



weekly **worker**

What sort of party? Moshé Machover rejects the model of 'actually existing Leninism'

- Hacking trial
- AWL resignation
- Grangemouth
- Russian Revolution

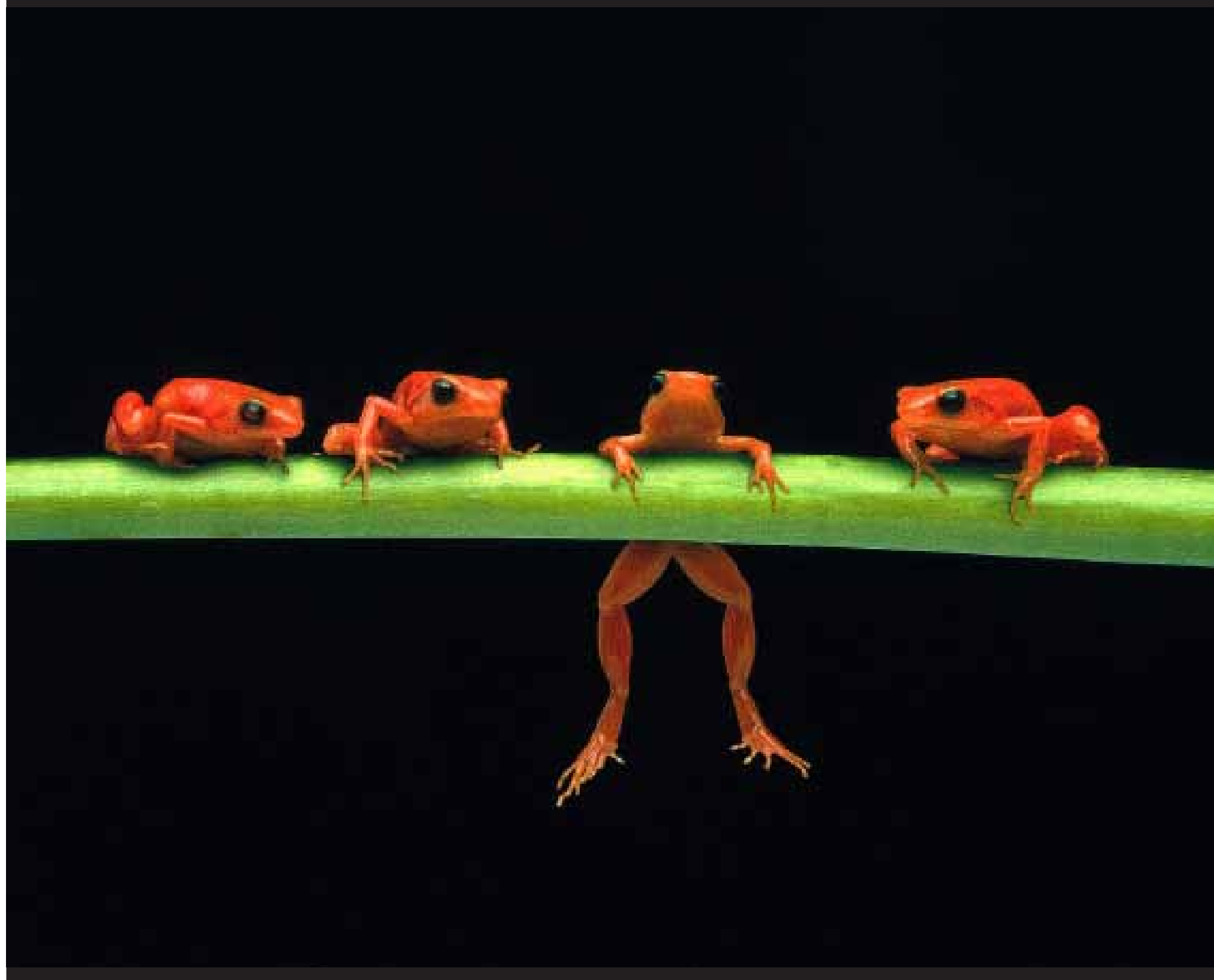
No 985 Thursday November 7 2013

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

www.cpgb.org.uk

£1/€1.10

SR-ISN-ACI:
SWAMP
THINGS GET
TOGETHER



LETTERS



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

Workers' schools

I agree with the general thrust of Christina Black's article, 'Their schools and ours' (October 31), and it is a refreshing change from the Lassalle/Fabian attitude so commonly found on the left in respect of such issues. As you rightly say, such an attitude has nothing to do with Marxism, and is simply a reflection of the dominance of a trade unionist, reformist mindset.

However, I cannot agree with the argument that "the state should fully fund schools, teachers' and other employees' pay, facilities, buildings and resources." That is also to call for the state to run the schools, because, if I am a powerful capitalist state, and I own the buildings, resources, etc, and pay your wages, you are my employee and, like every other employee, you will have to do as I say. He who pays the piper calls the tune.

Like any other employee, you may from time to time object to that; you may even take industrial action to express that objection. Occasionally, your action may even be temporarily successful. But only ever temporarily. A few weeks later, I can come back again and, sooner or later, the very fact that you are a worker, and therefore in a weak position *vis-à-vis* capital, particularly state capital, means that you will lose. I only have to threaten a reduction in wages, a cut in jobs, and some of your members will weaken. I can use all of the resources of the state to create a division between you and the parents and so on.

In short, what you are expecting is either that the capitalist state will simply roll over and die, and pay up for things over which it has simply conceded control, or else you expect that workers could exist in a perpetual state of war with that state, and thereby impose their will over it. It is, in other words, simply a demand for nationalisation under workers' control. But, as Marx, Pannekoek and Trotsky, amongst others, point out, there is no reason that any owner will simply cede such control outside a revolutionary situation.

