campaigning priorities for the autumn (and we are now fast approaching winter). Essentially another application of the WP interpretation of the 'transitional method', concluded comrade Bridge.

The Left Party Platform is clearly the leadership faction, launched preemptively. It has since been amended to the left of its initial draft, but remains contradictory and ambiguous - this time in line with SR's interpretation of the 'transitional method'.

The CPGB was central to the formation of the new Communist Platform, but it has not withdrawn from the Socialist Platform, despite



Make Communist Platform a real force after November 30

the obvious failings of the SP with which readers of this paper will be familiar from our recent coverage, and which comrade Bridge recapped for those present. For comrade Bridge the most important thing was that we publicly push the *politics* of the Communist Platform, which are in effect those of the SP majority, at least as demonstrated by the indicative votes taken at the SP's September 14 meeting. So in a straight contest between the SP and the LPP the CPGB should support the SP - a sentiment which was echoed by others in the discussion afterwards.

After November 30, he continued, it will be important to consider where to take the Communist Platform, assuming that the Left Unity party actually gets off the ground. It will be important to have staying power, to continue to engage actively with the Socialist Platform, and generally attempt to win others to the need for principled Marxist politics.

Comrade Bridge expressed strong reservations about the ambiguous wording of LU's proposed constitution in relation to both political dissent and the 'safe spaces' policy - similar clauses have been used, for example, in Die Linke in Germany, to bureaucratically move against the left within the party. One clause states that "Caucuses [factions - MC] may not organise public campaigns against the overall aims or policy of the party",¹ which could prove problematic in view of the likely victory of the LPP and its 'clause four' Labourism.

In the discussion that followed Bob Paul noted that in parts of Wales LU has drawn some left Labour Party people towards it, creating a small stir in the local Labour left. But Mike Macnair thought it unlikely that this would be widely replicated - 700 LU individual members could not be compared to 700 members of a far-left group. The great irony, he added, is that the organised left has exactly the same illusions as those anti-group individuals in Left Unity: while those individuals believe that it is possible to ignore or bypass the organised far left, most far-left groups believe it is possible to ignore or bypass the *other* far-left groups.

Comrade Machover criticised the CPGB's approach to the Alliance for Workers' Liberty within the Socialist Platform, arguing that it would have been tactically better to have chosen a different moment to attack the AWL rather than the first item of business. He also said the CPGB should see at least some off the 'independents' as natural allies.

Yassamine Mather stated that the SP's anti-imperialism was badly compromised by the presence of the

AWL and that it was correct to oppose AWL participation from the start. The AWL's softness on imperialism was now a potential problem for the SP - a legitimate stick with which its opponents could beat it. Ian Donovan, also a visitor, concurred on the need to immediately act against the AWL's presence within the SP and added that, in his view, LU is to the right of the old Respect project, giving as an example Kate Hudson's position on Julian Assange. Mike Macnair stressed that many of the 'independents' are not part of a newly radicalising social layer, but veterans of the left.

Peter Manson introduced the discussion on the SWP by reminding comrades that, although the present crisis had originated in a case of alleged rape, the bureaucratic culture of the SWP meant that *any* serious allegation against a leader could have provoked it.

The roots of that crisis lay in a combination of its anti-democratic internal regime and its programmeless opportunism. The two were actually linked, he said, since the absence of any programme makes it very difficult to hold the leadership to account and allows it to move freely from one opportunistic position to another according to what it believes will bring it short-term gain.

In the discussion Yassamine Mather noted that, despite the seriousness of the rape allegations, ultimately it was the cronyism shown towards the alleged perpetrator that had escalated the crisis so irreversibly. Another comrade noted that the crisis was in a sense the delayed result of the failure of Respect, which, whatever its weaknesses, at least kept the SWP distracted in a major project. Further disintegration seems to be on the cards.

For Christina Black one of the obvious effects of the SWP crisis was to have made the Marxism festival a lot less dull, though she agreed that the SWP is probably heading for a further explosion. In the view of Paul Demarty, Charlie Kimber and Alex Callinicos were half right in blaming movementism, feminism and so on for the seriousness of the crisis - the extreme fad-chasing nature of the SWP led it to adapt itself to such trends.

Comrades were agreed, however, that the SWP crisis was far from over, with many fearing a total implosion. That was not something the CPGB wanted to see, said comrade Manson, as it probably would result in many members either drifting to the right or dropping out of politics altogether. It would represent yet another setback in the struggle to create a single Marxist party ●

Notes

1. <http://leftunity.org/final-draft-lu-constitution>.

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 November 3, 5pm: Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by open discussion and *Capital* reading group. Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. This meeting: Vol 1, chapter 24, section 3: 'Separation of surplus value into capital and revenue'. Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Introduction to anthropology: the human revolution
Tuesday November 5, 6.15pm: 'The revolution which worked'. Speaker: Chris Knight.
St Martin's Community Centre, 43 Carol Street, London NW1 (Camden Town tube). £10 waged, £5 low waged, £3 unwaged. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: www.radicalanthropologygroup.org.

I am a woman now

Friday November 1, 7pm: Film and discussion, Birkbeck College, Malet Street, London WC1. This powerful 2011 documentary gives rare access to the lives of the first generation of trans women in the 1950s and 60s. Followed by panel discussion led by professor Alex Sharpe. Free admission. Organised by the Bishopsgate Institute: www.bishopsgate.org.uk.

Support Tusc

Saturday November 2, 8pm: Benefit gig, Rugby United Railway Club, corner of Spring Street and Railway Terrace, Rugby. Live music with Tan Trum, plus disco: £5 waged, £2 unwaged. All proceeds to Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition. Organised by Rugby Tusc: <http://rugbytusc.blogspot.co.uk>.

Socialism 2013

Saturday November 2, 3pm, Sunday November 3, 10am: Weekend of discussion hosted by Socialist Party in England and Wales (Rally for socialism: November 2, 6.30pm). University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1. Weekend: £30/£15. One day: £15/£8. Rally: £5. Organised by Socialist Party in England and Wales: info@socialistparty.org.uk

Living wage summit

Thursday November 7, 10am to 3.30pm: Conference, town hall, South Shields, Tyne and Wear. Speakers include: Rachel Reeves MP, shadow work and pensions secretary, and Frances O'Grady, TUC general secretary. Organised by Trades Union Congress: www.tuc.org.uk.

Socialist films

Sunday November 10, 11am: Screening, Bolivar Hall, 54 Grafton Way, London W1. Lewis Milestone's *All quiet on the western front* (USA, 130 minutes). Followed by discussion with Tony Benn and Kate Hudson. £10 (concessions £8, members £4). Organised by London Socialist Film Co-op: www.socialistfilm.blogspot.com.

Barnet against austerity

Thursday November 14, 5pm: Conference, Greek Cypriot Centre, 2 Britannia Road, North Finchley, London N12. Speakers include: Kate Hudson (CND), Alex Kenny (NUT), Dr Jacky Davis (Keep Our NHS Public), representatives of Lewisham People Before Profit, Save Barnet NHS. Organised by Barnet Alliance: www.barnetalliance.org.

Justice for Orgreave

Thursday November 14, 1pm: Picket of Independent Police Complaints Commission, Northern Echo, Pioneer House, Woolpack's Yards, Wakefield. One year after referral of South Yorkshire police to IPCC, demand a full inquiry into police brutality against striking miners on June 18 1984. Organised by Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign: <http://otjc.org.uk>.

Refugee justice

Saturday November 16, 10.30am to 4.30pm: Meeting and workshops, Star and Shadow Cinema, Stepney Bank, Newcastle NE1. Free participation and lunch. Donations welcome! Organised by North East Refugee Justice: nerefugeejustice@riseup.net.

Infidel feminism 1830-1914

Thursday November 21, 7pm: Talk, Bishopsgate Institute, 230 Bishopsgate, London EC2. The first in-depth look at a distinctive brand of women's rights emerging out of the Victorian secularist movement. Free admission, but advance booking required. Organised by the Bishopsgate Institute: www.bishopsgate.org.uk.

Labour Representation Committee

Saturday November 23, 10am to 5pm: Annual conference, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Free creche - please book in advance. Organised by the Labour Representation Committee: www.l-r-c.org.uk/shop/#conference.

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

Insiders call leadership to account

Members have finally been presented with a detailed report of the Delta case, reports **Peter Manson**. But it does not make easy reading for the central committee

“We need to understand why defending the party became synonymous with defending the leadership, and in turn with defending M [the Socialist Workers Party’s former national secretary, ‘comrade Delta’]. We need to grasp how it came to pass that internal considerations over the protection of a leading individual and the ‘cohesion’ of the CC ended up overriding our basic political principles.”

This is how former SWP central committee member Hannah Dee begins her contribution to *Pre-conference Bulletin* No2, which can be read via the CPGB website.¹ Since comrade Dee was on the leadership when the rape allegations against ‘M’ broke in 2010 and continued as a CC member until she was removed from the slate by the majority of her comrades before the January 2013 conference, she is in a position to reveal the full, appalling story - and she does not shirk from that task. Her article, entitled ‘A question of leadership’ (pp46-51), is easily the most important to feature in the October *Pre-conference Bulletin* (known as *Internal Bulletin* or *IB*).

Comrade Dee reveals that there were “serious divisions over how we put our principles on oppression into practice. Yet they were never aired in front of the party.” That is because “The minority [on the CC] were effectively gagged in the name of ‘confidentiality’ and ‘collective responsibility’.”

The complaint against M had to be kept covered up at all costs. However, the CC majority was not prepared to sit idly by in response to rumours of the accusation against M: “... a narrative was informally circulated - one that cast aspersions on the motives of the women bringing complaints against M, that impugned the motives of comrades who were critical over the dispute (including the CC minority), and one that talked about the dangerous pull of movementism, feminism, autonomism and so on. This was the basis of an ‘undeclared faction’ that developed over this issue.”

Comrade Dee does not name the members of this CC faction, but later in the bulletin “Jonathan (Oxford)”, who says he was a member of the ‘democracy commission’ set up in 2010 to look into the SWP’s internal shortcomings after the Respect fiasco, identifies them as “Amy [Leather], Jo [Cardwell], Judith [Orr], Mark [Thomas] and Weyman [Bennett]” (only the first names of SWP members are published in the *IB*). Jonathan claims that these five were “prepared to paralyse our party in order to prevent a complaint of sexual harassment getting a fair hearing”.

According to comrade Dee, they “organised around a petition that called for M to be reinstated to the CC slate. This faction continues to exist and continues to operate. One section of it has hardened into a sectarian and conservative rump intent on driving anyone who raises criticisms of the dispute out of the organisation (‘Statement for our Revolutionary Party’, *Bulletin* No1, p20).”

Comrade Dee reminds SWP members that the democracy commission had recommended that “serious political differences” arising on the CC should be put before the membership. However, “These recommendations were never implemented. A key reason for this is that the democracy commission was not combined with honest political accounting of what had gone wrong



Former CC members expose the cover-up

during the Respect period. Now we are repeating exactly the same mistakes.”

This point is also made in the *IB* by the Rebuilding the Party (RP) faction, to which comrade Dee belongs: “It is impossible for the organisation to make an informed decision about the membership of the CC when serious divisions are withheld from the membership - these divisions must be laid out before the party.” And “Ian (Bury and Prestwich)” asks: “How can conference democratically decide on its new CC if comrades have to rely on rumours of where the divisions lie? This is a ‘hollowed out’ democracy without political accountability.”

Yet the new slate of candidates for the CC, to be voted on at the forthcoming conference (December 13-15), “includes current CC members who have resisted even the smallest steps taken to try and correct mistakes,” says comrade Dee. “It even adds an additional comrade, who has been instrumental in organising the undeclared faction in defence of M.”

She openly admits her own part in the cover-up - she chose not to go public when she now says she ought to have done so: “I do not seek to vindicate my role in this crisis. During 2010, I was part of a deeply flawed process which sowed the seeds for what happened later.”

In 2010, an agreement was struck with M whereby he would apologise to “comrade W”, the first woman to complain of sexual harassment against him, for the “distress he had caused her”, and his role on the CC would be “reviewed”. But the national secretary

pre-empted this review by requesting a move to the industrial office - “thus avoiding any formal political sanction at all and misrepresenting the move as a voluntary decision on his part”.

Comrade Dee then recalls the January 2011 conference session to discuss the CC slate, which was introduced by referring to “articles appearing on sectarian websites” that had attacked M: “This meant the whole focus of the discussion centred on defending M’s political record from these attacks, rather than on the serious issue at hand that needed discussion in its own right.” As readers will know, the session ended in a section of the delegates giving M a standing ovation and chanting their support for him.