As Trotsky put it, "... a bourgeoisie that feels it is firmly in the saddle will never tolerate dual power in its enterprises. Workers' control consequently can be carried out only under the condition of an abrupt change in the relationship of forces unfavourable to the bourgeoisie and its state. Control can be imposed only by force upon the bourgeoisie, by a proletariat on the road to the moment of taking power from them, and then also ownership of the means of production. Thus the regime of workers' control, a provisional transitional regime by its very essence, can correspond only to the period of the convulsing of the bourgeois state, the proletarian offensive, and the falling back of the bourgeoisie: that is, to the period of the proletarian revolution in the fullest sense of the word."

Maybe in a pre-revolutionary situation, where a workers' government is in place, and it's possible to demand it carries out such actions, such a transitional demand could be raised, but until we arrive at such a situation, in reality all it does is to sow illusions in the state, and misleads the workers. We have to start from where we are, and demand greater control, but we should do so in the context of

explaining why the capitalist state, as with any capitalist employer, will not grant it on a permanent basis, and why, therefore, we have to instead focus our attention on building our own independent, worker-owned and controlled alternatives.

That would include paying taxes, etc, into worker-owned and worker-controlled social insurance funds to cover the purchase of buildings, payment of wages, etc, rather than handing over those funds to the capitalist state, for it to spend as it chooses.

Arthur Bough
email

There's no limit

The point made in the introduction to the article on free schools - that "the left's demands should look beyond what seems possible right now" - is an important one, but it does not summarise what appears below.

It's not a matter of avoiding limitation to what's possible: more controversially, it's favouring measures despite *adverse* short-term (or even medium-term) consequences. It applies (it would seem) to the issue of gun control (and even 'stand your ground' laws) in the United States.

Stephen R Diamond
email

Just friends

Just a correction to the passage about University of London Union ('Siege mentality', October 31).

It's definitely not the case that either Dan Cooper or the Alliance for Workers' Liberty ("underhandedly") cancelled those rooms for Marxism 2013. In fact, within the ULU leadership, Dan was consistently the most forthright in arguing against their cancellation - publicly and privately. To back this up, there was very recently a big and even more fierce argument about the potential cancellation of the rooms for Socialism 2013 on the grounds of their cover-up of allegations against Steve Hedley; all agreed that the behaviour of the Socialist Party was disgraceful, but Dan was again the person who argued most fiercely against their cancellation.

Say what you like about that article (and, by god, I'm not going to defend a word of it), but this stuff about rooms and underhand tactics simply isn't true.

Also, you describe me as a "close supporter" of the AWL. I have many friends in the AWL and work closely with them in various ways (they are by far the best and most open group for independents to work with, in my experience), but I very definitely have political disagreements with them (on Palestine, for example). The AWL has a system for 'organised sympathisers' of the group, and I'm not in that category.

And what's this nonsense about being "soft on feminism"? Socialists *should* be feminists - sort it out.

Michael Chessum

President, University of London Union

Cliff's nose

Paul Demarty writes that over a suggested boycott of the Socialist Workers Party by feminists at ULU, he smelt "the AWL's hand".

Tony Cliff used to portray himself as having a "nose for the struggle" - meaning a political instinct. In fact, Cliff's 'nose' was about opportunist adaptation to what he thought the class was thinking or would be likely to do (often incorrectly, but that's another matter).

Demarty's 'nose' is different. It can mystically sniff out the hidden hand of some devious and

underhanded conspiratorial clique, in the sort of language more associated with rightwing populist demagoguery and witch-hunting. No evidence, not even any argument for his case; simply presumption, assertion and slippery, emotive language.

Of course, if we already 'know' - or assert that we know, without evidence - that the AWL is 'guilty' of numerous past crimes, we are right to treat it in this way: after all, this is not bourgeois justice or 'freedom of speech' we are talking about, so any sort of third-hand hearsay, politically-motivated allegation, and 'instinct' or 'smell' is fully justified.

Carl Theasby
email

Condemn both

'A plague on both your houses' would be a good political position on international conflict for the AWL to hold, if they do actually support the third camp position. Instead, as the AWL demonstrate, 'third camp' ends up as a reverse of the support for 'anti-imperialism'.

One-sided silence, or being critical of one party to the conflict, is insufficient. If third camp supporters can condemn 'anti-imperialists' (and they should), then they can condemn their opponents too.

Jon D White
SPGB

Point-scoring

Here we go again. This time it's not prison officers, but hardworking and low-paid Public and Commercial Services union members, who get compared to concentration camp guards, with all the taste and nuanced argument usually seen in the rightwing tabloids (Letters, October 31). Perhaps comrade Smithee could let us know which trade unionists are 'unbarbaric'. Local government workers collecting rent from council house tenants? Dinner ladies, complicit in feeding processed garbage to kids? Nurses aiding creeping NHS privatisation by carrying out their day jobs?

As much as we'd all love job centre staff to resist welfare reform, get sacked, join whichever Left Unity platform we all currently support and overthrow the government, perhaps our time would be best spent directing anger at this government, policy wonks and the capitalist class.

It may surprise John to learn that most PCS members actually want to help people. As incompetent and driven by rightwing zeal as Iain Duncan Smith is, he has got one thing right: work really is good for your health and good for our communities. Welfare delivery in privatised, virtual job centres without PCS members would be significantly harsher and more barbaric.