Comrade Dee refers to this “horrifying spectacle” as a “complete betrayal”. In fact, “M had brazenly broken the agreement that had been made with W”. But the CC minority were told to sit still and shut up: “another CC member challenging that ... would have been seen as a serious breach of CC discipline”.

Official complaint

In 2012, W, having previously resigned from the SWP, decided to rejoin and put in a formal complaint against M (later another woman, ‘comrade X’, was to follow suit). Once again, “from the very start the handling of this complaint was primarily driven by a concern to defend M, and to defend the CC - regardless of any consequences for the woman involved or for the integrity of

the party’s politics on oppression.”

After the complaint was heard by the disputes committee (DC), made up of current and former CC members and others who all knew M personally, it was found to be “not proven”. Comrade Dee states that she and three other CC members - Joseph Choonara, Ray Marral and Mark Bergfeld - pointed to the “inadequacies” of the DC report: “At a minimum we felt it raised questions over M’s conduct (namely, that his conduct was not appropriate for a leading member of the SWP).” But the CC could not agree on a course of action and no vote was taken - “precisely because the CC was divided” - until two days before the January 2013 conference.

Meanwhile, the matter had come up at the November 2012 meeting of the national committee. The NC is “the body tasked by the democracy commission with advising the CC and holding it to account”. Accordingly the CC minority called for the full DC report, together with that of the DC minority (Pat Stack), to be presented to the NC. But the CC majority refused to provide the documents necessary for the NC to hold it to account. By contrast, when Ray Marral “expressed his concerns about the handling of the dispute to an NC member he was publicly censured.”

The four in the minority told their CC comrades that they would not let their names appear on the same CC slate as M for the January 2013 conference, but once more he pre-empted things by announcing that he

would not be standing again. “M’s decision to stand down was formally accepted by the CC,” notes comrade Dee. “But again the reasons for this were never explained or publicly stated. Instead it was presented as a ‘personal decision’, much as his move from national secretary to industrial organiser had been glossed previously.”

In the run-up to the 2013 annual conference, “The official position was that the issue could not be discussed in the pre-conference aggregates due to confidentiality,” writes comrade Dee. However, “At the same time, a narrative was covertly encouraged that suggested those seeking to challenge the disputes committee report were in some way undermining the democratic processes of the SWP, and that this was all part of a wider attack on democratic centralism.”

At one stage it had seemed that the minority were being offered a guarantee that they could remain on the CC “if they agreed to shut up about the dispute”. But comrades Marral and Dee were removed from the slate, on the grounds that there had been a “breakdown of trust”.

In the meantime, the complainants and their witnesses had drawn up proposals for a new disputes procedure in light of the obvious failings they had experienced. But they were prevented from putting them to conference or even writing about them in a *Pre-conference Bulletin*. Nor were they allowed to declare themselves a “reluctant faction” so as to be able to address the membership.

For its part, “The CC minority requested a statement be sent to members explaining our position. This was denied. Instead a response to our proposed statement was circulated to the membership, almost all of whom would not even have seen the original statement.” This was how the majority ‘complied with’ the democracy commission recommendation - subsequently agreed by an SWP conference - about the need to disclose important differences raised on the CC.

Comrade Dee correctly asserts: “All of this should make abundantly clear that the factionalism that has dominated the party’s internal life over the last year started at the top of the party and flowed from attempts to avoid CC members being held to account, or avoid confronting real political disagreements that had emerged over an issue that was clearly going to be a major point of discussion, not only in the party but also in the wider movement. A facade of CC unity was presented to the party. Behind it, those CC members who supported the disputes committee report developed a narrative in defence of M. The minority, in contrast, were effectively gagged under the guise of ‘collective responsibility’ and ‘confidentiality’.”

In conclusion, she states: “A party of leaders in the struggle needs to know what is going on and have the opportunity to debate it. There has to be an end to a ‘not in front of the children’ approach and a culture of trust in the membership.”

Breaking with the usual custom of delaying any response to *IB* contributions until the next bulletin, Alex Callinicos penned a brief reply, which was inserted after comrade Dee’s contribution. Comrade Callinicos began by describing her article as “lengthy, tendentious and self-aggrandising” - the latter accusation, as can be seen from the quotations above, is clearly untrue.

However, according to Callinicos, “she makes two factual claims that require immediate challenge”. The first was that comrade Dee asserted that “in July 2010 I asked her if she ‘had it in for’ M”, whereas in fact he asked that question six months later. Outrageous! The second was in fact not a ‘factual claim’ at all: “Hannah also implies that she believed in 2010 that W had been raped. If that is so, she must explain why she did not communicate this very serious charge to [national secretary] Charlie [Kimber] and me at the time ... and why indeed she remained silent about this belief for the following three years.” Try as I may, I cannot see any such implication in her piece.

The CC also could not resist responding to “Jonathan (Oxford)” - the comrade who had revealed the identities of the CC’s “undeclared faction”. His piece was followed by two curt sentences stating that the CC wished to “robustly contest these accusations”.

Just to rub salt in the wounds of comrades Callinicos and Kimber, another former CC member, Viv Smith, plus two other comrades who, like her, supported both W and X in their complaints, back up comrade Dee by describing exactly how they were treated in a separate contribution.

SWP democracy

The CC majority, however, continues its strategy of impugning ulterior motives to its critics, who they say are using the two DC cases to cover a retreat from ‘Leninism’. However, “these cases, however difficult, *cannot* be the ultimate source of the party crisis”.

The CC takes up the first 20 pages of the *IB* and four articles to do down the opposition and explain away the collective resignation of over 100 comrades, who left to form the International Socialist Network. Just as with Respect and then Counterfire, “the underlying issue in the split was adaptation to movements”. But in the ISN this is “combined now with the attraction of left reformism”.

Both Colin Barker and “Ian (Bury and Prestwich)” reject this. According to Ian, “Reading *IB* No1, it didn’t appear that there is a significant body of opinion in the organisation arguing for abandoning the working class as the agent of change or liquidating the party into the movements.”

Comrade Barker, a supporter of the RP faction, had, by the way, been accused of heresy in *IB* No1 by a comrade who thought that his observation that nowadays there are very few huge factories of the type seen at the beginning of the 20th century “means that the prospects of working class revolution are somehow diminished. He thinks this observation is somehow proof of my ... sliding away from Marxism. What a daft argument!”

But comrade Barker comes out with another ‘heresy’: soviets should not be exclusively based in the workplace. There are, on the one hand, large numbers of people who do not start full-time employment until their 20s; while, on the other, many workers live for decades after their retirement. Therefore, “it hardly seems likely [that students] won’t be involved in new forms of soviet. Pensioners are hardly likely to accept a form of popular democracy based solely on workplaces that excludes them!”

But back to the argument of the CC majority. For it, the complaints of the opposition are groundless: “Far from there being a ‘democratic deficit’ in the party, we have shifted from a situation in which there was quite a low level of debate and discussion, to a situation in which there is a great deal.” What is more, “By December, after three conferences in 2013, it would be difficult to claim that the SWP does not tolerate internal dissent or that we discourage argument. We intend to enter into the pre-conference period and the aggregates in that spirit.”

The CC wants to come over as the epitome of reason - and in this it is aided by the undeclared faction: “There is a substantial layer of comrades,” states the CC, “notably the 100 or so who signed the ‘Statement for our Revolutionary Party’ document in the first *Internal Bulletin*, who believe the central committee has been ‘soft’ in defending the party against the opposition.” However, “Generally speaking, we are not inclined to take disciplinary action where it can be avoided, and nor should we be.”

Nevertheless, after December the opposition’s factionalism that has carried on for a year must end for good: “Nobody will agree with every position taken by the conference [on the DC and SWP perspectives]; some may disagree with most. But every member must be bound by them, like them or not.” In other words, when conference decides once more to uphold the CC line, everyone must cease criticising any aspect of it.

Strangely, the CC quotes Duncan Hallas on the 1968-69 faction fight in the organisation. Comrade Hallas wrote: “Finally, conference decisions were made on the disputed questions. The factions more or less rapidly dissolved. No-one ordered them to dissolve. They dissolved because new issues were arising and new alignments of comrades on those issues. They dissolved precisely because they were genuine factions.”

This seems to me an argument for permitting the operation of factions, not banning them. People come together to try to change things and if they succeed they may well dissolve the faction. It does not sound to me like the paralysis and entrenched, artificial divisions that come with the right to form permanent factions, according to the CC narrative.

But no-one seriously challenges this CC ‘wisdom’. The nearest anyone gets is “John (Oxford)”, who proposes that members should be allowed to set up discussion websites, etc outside the three-month pre-conference period (when temporary factions are permitted): He declares: “Political debate amongst party members is inevitable. It’s what we do, often every time we meet, even in informal situations outside the party’s formal structures, such as branch meetings. We do it because we can think critically and because we think it’s important.” In fact, “Far from condemning web-based discussions, the party should be encouraging it. There is no contradiction between vigorous debate and a united political strategy. Indeed, Lenin defined democratic centralism as ‘freedom of discussion, unity in action’.”

For his part, “Adam (Hackney East)” points out that continuous debate is not the polar opposite of united action: “... for more active, often younger comrades, clearly capable of writing comments to an SWP blog on the bus or the train travelling to a meeting, as well being capable of contributing to it when they arrive, the ‘talking shop’ argument must appear very weak indeed”.

“David (Euston)” locates the “democratic deficit” elsewhere. For example, he claims that one in 40 SWP members are paid full-timers: “A Marxist party which selects its leadership from a cohort of full-time employees is, in practice, going to be run by its staff, not its activists.” Furthermore, “A slate system, where the leadership gets to nominate its replacements, gives the leadership a control over the organisation, and takes decision-making power away from the membership. It rewards loyalty and silence when the leadership errs.”

For David, democracy is “also about what happens in the smallest unit of a party. If its branches have no purpose other than to distribute a series of tasks, which have been drawn up centrally ... then the content of the discussion in that branch will wither.”

Finally, “Democracy is also about a kind of process: a willingness to tolerate a range of dissenting views, the protection of the rights of minorities. It is about something as simple as being able to fairly represent the views of those you disagree with, rather than relying on selective quotation and insults.”

Membership

As part of its counteroffensive, the CC wants to persuade comrades that the recent crisis has been but a minor hiccup. So, in ‘Building the party’, it states: “... the party has far from gone under or stagnated. Indeed we continue to play a central role in the trade unions, in workplace struggles, alongside others in the anti-fascist movement, in many of the bedroom tax groups ...”

Admittedly the membership has gone down by 217 compared to last year, but it still stands at an impressive 7,180. What a joke! But it is quite clear that no-one - not even the most dyed-in-the-wool loyalist - believes such huge exaggerations any more. The CC admits that only 2,147 of those “registered members” - fractionally under 30% - pay regular subs. But even amongst those there are hundreds who are really more like supporters - yes, they make a small, regular donation, but that is all.

The CC argument is that when a recruits fill in a membership form, the SWP must then “seek to win them”: “When they sign a form they are presenting an opportunity, a chance for us to persuade them.” In reality, it is agreeing that such ‘recruits’ are not actually members in any genuine sense. Yet it still wants to continue the pretence.

In *IB* No 1, “Mike (Leeds City Centre)” had informed comrades about the Leeds “re-registration effort earlier this year”. Comrades in Leeds decided to check out each name they had been given by the Vauxhall HQ. Mike reported: “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.”

Mike explained why: “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.”

But in *IB* No2 the CC strongly criticises the action taken by Leeds: “... the district’s efforts have managed to strip more than half the membership off the lists. We don’t believe this is a valid approach ... We should not write off such people. They might change their phone or address and (incredibly!) they fail to notify the SWP national office. We lose touch with them for a while. Should we wipe them from our records?”

Of course you shouldn’t. But pretending they are members is absurd - and the entire SWP knows it. And not just the likes of Ian Birchall, who gives his piece an ironic heading, taken from a Frank Sinatra song: ‘Mistakes? We’ve made a few, but then again too few to mention’. Comrade Birchall says: “When I joined we had 106 members, and I should not be unduly demoralised to learn that the real figure is 1,500 or less.” He adds: “In fact the CC’s attitude to the membership is profoundly insulting. I wonder what new members think when they discover how the CC is ‘protecting’ them from the truth. The CC seems not only unwilling to learn from the membership, but to positively distrust us.”

Several other comrades complain about the inaccuracy of the official lists. “Bobby (Southampton)” says: “I find it very difficult to get names deleted for members who have left

the country, the local branch or the party”; while “Andy (Leicester)” notes that “From a claimed membership of 7,597 last year, only 1,300 members managed to attend the pre-conference district aggregates.”

He continues: “We have moved from a position where all members were expected to pay regular subs and to sell *Socialist Worker* each week to one where individuals who completed a membership form several years ago, but have had no further contact with the SWP, are still considered to be members. This is not just a question of political honesty, but it is having a detrimental effect on inner-party democracy.” As “Ian (Cardiff)” points out, “we allow people to pay nothing and then sit in aggregates and vote.”

Andy estimates that, while there are officially 123 “registered members” in Leicester, in reality there are probably only 25: “These are people who actually pay subs regularly, consider themselves to be members and are involved in some sort of activity (paper sale, branch meeting, etc), at least from time to time.” At least we have here some sort of grasp of what membership of a revolutionary party should entail.

But “Amy (Cambridge)” broadens out the argument: “If we can’t tell the truth within the party about how many members we have, how many students came to Marxism or how many people attended the Tower Hamlets demo then it is impossible to have a rational discussion about these things.

“Honest accounting of the successes and failures of our activity is vital if we are to learn from it and do things better in the future. We’d all like there to have been 1,000 students at Marxism this year, for there to have been 5,000 people on the demonstration [in Tower Hamlets] against the EDL and be in a revolutionary organisation of 7,000 members, but this isn’t the case. If we are serious about making these figures a reality in the future we need to stop pretending they are true now.”

Loyalists

But the leadership can count on an array of loyalists - not to mention the hard-line supporters of Amy Leather’s undeclared ‘Statement for our Revolutionary Party’ faction - to claim that things are really going quite well and the oppositionists are all defeatists, trouble-makers or worse.

Several comrades, including “Terry (Hornsey and Wood Green)”, call for a post-conference purge: “Let us use our conference to debate and discuss how we should move forward, but once we have done so we must act together as a combat party with a united leadership and membership to give the most effective lead we can in the class struggle. There can no longer be a place in the SWP for those who refuse to accept this. They should leave or they must be expelled. Enough is enough.” “Steve (Medway)” writes that all SWP decisions must “be defended by members in all public forums” and that “attacks on the party or individual comrades by party members on social media are unacceptable and must cease immediately”; while “Phil (Bristol South)” claims that oppositionists, including those who have now left, were never really proper SWPers in the first place:

“... the arguments they were putting were not in our tradition, but came from a pic’n’mix selection from the different strands of the feminist movement or were heavily influenced by autonomists and anarchists. In truth many of them were not revolutionary socialists. They have not been missed in our branch - in fact since they have departed we have been able to get on with the job of trying to build the party and involve new people in activity.”

Continuing this theme, eight Leicester comrades allege that oppositionists “became inactive in fighting for party perspectives and actual branch building”. Instead

“attending Left Unity meetings, without discussion with the branch, became their primary activity”.

“Bridget (Kings Heath)” adds: “For every tale of a faction member being persecuted, I can give you a story of faction members vilifying non-faction members. For every member of the faction who has a story of ‘passive card-holders’ being use to swell the numbers of a delegation, I can show you another district where members who do not attend meetings, do not do paper sales and do not take part in any party activity sign up to the faction and become active only around the time of conference.”

For “Gary (Swansea)”, “lack of discipline and accountability online has damaged the party”. He rails against “websites/blogs set up by disgruntled members hiding behind a cloak of anonymity, whose sole purpose has been to damage the party and attack the democratic decisions taken at conference ... the elected CC and individual party members”.

Gary writes: “The internet ... is not a forum for personal attacks, vendettas and pernicious slander of comrades who take positions democratically decided at conference ...” There should be no official discussion forum either, since “Not every comrade has access to a computer”, so “wouldn’t this exempt those from the discussion?” Besides, would a “moderator overseeing discussion” be “the best real use of party resources”? This could only but lead to “the separation from real activity”. A very high standard of debate, isn’t it?

But other loyalists reject such crude arguments in favour of telling us how well everything is going. Comrade Leather’s Manchester district dreamt up the idea of presenting readers of the bulletin with the naive pro-SWP enthusiasm of 12 new recruits. Meanwhile five of their Manchester comrades report (“ironically, given the pessimistic tone of much of the content of *IB* No1”) that their branch can boast “a fantastic year, with a victory against council cuts; a growing and dynamic branch; new members who are politically confident and active in their workplaces; branch initiatives taking the paper into new areas. Our roots are strong and our branch is blooming.”

That is the theme of several other contributions too, so what is all the fuss about? Meanwhile, two students inform us how wonderful things are at Sussex University, where 130 people signed up to the Socialist Worker Student Society at the freshers’ fair: “we have managed to build big meetings, etc with only two active members”.

Honest Weyman

Finally let me end with the complaint made by “Phil (Hornsey and Wood Green)”, who claims that Weyman Bennett, who heads the SWP’s Unite Against Fascism ‘united front’, acted against SWP policy by joining a five-strong delegation from Tower Hamlets which handed in a petition to the home office calling for the English Defence League to be banned from marching in the borough. He was “seen doing so on BBC London news”, even though the SWP is against calling for such bans.

This time it is comrade Bennett who replies. He says: “I was not part of any delegation that went into the home office calling for a ban.” But he does not deny that he was shown on BBC news or explain how he came to be filmed with the delegation. His response leaves SWP members with more questions than answers.

But, there again, such incomplete explications are what we have come to expect from the leadership ●

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Notes

1. www.cpgb.org.uk/assets/files/resources/SWP%20IB2%20-%20October%202013.pdf.

AWL

Matgamna's chauvinistic tirade

Imperialism may not have invented political Islam, writes **Yassamine Mather**, but it has certainly used it to its advantage

A controversy currently rages over the seemingly odd decision of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty to prominently republish an adapted 2006 text by Sean Matgamna on the war on terror, the nature of Islamic fundamentalism and related themes. This *must* have something more behind it than some anodyne hope to spark debate on the left.

Whatever the particular motivation, however, it certainly cannot have anything to do with the quality of the text itself. Much of it is written in the characteristic 'Matgamna mode' of commentary which consists of negative statements about negative things, alongside a pregnant silence when it comes to what he *positively* favours. Where the writing is explicit in its meaning, it has sparked outraged responses on social media outlets from hundreds of people, drawing angry accusations of Islamophobia, racism and pro-imperialism and prompting a number of AWLers to quit the organisation in disgust.

Some of the milder criticism the Matgamna piece has drawn concerns its superficiality and ignorance. As one CPGB comrade commented on an email list, "it is fairly easy to demonstrate that his article is historically illiterate to a quite breathtaking degree, represents a theoretical regression from run-of-the-mill bourgeois area studies on the Muslim world, and is comparable in style, tone, intellectual substance and political conclusions to amateur-hour neo-conservative windbags of the Huntingdon type. Sean would be laughed out of SOAS in any decade of the last century for this garbage."

Quite, but, despite that, some of his arguments are still worthwhile engaging with:

- First, that "The 'war on terror' was not a 'put-up job', an artificially concocted replacement for the old cold war with Stalinist Russia ... to create an external enemy which can be used to bind atomised capitalist society together."

- Second, that "[the west] did not for that purpose invent the upsurge of militant political Islam, or, rather, the emergence of political Islam as a force in international politics ..." So "Neither covert western encouragement nor neocon manipulation" explains the "fundamental root of the luxuriantly thriving Islamic fundamentalism." Instead, "it has other, indigenous, roots."

- Third, that "In the Arab countries, especially, political Islam has expanded to fill the space created by the collapse of Arab nationalism", which imploded "in part ... because it had achieved all it could achieve - the independence of Arab states such as Egypt and Iraq, which were semi-dependencies of Britain until the 1950s."

- Finally, that today's political Islamist movements are the contemporary equivalents of the "desert tribes of primitive Muslim simplicity and purity enviously eyeing a rich and decadent walled city and sharpening their knives, or country folk in former Yugoslavia eyeing a city like Dubrovnik - so now much of the Islamic world looks with envy, covetousness, religious self-righteousness and active hostility on the rich, decadent, infidel-ridden, sexually sinful advanced capitalist societies."

Let us begin, then, with the 'war



No less backward than Jews, Hindus and Christians

against terror' - was there no ideological benefit to capitalism from this? After all, the military logistics do not make much sense - is a "war" involving the hugely powerful imperialist countries of the west, headed by the world's economic and military hegemon, a proportionate response to the *actual* threat that Islamic terror represented? If it was, why has it been dropped since the days of George W Bush and Tony Blair? Has political Islam suddenly gone away?

It is true to say that the effect of binding "atomised capitalist society together" in a collective project of positive defence of rationalism and democracy was never going to be the outcome of such a nebulous project as a 'war on terror'. However, it did 'bind' us all in another sense. It facilitated the speedy passage of legislation allowing unprecedented policing of private lives, correspondence, emails and social media interaction. These 'war' conditions allowed a dramatic potential constriction of the democratic right to protest, to access legal representation when arrested - this has not yet been fully deployed against the mass of the population in countries like the US or the UK, but will it not be used when the left starts to win a mass audience for its message?

Matgamna nods in the direct of this notion when he writes in an aside that this campaign has "in practice [been] very much a war on the civil liberties of ordinary citizens", but overwhelmingly the emphasis he puts on it has the effect of excusing the west. This is underlined when he comments that he rejects the notion that imperialism 'invented' jihadist political Islam and projected it on an international stage to achieve that

cohering effect.

Of course, 'invention' is too strong a term. But it is a fact that every western capitalist policy pursued in the 20th century in the Middle East, North Africa, as well as Afghanistan and Pakistan *has* helped to strength and spread Islamic fundamentalism - not simply through the financing of this or that Islamic group, but through its conscious deployment from the early years of the 20th century as a tool to intervene, conquer and frustrate the democratic impulses of the peoples of the regions.

Iran

The examples of this are legion, but it worthwhile highlighting the case of Iran to illustrate the point.

We can start with the 1905 constitutional revolution. In the summer of 1906, the British got directly involved in the post-revolution constitutional debate - not with the aim of helping to establish 'democracy' in Iran, but as part of geopolitical competition with tsarist Russia. Some 12,000 troops camped out in the gardens of the British embassy with the express purpose of being deployed as supporters of a 'constitutional monarchy'. What indigenous force was their trusted ally in this process? The Shia clergy.

Mass political Islam may have been an accidental by-product of the domination of Iran by the British, but - once 'invented' - it proved indispensable to imperialism during the rule of Mohammad Reza Shah. The 1953 CIA-organised coup saw the west rely on the monarchist, ayatollah Behbahani and a new convert, a former ally of the nationalists, ayatollah Kashani, play a crucial role in the

days prior to the coup and immediately afterwards.² The US and Britain used political Islam as part of preparations for an anti-democratic overthrow that resulted in the illegality of all secular opposition forces in the country and which stymied the possibility of democratic revolutions in the region for generations.

After the coup, with the help of his allies, the US and later Israel, the shah established the most effective and ruthless secret service in the region, the hated Savak. Its barbarous work differentiated amongst the opponents of the new regime - secular forces were arrested and imprisoned; religious opponents were at worst sent into exile; but the left were executed in large numbers. All this was designed to facilitate capitalist development, economic policies from land reform to the widespread introduction of casual work. This in turn strengthened Islamism's grip on wide swathes of society.

Superficially this may seem ironic, but only if, like the philistine Matgamna - you regard this phenomenon simply as some sort of ideological 'living fossil', separate from the main developments that characterise the other, 'modern' world.

The growing, bitter class divide ensured that the secular upper layers of Iranian society were as divorced from the reality of the lives of the majority as if they on the moon. Speaking personally, I was 12 before I realised that my fellow countrymen self-flagellated during Islamic ceremonies. More arresting was the realisation when I was 14 that the overwhelming majority of them despised every aspect of our secular, relatively privileged, 'western' private lives.

From the 1970s onwards, as Islamic societies of the periphery were incorporated ever deeper into the world market, the centre-periphery crisis in these societies entered a new and qualitatively different phase. The fluctuating - but mainly downward - trend in the price of raw materials (including, for most of this period, oil) on which these societies depend, speeded up the widening of inequality in social, economic and cultural development, the accumulation of foreign debt and the increasing inability of such states to control and restrain the spiralling crises they have to confront.

Under such circumstances, the rise of fundamentalism in Iran was unsurprising and a social explosion was obviously building. But, in all honesty, until I had come across Matgamna's piece, I had never read anyone ostensibly on the left of the political spectrum characterising one of the great revolutions of the last century - when ordinary people, the working class and the poor drove a pro-western dictator from power - simply as an *Islamic* uprising. In fact, the Shia clergy and its allies were relative latecomers to the revolution. Their relative advantage was that they had escaped the worst aspects of the repression meted out courtesy of the CIA and Mossad advisers to Savak and were thus far better organised than the left, many of whose activists were in prison until the very last days of the shah's rule. Workers, students, women, national minorities were an important part of the revolutionary movement and with the exception of pro-Soviet groups and a small American Trotskyist organisation, none of them celebrated the victory of the religious counterrevolution in Iran. What the left supported inside and outside Iran was the overthrow of a reactionary, pro-US, pro-Israeli dictator.