That's not to say there won't be many unfairly sanctioned, of course. For a moving and complex portrayal of this very issue, I urge all comrades to tune in to 'The Archers', of all things, where a former skilled carpenter, Darrell, acted with skill and subtlety, is battling with mental health issues and homelessness, whilst trying to overcome the perceived stigma of signing on. It's far more informative, meaningful and real than obscurist, hard-left point-scoring.

Richard Tomasson
South Yorkshire

Not token

A few weeks ago the local news in south Wales reported the demolition of a mural in Newport depicting the Chartist uprising of 1839. Knowing of the Chartists through Marx's

writings, I thought, what's next in line for the ruling class assault on the working class? Will libraries remove Marx's *Capital* for warping young minds? Or, worse, the dreaded blacklist of anyone with left leanings preventing them working?

If anyone from Newport has photos of the mural, I have the painting skills to recreate what was destroyed, if the wood and canvas can be funded. We should campaign for the council to put it in the local museum. This may be a token effort in the fightback, and one which I think Marxists feel a bit awkward about. Art to most of the left would probably seem at best colourful and a bourgeois hobby, or at worst not relevant to galvanising the working class for world transformation.

But if the working class is to rule, apart from knowing Marx's concepts of economics, it will also have to learn to be creative, especially regarding environmental problems. The brain doesn't take naturally to creativity - it has to be systematically cultivated.

Another issue Marxists should take up is the primacy of private property over the right of the public to see important works of art.

Frank Kavanagh
zeigerwatch@yahoo.co.uk

Not like the SWP

Both the CPGB's Mark Fischer and I went to the November 2 session on 'What is the role and relevance of a revolutionary party today?' at Socialism 2013, an educational event organised by the Socialist Party in England and Wales.

In the session Mark said some positive things about the SP, but accused it of operating on the basis of "bureaucratic centralism" rather than "democratic centralism". I agree with many of the points made in various articles in the *Weekly Worker* over the years about a large democratic deficit in the Socialist Workers Party, entailing much more centralism than democracy, and consequently "bureaucratic centralism" is a fair term for that organisation. This is a major reason, on top of the terrible handling of the allegations of rape, for a split earlier in the year (to form the International Socialist Network) and the probable expulsion of another faction (Rebuilding the Party) after the SWP's next conference in December.

However, I must disagree with Mark's assertion that the SP operates in much the same way, based on my experience in that party (and its forerunners, the Militant Tendency and Militant Labour) from 1990-98. Mark's justification for his assertion was that debates took place almost entirely internally (in particular in factional documents and meetings, internal bulletins, branch meetings and aggregates, with debates between opposing factions in which there was equal time allocated to both) rather than in publications read by "the class" (he specifically mentioned *The Socialist*) - with an exception made in the debate to leave the Labour Party in Scotland, where a debate also took place between the opposing factions in the pages of *The Guardian*.

Just because the Bolsheviks had such discussions in public 100 years ago, before the Russian Revolution in October 1917, that doesn't mean it is necessarily the best way to conduct such discussions nowadays. In these days of the internet, it is very difficult to keep internal discussions private and a number of blogs have been used to conduct debates within

the SWP against the wishes of the leadership. But the fact that this isn't happening as far as the SP is concerned is surely a sign of lack of dissent due to it being a much more healthy and democratic party.

In the period during which I first joined the Militant Tendency (in June 1990), there were some serious problems democratically, it must be said - including the fact that annual conferences (as required by the constitution) had repeatedly been postponed (supposedly due to the urgency of current events).

In fact, in early 1991, my region (Manchester/Lancashire) had an aggregate at which the representative of the executive committee with responsibility for the region, Nick Wrack (now the main leader of the Socialist Platform of Left Unity), proposed that Militant should stand candidates against Labour in the council elections in Liverpool (where Labour Party branches had their democratically elected candidates vetoed) and that an independent organisation should be set up in Scotland.

One of our members opposed the EC proposal that Nick put forward, and suggested instead that a special conference should be held to debate the 'Scottish turn' (as it became known). He argued, however, that we should support standing in Liverpool because that was urgent. This resolution was carried, and I am proud to say that I voted for it, due to it being a much more democratic way of operating.

After about six months of discussion - as well as conducting political activities, including standing in Liverpool - we discussed the Scottish turn in my branch of Militant. Since eight of us supported the Scottish turn and four opposed it, we elected two delegates (including myself) who supported it and one who opposed it to the special conference. Contrast this very democratic approach with the way the SWP operated before their March conference, with the opposing faction given much less time to speak and with a situation whereby, if the leadership line was narrowly voted for, no-one from the opposing faction was allowed as a conference delegate.

One thing that Mark Fischer was unaware of was that there was an unofficial Committee for a Workers' International mailing list that was completely unmoderated. In fact, it was me who set it up (I ran it until I resigned in 1998). It was known about by the British centre, but, judging by the proportion of members on the list, only particularly promoted in Belgium and the USA.

There was even a faction fight (the only particularly serious item of disagreement) that largely took place on the list between two factions in the USA. In the end, six members were expelled from the CWI and set up their own organisation called Labor's Militant Voice. The only time I was asked to remove anybody from this list was when a leading member asked me to remove those six comrades due to their expulsion. Contrast this with the way the SWP has historically strongly discouraged their members from taking part in internet debates.

Later on, there was a debate about changing the name of the organisation from Militant Labour to the Socialist Party. As was pointed out in the discussion at Socialism 2013, there were a lot of internal documents discussing this issue, to which any comrade could contribute.