So again the US and its allies did not crudely conjure the Iranian Islamic movement out of thin air, but they did facilitate its rise and, when the revolution threatened to go far beyond the removal of the shah, opted for a transfer of power to what it viewed as the not very palatable, but preferable alternative. Even after the Iranian clergy came to power, the US administration did not enforce a strict policy of isolation. Unlike today's Iran-US relations, which have so angered the Israelis, during the Irangate scandal Israel was very much part and parcel of the dodgy deal with the worst elements of the Shia clergy. Sanctions are and were always aimed at punishing ordinary Iranians for daring to overthrow the west's ally.

Middle East and north Africa

As the Ottoman empire was collapsing, France and Britain divided its territory between them before the complete demise of the French mandate and British rule. How did they expand their influence in the region? A twin-track policy, both of which yielded results for the colonial powers.

First, in many Middle Eastern and north African countries, traditional rulers associated with powerful landowning families were replaced by individuals, often newcomers from religious or national minorities. So in mainly Shia countries, a Sunni ruling elite was promoted, making sure the new rulers were obedient servants of

the colonial power and instituting a clear policy of divide and rule, which sowed the seeds for future internecine conflict.

In Egypt the Muslim Brotherhood's inception in the late 1920s can be traced back to the Wahhabis and Saudi funding, long before the historical times referenced by Matgamna. He says: "As the independence of the Arab countries became a substantial reality - in Egypt, after the failure the 1956 British-French-Israeli invasion of Suez to topple the Nasser regime; in Iraq, with the republican revolution of 1958; and so on - Arab nationalism became empty demagoguery in the service of goals that were reactionary (destroying Israel) or unachievable ('Arab unity')."

Now Gamal Nasser is a man hated by Israel and its supporters, mainly because he remains one of the few Arab leaders with any mass following. I have no doubt that, had he stayed in power, he would have fared no better than Ba'athist or other nationalist Arab leaders. However, he is rare amongst Arab leaders as a ruler who took on the Muslim Brotherhood, debated and indeed ridiculed its policies, including their misogynist ideas, to great effect. In fact his period in power coincided with MB's lowest popularity.

The Egyptian MB has clear, direct connections, both financial and political, with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states - all allies of the US. If the US had not switched post-Iraq to a foreign policy of encouraging Sunni Islam as means of weakening the growing Shia influence of Iran, I doubt if the Muslim Brotherhood would have achieved its spectacular electoral successes. In many areas of Egypt, MB clearly bought votes through its web of social and financial support for 'believers' - money was a real factor. Throughout 2011 and 2012 the US administration was perfectly happy to deal with MB in opposition and in government in Egypt. The MB's state-controlled media were a bountiful source of propaganda for Islamic ideas worldwide - all of this is hard to lay at the door of "primitive Muslim simplicity".

I always opposed the invasion of Afghanistan by Soviet troops - as if 'socialism' could be delivered by tanks. However, blaming the Soviet Union for the rise of jihadism is a bit rich. Even before the fall of Davood Khan and the coming to power of the pro-Soviet Khalq - ie, before the Soviet invasion - the US and its allies were financing the most dubious Islamic forces via Saudi Arabia. Later on, the CIA did not just sponsor the jihadists: it facilitated the recruitment and transfer of fighters to Afghanistan, and supplied them with heavy artillery, including surface-to-air missiles.

The result was a jihadist victory, an event that has played a defining role for many Islamists, who now prosecute their holy war under the illusion that they had single-handedly defeated a superpower, the USSR. In their minds even a global caliphate is therefore possible. This illusion *directly results* from imperialism's strategy of creating a 'green' (ie, Islamic) belt around the Soviet Union. A strategy conceived of as a bulwark against secular, leftwing and progressive forces - 'democracy' never came into it.

'Primitive tribes'

Matgamna's comparison of "desert tribes of primitive Muslim simplicity and purity enviously eyeing a rich and decadent walled city and sharpening their knives" with contemporary political Islam is not simply chauvinistically offensive: it is oddly reminiscent of passages one might have read in a mid-19th century history text book, possibly taught in a (second-rate) public school.

The overwhelming consensus of all informed commentators who have written or spoken about political Islam

in the last few decades is that it is a thoroughly *modern* phenomenon, a creation of contemporary capitalism. Indeed, even those who do talk of 'envy' of the west being one of its motivating factors - authors such as French sociologist Olivier Roy - propose a far more complicated analysis than the blood-curdling siege scenes Matgamna paints.

It is actually pretty much a consensus view that the current form Islamist movements take is linked to the global economic relations that have developed over the last three decades. The support for political Islamic movements is, essentially, derived from the uprooted - those who, for a variety of reasons, have been waylaid on the path of socio-economic development and to whom the new structures have brought nothing but ruin. At every level the new Islamism represents the rising not only of those who are alienated within their own national boundaries, but also of those who think they have discovered the source of their destitution and bankruptcy outside those boundaries.

The growing crisis and steady weakening of national governments increased the intervention of global capital in the internal affairs of Islamic countries. This process reached the point where the economic ministries of many such countries turned into fronts for the decision-making centres of global capital, bowing to the traumatic, crisis-provoking restructuring of socio-political life and presiding over policies that caused massive unemployment and attendant despair. Chronic inflation ravaged meagre savings, acute housing shortages led to running battles between the guardians of cities and never-ending waves of migrants, and the ravaging of healthcare facilities effectively transformed hospitals into morgues.

The savage demands of the International Monetary Fund and the credit limitations imposed by the World Bank forced peripheral governments to turn on their own people. What little remained of state largesse dried up; millions were made destitute, unprotected against misery, hunger and disease. These were the people who carried Egyptian, Tunisian, Moroccan and Algerian pan-Islamism on their shoulders. So the rise of political Islam is actually intertwined with global capital and neoliberalism. It is a child of our time and a product of the ruinous impact of advanced capitalism in the Islamic societies of the periphery.

Radical Islam is a reaction to the effects of particular forms of modernisation, not to modernisation *per se*. This is not a trivial difference with the likes of the chauvinist, Matgamna. For one thing, understanding this profoundly affects the strategies needed to overcome Islamism. This movement is not at its core a response to the modern state, modern culture or the separation of religion and state, but rather to mass unemployment, destitution and hopelessness brought about by the modern state under global capital. It is not so much a reaction to the essence of modernism, but to the ravages of advanced capitalism. Those thrown onto the rubbish heap of history claw at the nearest available ideology at a time when liberalism, nationalism and known forms of socialism are all discredited to one extent or another.

There is no alternative for confronting the pan-Islamist movement to the formulation of a radical revolutionary programme, the development of a coherent political platform and a thorough overhaul of the left's own system of beliefs and ideas about organisation.

While advanced capitalism is polarising the world into extremes of affluence and poverty that now transcend geographical boundaries, one can only talk of an economic programme that challenges capitalism

at every level. This means confronting the 'structural adjustment' policies of the IMF and the World Bank, which are bringing about destitution. It is on this ground that the left must distinguish itself from the liberals who also seek to woo the masses from radical Islam. Key sections of the economy need to be in public control (which is not necessarily the same as state control). This the most suitable form within which the labour force can be directly involved in production. The producers must control the means of production not just in legal, but in real political and practical, terms. These and other economic policies are crucial if the left is to unite with, and mobilise its main social base, the downtrodden. Only with a radical programme addressing the root cause of mass destitution can the left attract its natural class allies away from the clutches of Islamic fundamentalism.

The Islamic movement has filled a vacuum created by the ideological feebleness of the two main social classes - the indigenous bourgeoisie and the working class - and we must confront the fact that the left, as it exists in these countries today, is singularly ill-equipped to lead the implementation of the programme outlined above. The challenge is enormous, but I am certain of one thing: insulting and demonising Islam is not a solution.

Applying a category of "primitive Muslim simplicity" either to the Islamic societies of the past or to the thoroughly modern phenomenon of political Islam implies some sort of genetic deficiency amongst Muslims - almost an organic inability to understand or accept 'democracy'. The reality is that the lack of democratic experience of the masses is a direct consequence of decades of imperialist intervention - direct and indirect - and the continuing subordination of these countries to the interests of the US and its allies.

And here lies the AWL's main problem. In defence of Matgamna's 2006 article, it claims: "The AWL has closer links than any other socialist organisation in Britain with socialists in Iran, Kurdistan and Iraq." I will leave their links with the Iranian and the Kurdish left for another time. However, as far as Iraq is concerned, we all remember the AWL's effective support for the continued occupation of this country after the 2003 invasion. It argued against the immediate withdrawal of British (and US) troops as being likely to weaken the workers' movement - Clive Bradley suggested that campaigning for 'Troops out now' would involve at least temporary tactical common action in Britain with advocates of an Islamist clerical-reactionary regime in Iraq! Of course, the Baghdad regime installed by the US itself ended up as an Islamist clerical-reactionary regime.

Other AWLers argued that the immediate withdrawal of British and US troops would result in the Islamists massacring the workers' movement. As it turned out, it was the US-installed Shia occupation government that took on this task. The US, UK and imperialism in general may not have *invented* political Islam - to borrow Matgamna's weasel words - but they have promoted it from its inception, allied with it, materially and financially supported it and were happy to help deploy it in murderous assaults on the workers' movement in the countries of the Middle East and beyond.

So, Sean, for all your blood-curdling, Islamophobic claptrap - what side are you *actually* on? ●

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Notes

10. All Matgamna quotes from www.workersliberty.org/story/2013/10/04/political-islam-christian-fundamentalism-marxism-and-left-today-0.
20. www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB435.

Siege mentality

Conference is where political differences should be debated out. Paul Demarty reports on an exception

Given the all-round hoo-ha the republication of Sean Matgamna's atrocious article on religion provoked, it was perhaps inevitable that there would be blow-back within the Alliance for Workers' Liberty itself.

So far, the organisation has definitely lost one comrade as a result - Matt Hale, also a member of the International Socialist Network, was only in the AWL for a couple of months, and his departure will not cause any real pain, although recruiting him was a loudly trumpeted coup.

Comrade Hale was not the only member perturbed by formulations which, even with the most extreme charity, one must call delusional. Others, alas, are not quite so charitable. "This article is racist," writes Chris Marks, in the opening post of an email thread on the AWL's internal list that runs to some 30,000 words in total. As often with email threads of this nature, the arguments are at once circular and tend to spin off on tangents. What was obviously and direly necessary was a forthright debate - in person - between the AWL majority and a small but significant minority.

How fortunate, then, that the AWL's conference was coming up! Such, presumably, was the thought process of comrade Patrick Smith, who tabled an emergency motion calling on the AWL to distance itself from and apologise for the article. People higher up in his own organisation, let us say, did not see things that way. For over a week, comrade Smith was put under all kinds of pressure to withdraw the motion; long phone calls ensued. At one point, he discovered that his branch secretary had told AWL centre that he *had* withdrawn the motion; at another, it was conveniently 'discovered' that his dues were in arrears.

Presumably drawing on his experience of cracking heads with Labour Party bureaucrats, Smith faced all this down, only to be asked to appear at conference a full 90 minutes prior to registration, to find himself cornered by an irate pairing of Martin Thomas and Paul Hampton - the lawyer and the oaf - who barracked him until others began to arrive.

Having failed to secure the desired withdrawal, there then ensued that most dispiriting kind of debate - to decide whether or not the motion would be taken. Under no circumstances, supposedly, was anyone to speak as to the *content* of the motion; but this idiotic ruling was promptly transgressed by Thomas, at which point the meeting descended into a cacophony of protest and counter-protest. In the end, two thirds voted *not* to discuss comrade Smith's proposal.

That is a pretty serious level of tetchiness about one little motion (which, presumably, would have been defeated anyway). The question imposes itself: *why* is the AWL leadership so concerned to avoid debating a position it has itself thrust, for reasons unknown, back into the spotlight?

Perhaps it is because its defences are so lame. Take the professionally obnoxious Mark Osborn, the AWL's own Amy Leather. His first words on the email comment thread are straight out of the Osborn playbook

(and true as far as they go): "It is not a Marxist response to read something on Facebook and shit one's pants."

In any case, he thinks Sean is absolutely on the money about Islamists being "primitive". "One thing struck me during an old documentary about the Taliban: their leadership was sat around in a circle on the floor when someone explained the function of a gynaecologist to them; they started giggling like little children. These people are deeply, deeply backward." Is 'I saw it on the telly' a "Marxist response", Mark?

A more serious answer to the question is suggested by his contribution in the pseudo-debate at conference, which can be paraphrased thus: if somebody calls an article in the paper racist, you do not read the article. Instead, you roll it up and hit your interlocutor with it. Like the Viennese of the 16th century, the AWL (if you believe its leaders) is constantly under siege. It is through this mentality, rather than political argument, that it coheres its members.

Beyond that, it has to be said that not much coheres the AWL at all. An anecdote, from earlier this year, bears repeating here. The AWL is not the only besieged force on the British left these days; it is in the handsome company of the Socialist Workers Party. At the latter's Marxism festival, the co-hosts at the University of London Union issued a statement condemning their visitors as rape apologists, strongly implying that they would cancel the booking if they had the power (which, fortunately, they do not).

The instinctive reaction of many - including myself, and colleagues on this paper - was to smell the AWL's hand in this. Even after the AWL issued a statement to the contrary, we were left with the history of similar underhand tactics on the part of the group, and the fact that one AWL comrade, Dan Cooper, is on the ULU leadership, while a close supporter (Michael Chessum) is its president.

It turns out that we were wrong; that Cooper was outvoted, and the AWL's core was thoroughly embarrassed by the whole business. Yet restoring order was hardly unproblematic. A good many AWL members were sympathetic to the bureaucratic feminist arguments for boycotting the SWP in this manner; leading AWLers had to expend a lot of effort whipping their charges into line.

The AWL is structured according to the classic Dime bar advert - soft on the outside, hard on the inside. Leading members, like Sean Matgamna, Mark Osborn and Martin Thomas, are hardened sectarian warriors, who have turned over almost every organisation on the British left at least once. Their principal recruiting ground, however, is among students, who are recruited on - if anything - an even softer basis than the SWP. The AWL is particularly soft on the feminism that quietly breeds in NUS women's campaigns, and the infrequent glances I have had into the AWL's internal debates reveal conclusively that this brittle mindset is common among its younger members. Its tilt towards 'inclusivity' in language coexists, then, unevenly with the diatribes of a sectarian as hidebound as Mark Osborn ●

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OUR HISTORY

Across nations and issues

As Black History Month closes, **Mike Belbin** argues that black feminist communist Claudia Jones (1915-64) is only too relevant to today

How do we draw lessons from someone else's experience? We can recognise courage and intelligence when we see them, but, as Lenin said, truth is concrete. Other people's experience is not ours and we can be all too aware of the limitation of their perspectives, especially that of political activists in the past. Then again sometimes we may wish we were them, as that past can often seem much simpler than our own conjuncture. So are we left with appreciating activists in the past, either with general respect ('a great fighter in their time') or political nostalgia ('they had a real working class in those days')?

Who was Claudia Jones? Most who remember her will know her as someone who helped set up the Notting Hill Carnival. Others will know her as a black feminist (before black feminism became a university subject) and some may even remember her work for the Communist Party, in the US and UK. Online she is one of the '100 great black Britons', described as a black nationalist and fighting for equal rights.¹ Still others, like myself, did not know of her (I was told about her by a black colleague).

How many though will be fully aware of her life - her journalism and activism, her participation in a diversity of struggles, across nations and issues? Claudia Jones was an activist and journalist, a feminist and communist, an anti-racist and anti-imperialist. She was all of those and more - she does not in fact need a special month to justify writing about her (the current organisers of Black History Month might even find her a little too 'political' and 'negative' for these mollifying times).

The key themes of her life, and of her example as an activist, are the *neglect, location and integration* of diverse, connected struggles. She acted where she found herself, often not by choice. She was born in Trinidad, went as a child migrant to the United States, was a member of the Communist Party USA as a teenager, was imprisoned (which damaged her health) and was then deported to the UK, where she played a major part in setting up a newspaper, running organisations and, yes, starting the Notting Hill Carnival - still the highest-profile Caribbean cultural event in Britain.

She has been rightly claimed as an early theorist of the 'sex-race-class' perspective, but she never divorced this from a struggle for the realisation of a new communist society. As a woman born in the Caribbean, she was always conscious that sexism and racism are part of modernity - this post-slavery world in which economies, industries and ideologies have their origin in the huge European slave trade and its consequences. Furthermore, she was always ready not only to fight for communism, but to criticise and improve its theory and practice. She was an activist of the concrete, of the particular moment and the specific place, while consistently theorising her work and experience in a global context.

The example of her life shows us that we should not be afraid that we are in the wrong place in a bad time, with the 'wrong' sort of working class, so that the only thing we can do is concentrate on some single issue (like 'smashing the glass ceiling') to the neglect of others. She did not accept class-conservatism in feminists or sexism in anti-racists. In her approach, the struggles of modernity were conducted against a multiplicity



Black unity in the class struggle

of oppressions and required a diversity of fronts.

Black Marxist in America

Claudia Jones was born in 1915 to Bertrand and Sybil Cumberbatch in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad. The abolition of slavery in the 19th century meant that ex-slaves either continued on the sugar plantations or found some other scarce means of getting a living. After World War I, unemployment in the islands soared and by the 1920s Trinidad saw the growth of workers' organisations and the Garvey 'Back to Africa' movement.

The Cumberbatch family, however, emigrated to the US and in 1924 Claudia began living in Harlem, New York. She attended Wadleigh High School, where she studied drama, a subject that might have helped her confidence in speaking and writing, as well as her understanding of people. In 1932 Claudia's living conditions led to her contracting tuberculosis, which grew worse later in life (in 1933 her mother, Sybil, died of spinal meningitis). Despite winning awards at school, Claudia was unable to go to college, but worked in a laundry and as a salesperson, though only in Harlem. She could have become a resentful, but mainly unheard, black worker, but her interest in politics led her to start writing for a newspaper and to discovering Marxism.

In 1936 she joined the CPUSA and became a member of the Young Communist League. She soon rose to become editor of the *Weekly Review* and from 1945 acted as 'negro affairs' editor of the *Daily Worker*. After the war she became secretary for the women's commission of the CPUSA. In 1948 she was arrested under the US Immigration Act, because she was still registered as a Trinidadian and was therefore an 'alien'. She was freed on bail - just in time to speak at a May Day rally. However, the federal state was already making moves to deport her. In the meantime, the CPUSA had assigned Claudia to address working

class women about peace and equality and she went on a speaking tour of the states.

The party was then doing work among African-Americans, but with an emphasis very much on campaigning against segregation and for equal rights - a liberal cause, but a necessary one. Claudia, however, returned from her speaking tour and wrote an article on the situation of one neglected section of the whole exploited class: black women house workers, or 'domestics'. Had she surrendered to a single issue?

In 'An end to the neglect of the problems of negro women!' (*Political Affairs* June 1949), she speaks about a particular oppressed section of society, but not in a charitable or isolating way. She stresses that the black woman is feared by the bourgeoisie - "and for good reason. The capitalists know far better than many progressives that once negro women undertake action, the militancy of the whole negro people, and thus of the anti-imperialist coalition, is greatly enhanced."²

'Domestics', female house servants, are her main focus: a neglected, non-traditional fragment of the working class. But she also argues that they have the potential for being the most radical because of their superexploitation - they are underpaid and low paid. Furthermore, the superexploitation of black women is based not only in that they receive as women less than equal pay for equal work with men, but in the fact that the majority of black women got less than half the pay of white women. The location of these women within the pay scale meant that employers could pay others that bit more and so helped prevent the more 'advantaged' workers from recognising that they were being exploited too. This differential was not merely an insult to the colonised and discriminated against: it was a means of keeping the better paid happier and in their place. Black women were also 'triply oppressed' in being exploited in their own homes as well as other people's, while being discriminated against outside as blacks.

Jones also draws attention to the

personal - many liberals who protested at segregation drew the line, she says, when it came to social intercourse between black and white. Lastly, she calls for a struggle to fight for the full equality of black working women "with the support of white workers". She is not then just talking about the equal rights of a minority with regard to wages. She also targets the attitudes that accompany and reinforce this sliding scale of exploitation. She writes:

The responsibility for overcoming these special forms of white chauvinism rests, not with the 'subjectivity' of Negro women as it is often put, but squarely on the shoulders of white men and white women. Negro men have a responsibility particularly in relation to rooting out attitudes of male superiority as regards women in general.³

On the very first page of the article in which she wrote the above, she identifies another part of the problem:

This neglect has too long permeated the ranks of the labour movement. The most serious assessment of these shortcomings, by progressives, especially by Marxist-Leninists, is vitally necessary if we are to help accelerate the development and integrate negro women in the progressive and labour movement in our own party.⁴

Here Claudia Jones is one of the first to identify the 'links'. As someone with her own link to the Caribbean, she knew that capitalism may not have invented slavery or sexism, but had reinforced them in its own particular way. Post-slavery societies inherited a degradation of the black person which is qualitatively different from previous ways of characterising 'the other', and this was further reinforced by post-slavery colonialism. From the Middle Ages, the figure of the Turk was seen as following a different religion and culture, but as an enemy. The French and Germans were rivals. The Jew

was an 'outsider', but operated inside various levels of society and was therefore perceived as a 'risk' for this reason by anti-Semites. On the other hand, the slave and colonised African was a child - unruly, wild, without education: that is, not even educated in the 'wrong way'.

When Claudia Jones wrote her article on black women workers, it was not a call for pity, but for recognition. We may think we no longer have need of such a call, but we can cultivate the sense that neglected sections may still exist (not just 'domestics', but the low-paid) and that relations with the rest of the exploited might not be ones of simple unity. To point out degrees of exploitation is not to deny the oppression of the class in general: in the act of bringing this to the attention of progressives, Claudia Jones was committed to integration into the general struggle, practically and theoretically. This is not 'single-issue' politics.

Deported over free speech

As an 'alien', Claudia Jones was particularly liable to harassment and worse. She was arrested three times by the American federal state in response to her speaking and writing: that is, she was detained in order to limit her freedom of speech and victimise her over her non-citizenship - contrary to two of the supposedly most American of values: freedom of opinion and acceptance of immigrants.

In 1948 she was held under the 1918 Immigration Act and during 1950 she was further arrested under the McCarran (Internal Security) Act. At this time she was also served with a deportation order. In 1951 she and 16 other communists were arrested under the Smith Act, which was a relatively recent law (1940). This act stated that it was illegal to "advocate, abet, advise or teach the duty, necessity... of overthrowing or destroying any government of the United States by force or violence ... to print, publish, edit, issue, circulate, sell, distribute ... any written or printed material advocating [such an] overthrow..."

The US government may indeed have faced a few spies in the forthcoming war: that is, agents secretly informing enemy powers of the size of warships and so on. But in its actual operation this was a law about speech in public: in other words, free speech. It might just be applicable to someone visiting the White House and shouting, 'Shoot president Roosevelt now'. It was not supposed to apply to people who were pointing out the iniquities of the system and the state.

Claudia Jones never ever made a secret of her politics: she never 'took the fifth', claiming she need not answer prying questions about her beliefs under the constitution. In answering such questions, she made reference to Marxism and communism. In one of her hearings in 1953, she told the court: "One need only be a negro in America to know that for the crime of being a negro we are daily convicted by a government which denies us elementary democratic rights, the right to vote, to hold office, to hold judgeships, to serve on juries - rights forcibly denied in the south and also in the north."

1953 saw her convicted under the Smith Act, though she was hospitalised instead of being imprisoned immediately. Her ill-health had already been aggravated by previous

imprisonment; in 1951 while in prison she had suffered her first heart attack.

While she was being held on Ellis Island, she wrote several poems, one of which refers to “welcome shafts of light coming through the seams” of the wall. It continues:

Ere as I write bright rays peep through
Their fiercer power pierce this dew
Strength born of atoms held at bay?
Simulation of men’s will to cast
all doubt away⁵

Here, any sign of the sun (in other poems, trees and the ocean) encourages her resolve, as if nature is reminding her of the strength and recuperative powers of physical being and the human will. This thought process suggests that even a Claudia Jones might have occasionally been weary and self-doubting.

She also wrote poems about women friends and comrades: ‘For Consuela - anti-fascista’, about Puerto Rican activist Bianca Canales Torresola, and wrote about Elizabeth Gurley Flynn an Irish American communist who worked with Claudia and was imprisoned with her.⁶

In 1955 Claudia was imprisoned again, this time in the Women’s Penitentiary at Alderson, West Virginia, a prison that had recently held the musician Billie Holiday. The over-salted food served to Claudia meant she suffered another relapse and a widespread campaign was started to free her with a petition calling for her to be released on health grounds.