Steve Wallis
Manchester

MEDIA

Establishment still in dock

The problem is not ‘irresponsible gutter journalism’, argues Paul Demarty

The phone-hacking scandal has alighted again onto the front pages, if only of the ‘quality’ press, and it is almost like old times.

Rebekah Brooks and Andy Coulson, both former editors of the late *News of the World*, are in the dock on charges - which they deny - of conspiring to pervert the course of justice. Some rather startling allegations of cloak-and-dagger damage limitations have been made by Andrew Edis on behalf of the crown. A good deal of attention has accrued to a quite striking story, in which Brooks and her husband are purported to have ditched a series of computers, involving the then head of security at News International, black bin-liners full of electronics being left lying around, coded text messages and a bogus pizza delivery.

Brooks is also alleged to have attempted to put together an internal report on phone-hacking that would exonerate her and put Les Hinton (the former NI chief executive) and Colin Myler (the last editor of the *NotW*) in the frame. In all, the prosecution seeks to paint a picture of the two as presenting unbelievable accounts of their role in the hacking crisis, and seeking cynically to save their own skins.

In response, the defence has a number of claims; principally, that it is unrealistic to expect an editor to be intimately aware of the provenance of every last word in a paper; that “fierce and intense” competition between journalists on the paper - likened by Coulson’s lawyer, Timothy Langdale, in one telling phrase, to a “story factory” - led to sources being obscure to those higher up the editorial food chain.¹

Who to believe here is, naturally, a matter for the jury. We must make an observation, however. Let us assume that Brooks, Coulson and their counsel are telling god’s own truth about everything; that they were indeed unaware of the sordid origins of many of their stories, of Glenn Mulcaire’s book of voicemail PINs and all the rest. Let us assume that Langdale is correct - a modern tabloid is a “news factory”, with editorial leadership operating at a high level of abstraction from the meat and potatoes of news-gathering.

We would then, surely, have to conclude that underhand tactics - criminal or otherwise - would *inevitably* result from this set-up, and that the proper oversight that management is notionally supposed to provide on the whole process was, with the best will in the world, impossible. Indeed, whatever Brooks’ and Coulson’s (or anyone else’s) personal level of culpability for this disaster, there is more than a little truth to this picture - that the sins of the mass media, such as they are, are *structural*, and have to do with the nature of press institutions and their relationships with broader society.

Indeed, that was precisely the lesson of the shady goings-on at the *News of the World*, if ever there was one; we all knew that politicians trod lightly around Rupert Murdoch’s media empire, but suddenly the incestuous reality of the British establishment was put under a harsh glare. There did not seem to be a major politician or top cop in the country who had not been entertained on the Murdoch shilling; the foot-dragging of the Press Complaints Commission and the Metropolitan Police suddenly took on a sinister air. This was not a crisis of the press, but a minor crisis of political legitimacy across the board.²

All has been conveniently forgotten now. Recent days have seen the



Rebekah Brooks: trying

signing of the royal charter on press regulation, which would create a new regulator with ill-defined statutory underpinning for newspapers. The most offensive clauses of the new regime (principally, large costs awards in libel trials against the defendant even where the defence is successful) have *already* been passed into law, very much on the quiet, in the Crime and Courts Act.

Nevertheless, the press barons have boycotted it, and are pressing forward with their own new self-regulator, the Independent Press Standards Organisation (Ipso). We now have the bizarre situation where the much-vaunted post-Leveson settlement is already, in effect, dead in the water so far as its supposed purpose is intended; the ‘side effect’ of restricting free speech when it comes to smaller fry than the major national papers, however, is already in force.

It is difficult to see this farcical kludge as anything but inevitable, given how things have turned out. There is some truth to the persistent howls of anger from Hacked Off types, to the effect that the politicians have ‘chickened out’. There are very good reasons, from the politicians’ point of view, as to why they should; a *compulsory* system of statutory press regulation is a one-way ticket to Strasbourg; such systems are explicitly outlawed by the European Convention on Human Rights, after all.

The alternative they came up with - punitive costs awards and so forth - is ingenious to a point, but also an invitation for the press barons to call the government’s bluff. This is exactly what they have done. Those papers sympathetic to an overhaul of press regulation - the *Guardian*, *Independent* and *Financial Times* - have expressed that choice simply by not signing up to Ipso either. Nobody believes for a second that the government’s hopeless compromise, cooked up in the virgin hours of a Monday morning before a slew of revisions in the cold light of day, is anything other than an embarrassment.

Change of story

So we have ended up in the worst of all possible worlds. The ‘self-regulation’ cartel will continue, the only change being that its cartelism is *reinforced*. The punitive damages awards will merely set the bar even higher for entry into the press elite.

But something more important has happened, which is less strictly definable. Somewhere along the line, the story changed. It was once the crooked, corrupt relationships between three species widely detested

by the general population - the press, politicians and police - which was under examination after the phone-hacking affair. Yet here we are, a year and a half later, and only the press remains in the spotlight. It is Rebekah Brooks and Andy Coulson in the dock - not Jeremy Hunt or Paul Stephenson. The problem has become ‘How can we stop the press misbehaving?’, rather than ‘How can we break this crooked circle-jerk at the top of society?’

Equally, the discourse has shifted to the question of ‘limits’ to free speech. The increasingly tiresome Steve Coogan is always on hand to say that this is not about ‘restricting free speech’, but ‘clamping down on irresponsible gutter journalism’. No, Steve - it *is* about restricting free speech. Freedom is indivisible - the right to print allegations of impropriety against some politician *is the same right* as the gutter press has to pry into the lives of celebrities. This is the age of Google. You do not, and never will, have privacy. Deal with it.