Her deportation was subsequently ordered on December 5 and she left for London on December 9. There was some suggestion that she might be sent to Trinidad, but the colonial governor denied her entry. She arrived in Britain on December 22 1955.

During 1956 Claudia was hospitalised in London for three months, but lost no time in affiliating with Caribbean members of the Communist Party of Great Britain. She found, however, the ‘official communist’ hierarchy of the day too bureaucratic and began to work with various other organisations in London.

United front

In 1958 she set up *The West Indian Gazette and Afro-Asian Caribbean News* with herself as editor. From 1958 to 1964 she was active in the political organising of Caribbean, pan-African and third-world communities in London.

Did she then swap Marxism for nationalism? To answer this it is worth looking at an article published just before her death in the magazine *Freedomways* (summer, 1964), entitled ‘The Caribbean community in Britain’. At that time, the situation of Afro-Caribbeans was a neglected subject - except perhaps in relation to a perception of individual male migrants, who had chosen to come to this country and were seen as having a hard time at the hands of a few bigoted landlords. Not only does she consider the position of Caribbean people in Britain, but she locates it in the general relations of migration, relating it first to where the people are coming from and proposing that it is “a stop-gap measure to ease the growing frustrations in a largely impoverished agricultural economy”.

The pull added to the push was, of course, that Britain after World War II needed cheap labour to fill semi-skilled and non-skilled vacancies, in the expanded public services and rebuilding programmes of the new welfare state. In 1962 in reaction to rightwing agitation, the government brought in the Commonwealth Immigration Act. This was designed to discriminate against Commonwealth citizens, for whom it introduced a

voucher system. Just enough migrants of colour would allowed in to take up the increased number of low-paid jobs, so as not to irritate the racists too much. White professionals leaving Britain to take up work in other countries (often twice as many as the migrants coming in) did not face such discrimination.

The whole issue exposed and reinforced divisions between UK and colonised workers - conditions, Claudia Jones says, which “have delayed fundamental social change in Britain”. She is quite clear that racism, the categorising of people into a general degraded class, is a force for the exploitation of colonised peoples and results in the division of the working class. This inheritance from the empire need not be something conspiratorially promoted, but just an ethos taken for granted and encouraged by its coincidence with other attitudes of superiority, such as class, nationalism and sexism.

Claudia, however, poses a future that need not be all gloomy. The migrant workers may well bring a new fire to the struggles for peace, trades unionism, democracy and social change, as well as the growth of new institutions, like her own newspaper. One call she makes, however, is for the avoidance of any subdivision of West Indians into different island nationalisms - Jamaicans, Trinidadians, etc. Caribbeans must be acquainted with their own whole history; her other aim, besides unity in the UK, being a united socialist federation of islands in the Caribbean itself. A demand similar to the one for a United Socialist Europe.

Caribbean festival

In 1958 a riot took place in Notting Hill, an area full of run-down Victorian houses rented out expensively to Caribbean families. That August there had already been attacks on black people in this area and in Nottingham. On August 29, a Swedish woman was arguing with her black husband near Latimer Road tube station. Some white people tried to intervene and a fight broke out. The woman was later attacked by white youths and called a “black man’s trollop”.

Later that night 300-400 white people came into the area and picked on any black person they could find, while attacking houses with black residents. The rioting continued nightly until September 5. The police were accused by many residents of not taking the attacks seriously. In 2002, files were released showing that senior police officers told the home secretary of the day, RAB Butler, that the riots had little or no racist motivation. The denial of serious racism in Britain is an old tradition.

The following year, in response, Claudia Jones and others set up a ‘Caribbean Carnival’, to be held in winter to coincide with the carnival in Trinidad. This first festival of music and celebration took place inside St Pancras Town Hall. The primary focus, as far as Claudia Jones was concerned, was to counter the chilling and disintegrating fear left after the riots. It would be a festival of West Indian culture, another occasion for unity. In the original souvenir brochure, she writes: “A pride in being West Indian is undoubtedly at the root of this unity ... It is true to say that pride extends not only to what West Indians have proudly established in the culture of the Caribbean, but to the treasury of world culture.” She goes on to mention the space exploration programme (with no national prefix), pointing out that this is all part of our “multi-racial culture [which] should be the fount, helping the universal quest to turn the instruments of science everywhere for the good of mankind”. (Would she now be connecting the struggle for an open internet with people’s equality everywhere?)

After her death, it was agreed that the carnival should be moved to the

summer, to the August bank holiday weekend. Caribbean consciousness had been raised and celebrated; now the festival would take a more outdoor form, such as the procession of steel bands around the streets of Notting Hill. It opened up the occasion to a more mixed public, creating an intoxicating weekend - non-royalist and focussed on Caribbean culture, but definitely a London event, with up to a million people attending each year. After 1975 - the largest yet - there were loud calls for a crackdown on crime at the event which led to ‘over-policing’ in 1976 (as if pickpockets never mingled with crowds at a royal wedding, on the tube or in Oxford Street). A state of tension was created - this author was himself barged by a line of eighty police officers while walking with a mixed-race friend.

On the bank holiday Monday, rioting broke out against the overbearing police presence. Let me observe that after it all kicked off someone did try to lift my wallet, but he was so obvious that I managed to catch his hand going into the inside of my jacket. The crowd around us, meanwhile, were more interested in when we should take to our heels in response to the police charging towards us with dustbin lids and batons.

The Notting Hill Carnival led to other carnivals in Britain, and even if the North London event has become much more corporate in recent years (like rock festivals) Notting Hill still represents the contribution of another culture to the European scene. The original idea was to promote a festival of involvement - of music, costume, dancing and simple social solidarity - first for people from the Caribbean and then in the streets for anyone. Such a festival is not unlike the sort of art envisioned by those Paris avant-gardists, the situationists, at around the same time. Concerned that citizens in modern western capitalism were more and more becoming mere spectators, whether in museums or cinemas, they called for an art of greater involvement. ‘Against the spectacle’, their first manifesto, declared: “... the realised situationist culture introduces total participation. Against preserved art, it is the organisation of the directly lived moment” (Guy Debord, May 17 1960). And don’t forget to *jump up* while you’re there.

Unity for all

Claudia Jones saw West Indian or indeed pan-African unity as a necessary step in her era. In this she was close to another Trinidadian, though a Trotskyist, CLR James, who also believed then in a ‘black international’, if it was not separate from class struggle.

Unlike James, Claudia Jones never renounced the CP, though she increasingly took her distance from it in London. She visited women’s groups in the Soviet Union and went to China, where she was photographed in a group beside Mao. She went to Trinidad and Tobago and she spoke in Japan. In her book on Jones, Carole Boyce Davies comments on Claudia’s relationship to James: “Even though CLR James, a Trotskyist, argued for self-determination [that is, national liberation] and pan-Africanism [unity of all those of African descent], he also upheld proletarian internationalism; it is therefore entirely consistent that James and Jones, even given their differences over Trotsky and Stalin, were on the same page when it came to the black international.”⁷ Both Jones and James showed that promoting the self-consciousness of a section does not mean neglecting the location of that section within a necessary general movement. As Claudia Jones showed, you cannot separate these struggles.

One of her last public appearances in Britain was a brief filmed interview for BBC TV news in 1964. She was asked about the Commonwealth Immigrant Act in these terms: “There was a great deal of ill feeling about this act when it was introduced. Has this ill-feeling among West Indians died down?” Instead of

just commenting as a ‘representative’ of black British or West Indian “feeling”, Claudia replies:

What is important now is not so much the feeling directed against the act as such ... but the consequences of the act: namely, the fact that the population at large, because of the whole propaganda against the West Indians, regard them as second-class citizens, and they themselves, on the job and in virtually every sphere of life, find this difficulty since the Immigration Act in terms of discrimination, colour bar, housing, etc, etc.”

That is known as making the links.

Not the end

In the year she died, 1964, Claudia Jones met Martin Luther King, who was on his way through London to collect his Nobel prize. Afterwards she penned an editorial for *The West Indian Gazette*, the last thing she would write, which was published posthumously.

She refers to the parallels many at the time were making between black-white relations in the UK and the US: “We can agree that there is enough that is similar from which to draw important lessons. One such lesson is the necessity to uphold a principled stand on every issue of discrimination ...”⁸ A lesson in drawing lessons.

She goes on, however, to discuss the warning that some people were making about the development of ‘ghettos’ in British cities. She points out that this often accompanies “an attempt to divert the concern from the spawners of racialism and racialism itself onto the heads of Commonwealth citizens from Asia, Africa and the West Indies ...”

The same trick of *diverting the concern* (or shifting the blame) is, of course, a favoured technique today. Black and recently Muslim communities are said to ‘huddle together’ in self-created, separate areas - enclaves. Though they are often mixed in with the general poor, what is also ignored and neglected is that housing discrimination, as recently exposed, is still rife (even if they are middle class, when people from those minorities pursue better housing some estate agents put the price up when they walk in). Just as teachers (and working class parents) are blamed for underachieving children in education, instead of resource-starved schools and class disadvantage, the discriminated-against are blamed for their separation from society.

As Claudia Jones puts it at the end of her last editorial:

This is why Dr Martin Luther King’s answer had to be a dual one: namely the necessity of all decent Britons to challenge every case of racial discrimination and for the Commonwealth citizens to organise and unite - the better to challenge the disabilities confronting us.⁹

She always posed it as a united strategy of distinct groups, one that we might well apply to a coalition of the Marxist left.

On December 25 1964, Claudia Jones died of heart failure and was cremated at Golders Green Crematorium. The funeral drew recognition from around the world. Singer, actor and activist Paul Robeson sent a message and a memorial meeting was held in Beijing by the Committee of British and American Friends of Claudia Jones. The National Union of Journalists still holds an annual Claudia Jones Memorial Lecture every October.¹⁰

Her grave in Highgate cemetery lies alongside and “to the left of” Karl Marx. A flat headstone was later added. It read: “Claudia Vera Jones. Born Trinidad 1915. Died London 25.12.64. Valiant fighter against racism and imperialism, who dedicated her

life to the progress of socialism and the liberation of her own black people.”

What example, what lessons?

What can we learn from this woman in the past of our modernity?

Others, such as Carol Boyce Davies and bell hooks - she insists on presenting her name in lower case - have continued her struggle against not just a racial or racist enemy, but an imperialist patriarchy. In 2008, Boyce Davies in her book on Claudia Jones *Left of Karl Marx*, comments on global capitalism: “What is produced is not just the material conditions we live under, but also the very conception of what it is to be human. Claudia in many ways struggled with the very challenge to her humanity.”¹¹

It is quite clear from her life that Claudia Jones never gave in to seeing herself simply as a victim. Whether she got her confidence from being a Trinidadian rather than a ‘downgraded’ (black) American or absorbed it at school and in her home or even from Marxism’s global perspective, she rejected the self-hating option of seeing white people as responsible for everything she was. As bell hooks has written more recently, “Significantly, the black folks who see themselves as always and only victims are as deluded as those black folks who insist that black people are not victimised by ongoing racist assault on all fronts.”¹²

The human being, in going beyond the mainly instinctive animal state into the history of creating technologies (like fire), social institutions and mythologies in order to survive and seek happiness, is always in danger of being dominated by previously constructed forms and notions that do not actually benefit all of us much of the time. Claudia Jones’s efforts to locate, unify and create a better future was a struggle to be a more conscious human being.

She was poor, stateless, sick. She was imprisoned, deported, ignored. She was probably not optimistic all the time, but she never ceased to locate exploitations and oppressions in relation to each other. She was supported by many others (I wish I had time to name and celebrate them all), though like so many black women she was either entirely forgotten or had her full contribution obscured. We need to remember that she was not sectional or sectarian, but neither did she ignore still-existing divisions: she brought up neglected subjects and related them to existing structures and knowledge.

She was no great leader to whom we must build a new temple: it is up to us to find whatever was useful in her words and her example, and apply it to our situation. She was transnational, international: she believed the answer was a new society ●

Dedicated to Dawna, who, among her other achievements in life, made Claudia Jones known to me.

Notes

1. www.100greatblackbritons.com/list.html.
2. B Johnson ‘I think of my mother’: notes on the life and times of Claudia Jones Hope Valley 1985, p103.
3. Quoted in *Ibid* p103.
4. *Ibid*.
5. ‘Morning mists’, quoted in C Boyce Davies *Left of Karl Marx: the political life of black communist Claudia Jones* Durham, N Carolina 2007, pp121-22.
6. *Ibid* pp112-17.
7. C Boyce Davies *Left of Karl Marx: the political life of black communist Claudia Jones* Durham, N Carolina 2007.
8. B Johnson ‘I think of my mother’: notes on the life and times of Claudia Jones Hope Valley 1985, p156.
9. *Ibid* p158.
10. See nuj.org.uk/events.
11. C Boyce Davies *Left of Karl Marx: the political life of black communist Claudia Jones* Durham, N Carolina 2007, p232.
12. b hooks *Rock my soul, black people and self-esteem* Washington 2004, p77.

EDUCATION

Our free schools and theirs

The left's demands should look beyond what seems possible right now, argues **Christina Black**



What sort of learning?

Last week, deputy prime minister Nick Clegg alienated his Conservative coalition partners by suggesting that more constraints should be put on free schools to ensure that minimum standards are met. Clegg's proposed changes would mean that free schools could only employ qualified teachers and that they must teach the national curriculum.

His statement followed two big, negative stories relating to the government's free school policy. Firstly, the news that the Al-Madinah Islamic free school in Derby received a damning Ofsted report, where it was deemed inadequate in every respect and placed in 'special measures'. The school is reported to discriminate against female members of staff, forcing them to wear a headscarf even if they are non-Muslim, and to segregate boys and girls, even having separate lunchtimes for male and female students (according to the school this is because the lunch hall is too small to accommodate all students, although the standard solution is to have separate sittings for younger year groups and older students). Not to mention the quality of teaching and learning.

The second story to hit the headlines around the same time was that of the 27-year-old headmistress of Pimlico Primary free school, located only a mile from parliament itself, who resigned after four weeks in the job. Annaliese Briggs had taken up the headship (a role

normally associated with a very senior member of staff) with no teaching qualifications or experience.

So it was hardly surprising (or coincidental) that Clegg's statement received so much public support - 81% of those questioned in a recent poll said free schools should be forced to employ only qualified teachers, while just a third thought that free schools should be allowed to opt out of the national curriculum.¹

None of this will be particularly comforting news for education secretary Michael Gove. Gove's continued ideological onslaught on the education system has been very unpopular with teachers. Not just free schools and academies and the whole 'free-market' approach to education, but the fact that the coalition has presided over: performance-related pay; the proposed changes, backtracks and further plans to overhaul the current GCSE courses in England and Wales, transforming them into something Mr Gradgrind would thoroughly approve of; the terminating of the Building Schools for the Future programme, introduced to improve dilapidated schools; the abolition of the education maintenance allowance (EMA) for young people from low-income families. And all the while teaching unions are involved in industrial action against changes to teachers' pension schemes.

The agenda of Gove and David Cameron (other than transforming

the education system back to the turn of the last century) is to take state schools out of local authority control, give them (or in reality the head, the board of governors, the sponsors, churches and mosques) autonomy and let them thrive or fail. All part of the ideology one would expect from the leader of the Conservative Party and his education secretary. Under current conditions it was always going to be the case that those with the wherewithal and ideological will to set up a free school would predominantly be the church, the mosque or the temple. And it is a good bit of PR for larger companies to fund schools and so be seen to make a 'positive contribution to local communities'. It is a fantasy indulged in by many on the left that McDonald's, for example, will sponsor schools in order to indoctrinate the next generation of Big Mac munchers or issue diplomas in burger-flipping. In fact they would much rather be seen promoting 'healthy lifestyles' by funding a new sports building, swimming pool and dance studios in their sponsored school.

Bring in the state?

In these circumstances it seems natural for any self-respecting lefty to oppose the very notion of free schools. The National Union of Teachers is opposed to them. It's obvious: a Conservative-led coalition government, opposed to the public sector, allows any Tom, Dick or Harry to set up a school

outwith local authority control, employ whoever they like and teach whatever they want. It is just a form of privatisation, a blatant disregard for the skills and professionalism of qualified teachers and a move away from the equality of a common curriculum - right? Well, yes, it is on one level, but does that mean communists are opposed to the very concept of schools that are 'free' from state control? Actually, and for many surprisingly, no, we are not.

We are not statist. We are not for the British or any other state. So why call upon the state to decide and regulate what it wants young people to learn? Marx made the argument against state control of education in 1875 in his *Critique of the Gotha programme*. Written at the time of the unification of Germany under the rightwing junta and the Prussian monarch, the Gotha programme called for "1. Universal and equal elementary education by the state. Universal compulsory school attendance. Free instruction."

To which Marx responds: "Elementary education by the state" is altogether objectionable. Defining by a general law the expenditures on the elementary schools, the qualifications of the teaching staff, the branches of instruction, etc. and, as is done in the United States, supervising the fulfilment of these legal specifications by state inspectors, is a very different thing from appointing the state as the educator of the people! Government and church should rather be equally excluded from any influence on the school ... the state has need, on the contrary, of a very stern education by the people" (my emphasis).²

While universal education is a concession to the working class, it is also a means of exerting state control. Yes, the state should fully fund schools, teachers' and other employees' pay, facilities, buildings and resources. Yes, teachers should be qualified to teach; a person can have a vast and deep knowledge of their specialist subject but no empathy, social awareness, creativity and all the charisma of an individual paperclip. And, yes, there should be professional standards, regulated by the professionals themselves, in the same way that the British Medical Association does for doctors (incidentally the equivalent body for teachers in England and Wales was done away with by the present government. It continues to exist in Scotland, where it has a much more established status).

That is not to say that the state ought to write the curriculum. One of the main gripes of teachers (other than the intense pressure to meet ever increasing and unrealistic targets that would be the envy of Gosplan) is that there is not the time and space within the curriculum to be creative, to deviate, to allow students the freedom to go off on a tangent. In other words, deep, meaningful learning and exploration. For the professionals themselves to have control over curricula would allow more opportunity for creativity, personalisation and choice for teachers and students alike.

Aside from the bureaucratic issues, there are other problems that communists have with "appointing the state as educator of the people". It allows the state to enforce its 'values' (a word we hear a lot of in education that is rarely defined) on the youth. It can promote patriotism, from enforced flag-waving for 'Team GB' to curriculum time being given over to the celebration of royal occasions. It can offer lessons where 'democracy' is represented as allowing people

(who are not in prison or homeless) over the age of 18 to vote every four to five years in a first-past-the-post election (remember, we are lucky to live in Britain - not everywhere allows people to vote - in some places there are human rights abuses - go check out Amnesty's website). When I was a school student, I remember the army being invited to give us a recruitment talk in the assembly hall.

Currently in non-denominational state schools in England and Wales, the school is required to deliver a daily act of worship of a "broadly Christian character". Try to comply with that too closely in any inner-London secondary and you will face all-out rebellion by students, teachers and parents. Rightly so. There should be no place for enforced religious observance in state schools. As communists we are for the complete separation of church and state.

However, what you will find is that schools agree to promote the "spiritual, moral, social and cultural" development of students. This usually takes the form of an innocuous quote from Martin Luther King or Ghandi about turning the other cheek. Occasionally students are treated to the 'if you want it badly enough, it'll happen' Oprah Winfrey style of motivational message (just ignore the material circumstances: you will all play for Man United or be the next rap star - so long as you want it badly enough). Or, if we are all really lucky we might be treated to the profundity of statements such as 'There's no "I" in "team"!'

In other words, the state inevitably promotes its great institutions, such as monarchy and parliament, its 'all in it together' national sports events, its armed wing and its imperialist interventions around the world (and hopefully picking up some potential cannon fodder along the way). It can promote the ideology of both passivity and subservience (turn the other cheek, be humble, know your place) and at the same time of capitalist aspiration (the only thing standing between you and the life you want to live is your own motivation - and certainly not your place in productive social relations). No wonder Marx did not want the state to act as educator!

So what is our vision of 'free schools'? Schools fully funded by the state, through local authorities. Schools with qualified teachers who decide and maintain standards from the chalkface, not the cabinet office. Schools free from grip of the Church of England, the Catholic clerisy, the temple or the mosque. It may be hard to imagine in the current climate, but if the workers' movement were stronger, we could have schools set up by the TUC, the cooperative movement, local community groups, the CPGB ...

The problem of the left is that its approach to such questions is highly limited. The normal response is to adopt trade union-type demands to protect education by demanding state control, even though we are opposed to the bourgeois state. To oppose the freedom for schools to create their own curricula because in current conditions that puts those curricula in the hands of religious institutions or private companies. But we ought not to restrict our demands to what we seem able to gain in current conditions. Otherwise, we ought not to favour freedom of the press - in current conditions it can only produce the *Daily Mail* •

Notes

1. www.channel4.com/news/free-schools-brits-want-qualified-teachers.
2. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_Critique_of_the_Gotha_Programme.pdf.

UNIVERSITY

Making common cause

The strike action taking place in universities across the UK this week follows the refusal of the University and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) to resume national negotiations with Unite, Unison, the University and College Union, the Educational Institute of Scotland and the GMB (the last two of which are not currently taking action).

Among other things, the unions are seeking an increase in pay above retail price index; action on a national level to address the gender pay gap in higher education; an agreement on working to reduce long-hours in the industry; and a living wage for university staff in London. Disappointingly for Unite, Unison and the UCU the strike ballot turnout was poor - the largest, that of UCU members, was 35% - and the vote in favour of strike varying ranging between 54% and 64%. The momentum is not with the unions and it appears many workers in the industry view pay restraint as something they have to accept in the context of a general decline in real wages.

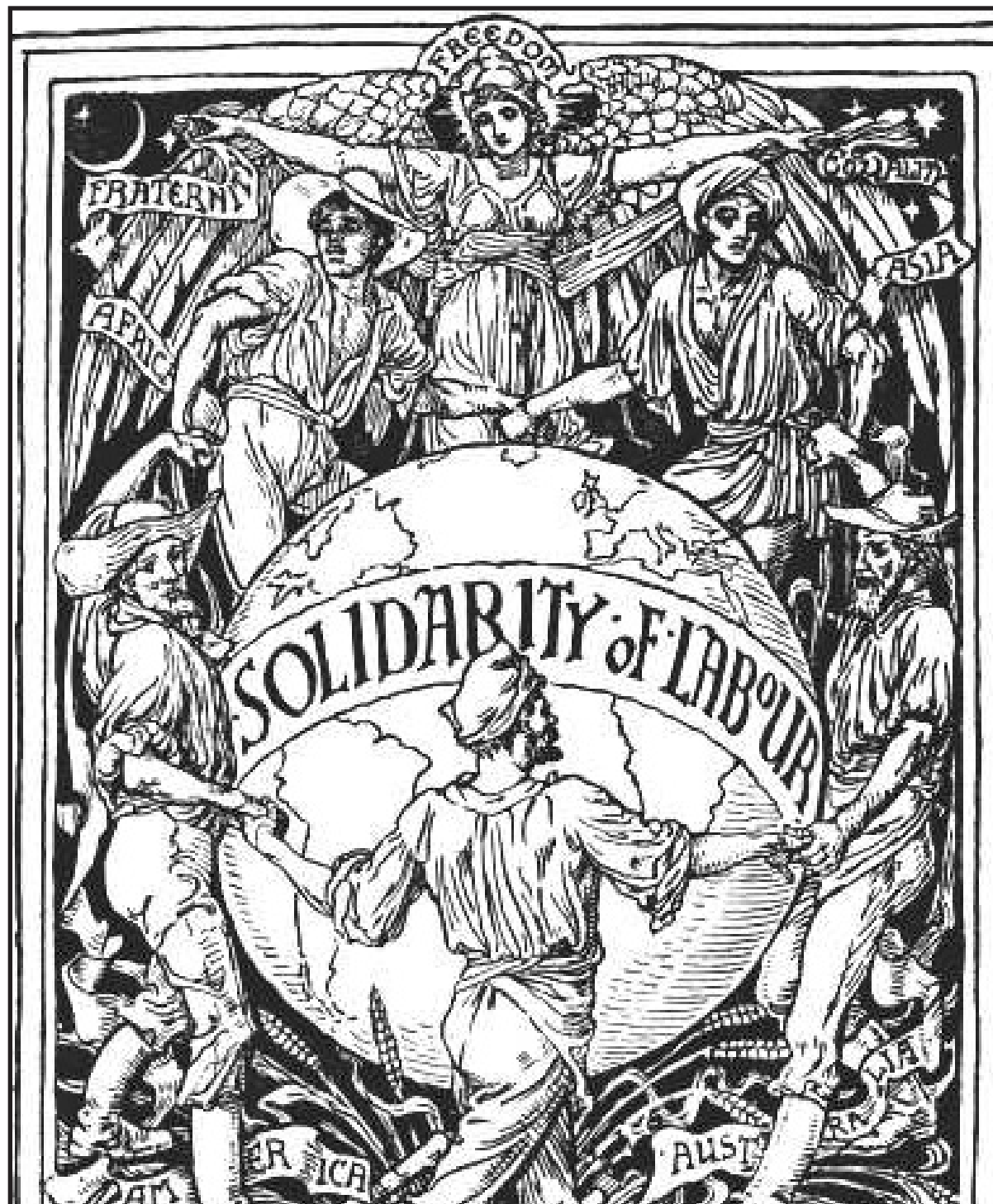
Following a 13% fall in real wages since 2008, the UCEA have offered university workers a 1% pay rise, claiming that "joint work" around flexible working arrangements, casual contracts and the gender pay gap is on the table, while offering nothing concrete on these issues. The unions point out that a report this year by the Higher Education Funding Council for England showed that there was a cumulative operating surplus of over £1 billion within higher education (the UCEA claims that the unions are using old figures and the surplus forecast for this year is a mere £380 million). Unions have also cited the increase in executive pay in recent years as evidence that funds are available. Vice-chancellors receive an average pay and pensions packet of almost £250,000 (up on average by £5,000 in 2011-12), leading to a 1:19 pay ratio between the lowest and highest paid individuals in the sector.¹

The universities pretend this is necessary to ensure talented managers remain within the sector, despite the fact that such individuals usually play no role either in education itself or in research (or like other non-academic staff in facilitating it - if anything they hinder the supposed function of universities to stimulate the flow of ideas and expansion of knowledge). The obvious consequence is that the managerial layer becomes an ever increasing drain on the resources available to universities.