The usual admonitions - ‘You do not have the right to shout “Fire!” in a crowded theatre’ - entirely miss the point. If you are a democrat, then your approach to this problem is to try to push the boundary of what is permitted *as close as possible* to the crowded-theatre scenario. You do not work in reverse, and draw ever more tortured analogies to a physically threatening speech act.

Worst of all, it allows the great and the good to be ‘seen to be doing something’, while *reinforcing* the atrocious defamation laws in this country. Let us be clear: free-born Englishmen do not have the right to free speech. We have no first amendment. What we have is mounds of legal precedents and marginal legislation which add up to a scenario in which there is a *level* of freedom of expression. This is not an inalienable right; nor is its truth self-evident. The punitive costs awards somehow make Britain *more* plaintiff-friendly; which is to say, more friendly to the *wealthy*, as they try to hide their dirty little secrets.

That Brooks and Coulson should be on trial at all makes the rush to more restrictive press regulation look all the more stupid. *Why* are they on trial? Because phone-hacking has been a criminal offence since the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act of 2000, and so attempting to cover it up, as they are alleged to have done, amounts to a criminal conspiracy. It was already a matter for the criminal courts, long before Glenn Mulcaire and Clive Goodman were packed off for their stays in one of her majesty’s penitentiaries.

So why has it taken so long for Brooks and Coulson to have their day in court? If there is enough evidence to prosecute them now, surely there must have been years ago. This brings us back to the real issue: the mass media is an institution of class power, which other such institutions were all too happy to protect until the last possible moment. If you want to destroy the gutter press, all well and good; but doing so means a complete reconstruction of the political status quo; and, more to the point, doing so requires absolute fidelity to the fight for free speech. You cannot regulate capitalist oligarchy out of existence with a royal charter ●

paul.demarty@weeklyworker.org.uk

Notes

1. *The Guardian* November 4.
2. See M Macnair, ‘Leveson, libel and lucre’ *Weekly Worker* October 17.

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 10, 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 12, 6.15pm: ‘Utopian disjunctures and participatory democracy in Bolivarian Venezuela’. Speaker: Matt Wilde. 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.

No to anti-gay laws

Thursday November 7, 6pm: Protest against conductor Valery Gergiev, outspoken supporter of Russian anti-gay laws, Barbican Concert Hall, Silk Street, London EC2. Organised by the Peter Tatchell Foundation: www.petertatchellfoundation.org.

Gender, race and colonialism

Thursday November 7, 7.30pm: Discussion, Artists Room, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Organised by International Marxist-Humanist Organisation: www.internationalmarxisthumanist.org.

Medical aid for Palestinians

Saturday November 9, 10am to 2pm: Fundraiser social with entertainment, Christ Church Hall, Morningside Road, Holy Corner, Edinburgh. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.palestinecampaign.org.

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.

Political geography of Palestine

Monday November 11, 6pm: Talk, Newcastle University, Daysh building, room G.07, Claremont Road, Newcastle NE1. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.palestinecampaign.org.

Syria - revolution or counterrevolution?

Monday November 11, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Rumi’s Cave, 26 Willesden Lane, London NW6. Speaker: Ewa Jasiewicz. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk.

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.

Remember Orgreave

Thursday November 14, 1pm: Protest at police injustice, IPCC Northern Echo, Pioneer House, Woolpack’s Yards, Wakefield. Organised by Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign: www.otjc.org.uk.

Alternatives to austerity

Thursday November 14, 7pm: Public meeting, Newton Building, Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham NG1. Organised by Nottingham Peoples Assembly: www.nottspeoplesassembly.org.

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.

Living with war

Saturday November 16, 1pm to 7pm: Public meeting, Art House, 140 Lewisham Way, London SE14. Organised by Lewisham Stop the War Coalition: www.lewishamstopwar.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.

International unity against war

Saturday November 30, 10am to 5pm: Conference, Emmanuel Centre, Marsham Street, London SW1. £15 (£10 concessions). Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk.

CPGB wills

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

AWL

Failing the litmus test of loyalty

The republication of a chauvinistic article on the Alliance for Workers' Liberty website was the spark that led **Patrick Smith** to resign from the organisation. Mark Fischer asked him about his experience in the group

What is your background in the workers' movement and how did you first encounter the AWL?

I met the AWL in Hull during Operation Cast Lead in 2008-09,¹ via the Palestinian Solidarity Campaign. I had not really come across any far-left groups before this. When I was at university I never really noticed them, to be honest. I suppose that the real story is that the people I encountered in the PSC were essentially mad - when a leading local member was asked where all the Israelis should go when Israel was destroyed, the answer was, 'The Jews should go back to Brooklyn'!

In comparison, the AWL seemed fairly level-headed. I didn't agree with them on Palestine at first, but I thought they were at least somewhat reasonable. In 2010 I was invited to attend the group's annual school, Ideas for Freedom, and I suppose that's where I was properly introduced in a political sense. I enjoyed the event; it had some good debates and the whole thing was interesting. So I was drawn to the work of the organisation locally and nationally.

For a brief period I became the informal AWL fraction convenor in the University and College Union. That was followed by taking a leading role in the group's work in the Labour Party and Labour Representation Committee, particularly in regard to NHS work. Locally, I became the secretary of the Constituency Labour Party.

It seems you didn't come to the AWL as a naive - you mention your different take on Palestine, for example. So, even before the latest Sean Matgamna monstrosity,²

had you developed some criticisms of the politics of the organisation?