Besides pay, the industrial action is demanding an end to insecure employment contracts and the increased workload of academic staff. The widespread use of zero-hour contracts in UK universities is something the unions want to see addressed - freedom-of-information requests by the UCU revealed that around 53% of higher education institutions employ some staff on zero-hour contracts, with 46% employing more than 200 workers in this way.

The prevalence of fixed-term contracts in HE (affecting 36% of academic staff in the UK in 2011-12²) is another concern for the unions. Recent legislation has meant that workers on fixed-term contracts are excluded from collective redundancy negotiations when their contract has come to an end - as the UCU pointed out, this situation has resulted from legislation for which the UCEA lobbied. The widespread use of such terms of employment places more power in the hands of university management and enables them to attack pay and conditions of staff with greater ease.

On November 1 the UCU will be



Workers and students, unite

commencing 'short-of-strike' action by working to contract. Last week when I attended a joint UCU-Unison meeting at the University of Westminster in preparation for the current strike there was an expectation among those present that this is the beginning of what will be a long campaign involving strikes and other forms of action. Some present were concerned that if this fight is not won not only would this lead to a prolonged period in which wages are held down, but that it would demonstrate to employers the inability of the HE unions to force them back into negotiation and may present a serious threat to national bargaining. It was suggested that a strong turnout at enough universities may put pressure on management to try and bring other university employers back to the national negotiation table if they saw that they would not benefit from an end to national bargaining. If, however, the strategy of the university employers is to break the power of the unions in higher education, it seems unlikely that they would return to negotiations without well-supported and sustained action from the unions - action that the union bureaucracies are not exactly rushing to call.

This dispute must be viewed in the context of the remodelling of higher education that has been underway for over two decades and has been aimed primarily at ensuring universities meet the needs of capital in relation to research and the labour market. Along

with the introduction of tuition fees and the commodification of teaching and research has come an increased effort to lower costs and increase 'output'. This drive has been behind the redundancies; the casualisation; the tailoring of teaching towards results rather than learning; and the increase in the number of bureaucratic tasks academic workers must complete to ensure the quality of their teaching or research - all of which have become more prevalent in recent years. The shifting roles of students ('consumers') and academic workers will also undoubtedly have a significant impact on campus politics.

It may be premature to say so, but the instrumentalisation of education, combined with the proletarianisation of academic work, could lead to a situation where university workers become increasingly radicalised by their antagonistic relationship with management and students become relatively far more passive and demobilised politically. University managements increasingly try to exploit the new consumer status of the indebted student in order to win support for attacks on the pay and conditions of those providing their education by arguing that it is in their interests to ensure they get 'value for money'.

At my university a small group of rightwingers have started a petition arguing that the unions have acted irresponsibly (surprise, surprise) and that students ought to receive a refund

for 'contact hours lost'. Whilst so far this has received little attention, there is certainly a danger that such attitudes will become more widespread. We on the revolutionary left must answer those who would divide students from education workers by advocating the necessity of student-worker solidarity against the combined interest of capital, management and the state; and by counterposing our present situation not to some golden age in the past, but to a future of free education and democratically run universities - a society beyond capitalism in which the generation of knowledge is not regarded as a form of property and in which all have access to the accumulated intellectual wealth of our species and the prospect of fulfilment and self-liberation.

There is no guarantee that victories against capital within higher education will be won in the near future. What is therefore required is the patient building of support for a campaign along the lines of what I have set out. There is no solution to exploitative work practices, bureaucratic control and the influence of capital over curricula within the campus alone. There is a whole world to win beyond it ●

Callum Williamson

Notes

1. D Ashley, 'Pay gap at university is biggest in public sector and getting bigger, says report', UCU website, October 17.
2. www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2694&Itemid=161.

What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Why no protest over woman's oppression?

Stirring stagnant Saudi waters

When is it OK to oppress women? When the oppressor is a key ally and trade partner, answers Eddie Ford

In what has been described as the most organised and *open* political campaign ever seen in Saudi Arabia, at least 60 women held a day of action on October 26 against the ban on female driving. No other country in the world enforces such a prohibition, yet, when it comes to driving, just like every other area of life, women in Saudi Arabia are crushed under the weight of oppressive, ultra-patriarchal laws. For example, Saudi women need permission from a male guardian to travel, work or marry and in public must always wear a headscarf and an *abaya*, a black cloak covering the body.

Sure, yes, the women may not have formed a disciplined convoy driving through the central heart of Riyadh, banners blazing. Rather it was more a case of taking a short trip down the road. For instance, a YouTube video shows May al-Sawyan committing the crime of leaving her apartment without a male chaperone, getting into the family car and driving to the small supermarket near her home to buy groceries: she wore sunglasses and her hair was covered by the traditional black headscarf worn by Saudi women, but her face was otherwise visible. There are other clips of women driving in defiance of the ban in Riyadh, al-Ahsa and Jeddah.

In the context of Saudi Arabia what would be regarded as perfectly normal elsewhere is a brave and rebellious act that could possibly land the perpetrator in prison. For Saudi woman though the driving ban is a particularly potent symbol of oppression. 'Respectable' middle class women in Saudi Arabia, needless to say, do not travel by public transport (insofar as there is any) - that is for the likes of Bengali or Filipino migrant workers. Therefore they have to wait for a male family member to drive them anywhere. A daily humiliation, in other words - not to mention massively inconvenient. Naturally, rich Saudi woman do not have the same problem - they can call on a driver any time that suits, though no doubt many of them will still resent the restriction on their freedom. Women remain permanent minors in the eyes of the Saudi regime.

The 'October 26 driving for women' group has used social media networks to publicise the issue with considerable aplomb. Activists say they have over 16,000 signatures on an online petition calling for an end to the driving ban. Almost inevitably, the group's website, 'oct26driving.org', was hacked into on October 27 and at the time of writing is still inaccessible.

No concessions

There have been two previous campaigns to overturn the ban, which both fizzled out after arrests for various 'public order' offences. Back in 1990, 47 women drove through Riyadh and Madeha al-Ajrourah, a New York-educated psychotherapist, was one of them. In her own words: "The reaction was incredibly violent. Religious clerics saw us and went mad, they started screaming and hitting my car at the traffic lights." She was not imprisoned but was immediately sacked - other women lost their jobs too or had their passports rescinded in



Amidst the huge wealth, huge oppression

punishment. In June 2011 there was a similar protest.

So far, however, there appear to be no cracks in the Saudi edifice - quite the opposite, if anything. All petitions on the matter sent to the royal court have either been ignored or flatly rejected, while proposals for female traffic officers and driving instructors have not even reached the floor of the Shura 'advisory council'. True, at the beginning of the month, three female members of the Shura - among the 30 women appointed in January by the 90-year-old dictator, king Abdullah bin Abdulaziz bin Saud - recommended that the ban be rescinded (it is worth noting that female Shura members must enter the building via separate gates). They urged the council to "recognise the rights" of women to drive a car in "accordance with the principles of sharia and traffic laws". Yet no formal debate on the question has yet taken place or even being scheduled - absolutely no sign of movement.

In fact, far from making concessions, the regime has actually toughened its rhetoric. Two days before October 26 protest, an interior ministry spokesman warned that the kingdom's laws "prohibit activities disturbing the public peace" which "only serve the senseless, the ill-intentioned, intruders and opportunity hunters" - such laws

would also be used against those who dare "demonstrate in support" of the female drivers. Meanwhile, the BBC has seen an official document advising police on how to handle women drivers.

Naturally, the most conservative and reactionary sections of Saudi society are up in arms - something must be done. Last week 150 clerics and religious scholars held a rare public protest outside the king's palace in Jeddah to object to "westernisation". They accused the United States, normally a byword in traditionalist circles for anything distasteful or immoral, of being behind the driving campaign. Indeed, if this "conspiracy of women" was allowed to succeed, it would spread "licentiousness" like a moral disease - even pose a direct "threat" to the kingdom and Islamic civilisation itself. John Knox's "monstrous regiment of women" all over again - only this time in 2013 as opposed to 1558. One prominent cleric, sheikh Saleh bin Saad al-Lohaidan, claimed "medical studies" show that if a woman drives a car it "automatically affects the ovaries" and "pushes the pelvis upwards", resulting in "negative physiological impacts". Reassuring to know that Saudi medical science is so cutting edge.

The unfortunate reality is that the kingdom of Saud has over the years

become *more* repressive, not less - even allowing for tokenistic female members of the Shura. This conservative stance hardened under the impact of the Iranian revolution/counterrevolution - fearful for its own continued existence, the dynastic regime has resisted virtually all attempts at reform, no matter how modest.

Having said that, so far none of the female drivers or their supporters have been arrested. Doubtlessly the high level of publicity generated by the October 26 group has made the authorities a little reluctant to crack down too hard and too quickly - but that could easily change. However, campaigners regard the day of action as a partial victory. They are optimistic about the prospects for the driving campaign, and the struggle for women's rights in general, despite the grim objective situation.

Hypocrisy

There have been other recent battles against women's oppression. Campaigners have been calling on the regime to overturn the 10-month jail sentences imposed at the end of September on the two founders of the Association for the Protection and Defence of Women's Rights in Saudi Arabia, which in 2008 launched a 'No to the oppression of women' campaign.

They fell foul of the authorities two years ago when taking up the case of a woman who complained of serious abuse by her husband. They responded to her text message complaining that her husband had left her and her children at home without food or water and asking for help. But when they went to her apartment the two women were arrested and charged with "attempted kidnapping". It seems that the text message had actually been sent in order to entrap them. Although the kidnap charge was quickly dropped, the two were eventually found guilty of *takhib* - inciting a wife to defy her husband's authority.

October 21 saw Saudi Arabia come under fire at the United Nations, with critics condemning the kingdom for jailing activists "without due process" and "abusing" the basic

rights of Saudi women and foreign workers. There were calls for the abolition of the Saudi system of male guardianship and "concern" expressed at the "restrictions" on freedoms of religion and association, whilst others called for a "moratorium" on the use of the death penalty. Responding, the president of the Saudi Human Rights Commission, Bandar bin Mohammed al-Aiban, farcically maintained that the country was "taking all steps" to protect the rights of both women and migrant workers - like a ban on outdoor work between midday and 3pm from June to August, when temperatures are usually higher than 40 degrees. Very generous. With regard to women's rights, we learnt from al-Aiban that sharia law "guarantees" gender equality and that Saudi women are "full citizens" able to dispose of their property and manage their affairs without seeking permission from anyone.

True to form has been the staggering hypocrisy of the west over Saudi Arabia. Part of the justification for imperialist intervention in Afghanistan and elsewhere was the need to protect and defend women's rights. There has even been talk from William Hague that support for the anti-Assad opposition in Syria will lead to an "improvement" in women's rights. So where are the loud messages of solidarity for the October 26 group from William Hague, or Harriet Harman for that matter? You must be joking. Wretchedly, Hague just mutters that the UK does a "lot" of business with Saudi Arabia, and, of course, it would be foolish to jeopardise valuable contracts.

In reality, as everyone knows, Saudi Arabia is supporting the most reactionary and fanatical elements in the Syrian opposition - ditto in Iraq, where there has been another wave of deadly sectarian attacks targeting Shi'ite-majority areas. Women's oppression would surely intensify under the control of such Saudi-backed groups - groups that are indirectly armed by the west ●

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