There were a number of things that irked me, particular the scandalous behaviour of a leading AWL member in the UCU, but I suppose the international event that sparked some doubts with the method of the comrades was Libya. To be honest, I was pretty confused by the line. Even as a relatively new member I understood what the majority of comrades were saying, but it seemed to me so bizarre and wrong, and I really wanted to understand how - theoretically - the group had arrived at such a position.³

More recently with Syria, we see the AWL 'not endorsing/not condemning' a rotten peace deal. If that's really the best the organisation had to say about these things, then something has gone seriously wrong.

An important turning point was the crisis in the Socialist Workers Party and most of the left's response. It sparked me to start to think about programme in a more serious way and in this I found a lot of what you guys had written and featured in the *Weekly Worker* of use. Much of the AWL's criticism of the SWP apparatus was straightforward and uncontentious, but the *Weekly Worker* was taking a deeper, more programmatic approach that I thought would be more fruitful in the long run.

When the controversial Matgamna article was republished on the AWL site, it is clear that you were outraged. But what about other comrades? You've described so far a slow dawning on the nature of AWL politics - was

it an important moment for others too?

When an AWL comrade sent me selected quotes from the article, I thought he was taking the piss. I went to the article and read it, and I couldn't believe my eyes. This was well before it had spread like wildfire on Facebook.

When it was posted on the internal list, as I have written, I was shocked by the response of the overwhelming majority of the group. It is true that there were some sort of queasy misgivings from AWL hacks - some talk of "unfortunate" language from Ed Maltby, for example. And it was Sacha Ismail who initially flagged up the problem of Islamophobia - something that prompted a typical response from loyalists like Jim Denham. Ed and Sacha's initial responses were about as critical as those sort of people are ever going to get in the AWL, but later they flipped back, of course. They claimed to have reread it - more carefully the second time, I assume - and suddenly realised that it wasn't Islamophobic or chauvinist at all. And they happily put their names to an executive committee response to that effect.

This is a pretty familiar process from our knowledge of the AWL. Matgamna makes some outrageous public statement. There is disquiet and unease internally even from loyalists like Ismail, often over the leader's choice of language or the glaring omissions in his analysis. Quickly, however, the whole issue is reconfigured as one of loyalty to the group in the face of a hostile attack by other political trends - Matgamna almost becomes the

organisation's personification.

That's partially true. I think in the emails that have been made public on your site there is a comment cited along the lines that defence of Sean's article is now the litmus test of loyalty to the group. A lot of people who were critical of the article didn't post on the list until really late on.

At one point executive members Mark Osborn and Daniel Randall referred to the debate as an "episode", then the EC released an unapologetic, unconditional defence of the article, and comrades who had previously been critical of the article apologised; which implied to me that it was over. Then my emergency motion to conference comes out and the whole thing kicks off again to a certain extent.

I really don't think the AWL centre expected the storm that they got when this thing went up online. As far as they were concerned, it was a minor incident - more of a misunderstanding in the group. Before I posted my emergency motion on the internal list, they probably considered it was more a matter of talking to contacts and reassuring/reconsolidating them, etc. That is, repairing the minor damage caused by the likes of Workers Power and that sectarian stirrer, Richard Brenner!

The leadership wanted the debate to remain internal, to draw a line under the "episode" and cohere the group and its supporters, but I felt it was important to make this an issue for the entire left by making the whole thing public. There's probably a lesson there for people in other groups who develop important political differences. It took on a life of its own, which I think no-one in the AWL centre wanted.

Despite the AWL's claims to be an open, democratic group, it appears to have a policy that members should not engage with the CPGB when it can possibly be avoided.

It certainly exists as a *de facto* policy. When the *Weekly Worker* made errors in its reporting of recent events at the University of London Union and the AWL's part in them,⁴ I suggested to Sacha Ismail that we write to the paper and simply correct them. After all, a lot of people read the *Weekly Worker*, so why let inaccuracies go uncorrected?

Initially, I convinced him - it's all on email if there are any denials about this. Sacha argued for such an approach on the EC, but the committee said no, there should be no correspondence, because the group has a 'general policy' about it. Sacha explained it along the lines of 'We don't want to give the *Weekly Worker* any encouragement to write about us' ...

We don't need that much encouragement ...

Exactly. But he explained the rationale was that if we wrote in, you'd feel enthused to start attacking us and "lying" about the AWL on a whole range of issues. Nonsense, really ...

Lastly, on the opposition. It started off pretty weak and seemed to further enfeeble itself at the AWL conference.

In the first place, there was no coherence in the opposition. Almost everyone in it seemed to have a completely different view of what was wrong with the Matgamna article. So it was very hard for them to arrive at a coherent, unified oppositional line.

At conference, the opposition met and I said to the comrades they should haggle out the minimum they could unite on and submit an amendment to my emergency motion on that basis.

However, the incredible decision of the comrades to allow a loyalist representative - Steve Wood, a member of the national committee - into the meeting meant that was impossible. The discussion was constantly diverted and any, even small, coherence that could have come out of it was ruled out.

So there was no amendment, reflecting the fact that the comrades clarified nothing and they are still keeping everything they write criticising the majority internal. (Last time I was part of that conversation I know that some comrades were in favour of making it public - but that's a minority of a very small minority in the AWL itself).

As a result of that incoherence, no oppositionist stood up to speak in the debate on the emergency motion on the conference floor, apart from Dan Cooper (who wasn't called).

Conference was the moment to make an impact and challenge the leadership over Matgamna's article and their dire public response - but that was squandered. Writing an *internal* document *now* - weeks after the EC has produced a large amount of material itself - is pretty much a waste of time. **Is this why you felt it right to resign? As you know, we have been critical of the culture of resignation on the left - ie, a serious difference is the cue to walk. Was there really no space to continue a fight?**

Part of my decision was an assessment of the opposition's fighting capacity, myself included. They have yet to secure any sort of public recognition, however slight, that the article is bigoted. Then there was the reaction from AWL centre and the majority of comrades in the organisation. We arrived at a point where everyone outside the opposition - whatever mildly critical stance they started from - came round to saying the piece was totally unproblematic. When you add to that the incoherence and ineffectiveness of that opposition, it just seemed to me a massive waste of time to continue under the constraints that would have been put on me by remaining a member of the organisation.

Mark Osborn explicitly stated that the problems in the group could be put down to a failure to "integrate the youth" into the AWL's "tradition and political method". But part of that purported tradition the AWL lays claim to is respect for the rights of minorities, open democratic discussion and accounting for its actions in front of the class. What Osborn's remarks imply is a yearning for political *homogeneity* - and my experience suggests *this* is actually an important defining feature of the AWL tradition, not a personal quirk of Mark Osborn.

There is very little room for a successful rebellion in an organisation like that unless it starts at the top ●

Notes

1. The December 2008-January 2009 assault on Gaza was codenamed Operation Cast Lead by the Israelis.

2. S Matgamna, 'Political Islam, Christian fundamentalism, Marxism and the left today': www.workersliberty.org/story/2013/10/04/political-islam-christian-fundamentalism-marxism-and-left-today-0.

3. The AWL refused to oppose the imperialist war on Libya - see 'Zig-zagging social-imperialists' (*Weekly Worker* December 1 2011) for an overview of the group's politics by one-time member and now socialist blogger, Arthur Bough.

4. See Paul Demarty's 'Siege mentality' (*Weekly Worker* October 31) both for an overview of the AWL conference as a whole and the CPGB's take on this individual incident.



Neither for nor against!

Why I am leaving the AWL

Patrick Smith's resignation letter

There are times, of course, when remaining in an organisation you have important political differences with is the right thing to do. It is right to fight for the correct ideas with your comrades, to seek to convince people you have worked with in the movement for years, and expose wherever possible the undemocratic and disorganising nature of bureaucratic centralism.

During the course of the AWL's pre-conference period there have been some sharp political differences thrown up between myself and the organisation, not least the political character of Islamic fundamentalism, but also the theory of imperialism. Taken on their own, these differences would be no reason to leave; indeed, they are reasons to stay and fight.

However, I have been shocked by the response from the group, not just from the Matgamna clique at the centre of the organisation, but from the majority of members. It is for this reason I have chosen to make my resignation and the entire internal debate public.

It is worth restating that sections of the Matgamna article¹ are simply bigoted. There can be no defence of it. Not just the Islamophobic language, but the chauvinist - worse than chauvinist - world view that it presents; a world view that permeates and informs the entire article, a world view upon which Sean's explanation for the appeal of Islamic fundamentalism is predicated.

There can and should be a debate about the substantive political content of the article and the wider politics of the AWL. Articles by Simon Hardy² and Yassamine Mather³ are the start of such a debate, but that is separate from and not a substitute for a public recognition of the bigoted nature of the article.

Matgamna's contribution paints a picture of a world bifurcated into backward and advanced societies: the Islamic world and the west. Throughout the article, the Islamic world is consistently characterised as poor, deprived, outside the advanced capitalist world, and on the fringes of capitalist prosperity. This is in contrast to the west, which is consistently characterised as technologically advanced, prosperous and rich. These characterisations are either directly stated or implied through the contrast of the two worlds.

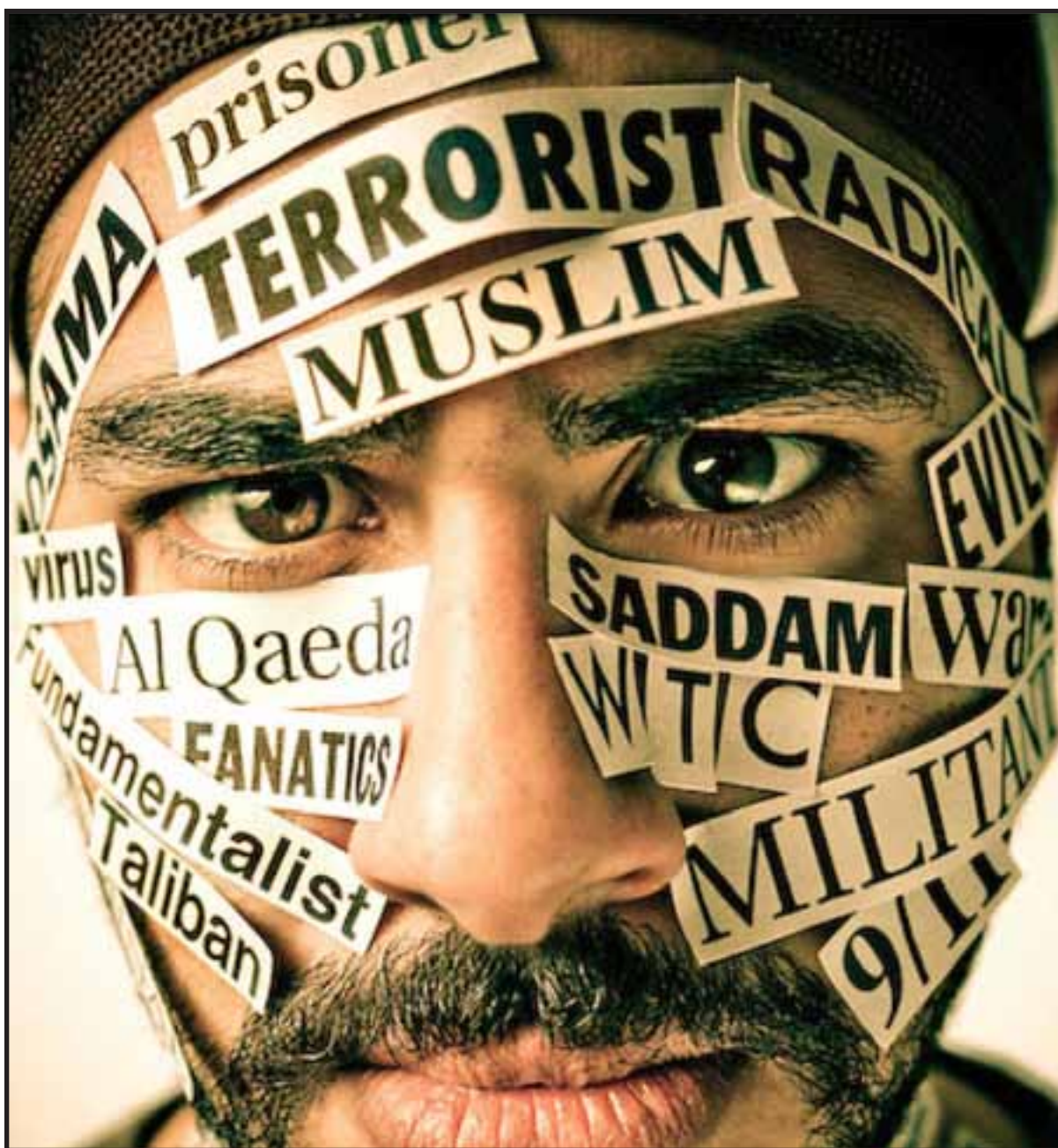
In Sean's imagination the proliferation of communications technology has led to the Islamic world learning of and subsequently envying the west's prosperity and riches. This, Sean claims, is the material basis for Islamic fundamentalist ideology, which fulfils the desire to escape poverty and deprivation by relegating it to the afterlife.

He provides a very different explanation for the rise of Christian fundamentalism, the appeal of which can be found in the "the spiritual emptiness of prosperous capitalism". He goes on to express surprise at the fact that "primitive religion" is a growing force in "the most technologically advanced society on earth", the USA.

The general narrative here is one of two worlds; the advanced, prosperous capitalist west, in danger of regressing into a primitive state of religious ignorance; and a poor, simple, primitive "Islamic world", already there, enviously "eying" the west.

To articulate this chauvinist world view Sean chooses language and imagery that is not simply "problematic": it is Islamophobic.

Bigotry has no place in a socialist



No Islamophobia?

organisation, so one would think that pointing it out on an internal mailing list out would be relatively uncontroversial. Unfortunately this was not the case. Not only did the majority of members mobilise to defend the article's chauvinism and choice of language: some tried to deny that Islamophobia even existed.

Executive committee member Mark Osborn wrote - in a reply that resembled the 19th century social-chauvinism of Eduard Bernstein - that "some societies are primitive, or more primitive than advanced western capitalism ... people in less well-off (more backward, even primitive) societies looking on with envy and jealousy and fear at American riches and power".

Jim Denham, no doubt in one of his infamous spasms of rage at the injustice of criticism directed against his group, took to the keyboard to tell us that "we should avoid, whenever possible, using the word 'Islamophobic', which is used by fundamentalists and their apologists to deligitimise [sic] all criticism of Islam and/or Islamism and equate ideological criticism with 'racism': a long-running campaign that, unfortunately, seems to have gained some support within the AWL."

While this 'enlightening' debate was taking place, some 500 people had already shared the article on Facebook and were beginning to quiz AWL members as to their views on the issues it raised. The executive committee were forced to produce a response to the group's critics.⁴ This pathetic exercise in double-think and

misdirection was wholly inadequate and prompted me to submit an emergency motion⁵ to the conference.

From the time I submitted the motion to the start of the debate at 10am on the Sunday morning, I was subjected to a sustained campaign of pressure from about a dozen comrades to withdraw the motion. This took the form of long, tedious debates on the phone, in my branch, and a particularly high-pressure/aggressive double-act composed of Martin Thomas and Paul Hampton before the start of the conference.

The executive committee proposed to the standing orders committee that the conference should decide as to whether or not it would accept the motion, with two speakers for and two against. An hour was set aside for a debate - either on the motion itself or on the article, depending on the outcome of the vote.

Martin Thomas and Cathy Nugent spoke against taking the motion. It was claimed that the situation was not an emergency and that the motion sought to overturn the "tradition" of the AWL. Martin Thomas, incapable of sticking to the rules of the debate, repeatedly spoke to the content of the motion and engaged in myth-making about what it actually said. In the end, two thirds of conference voted not to discuss the motion, ending any possibility of addressing a situation that was rapidly getting out of hand.

In the ensuing 'debate' only two members - myself and Hannah Thompson - raised any criticism of the article. It is unclear as to whether this was because those who were critical of the article were not called to speak

or whether they chose not to, but the debate was primarily used to denounce and attack critics and to rally support for the leadership. In one incredible

contribution, members were told that it was not even necessary to even read the offending article before springing to its defence. Any critical, or thinking, approach was actually "disloyal" to the group. Moreover, it was even wrong to post their grievances to the internal list. We were asked to show solidarity with poor Sean and told that the executive committee's public response was a defence of us all. Many of the arguments made in that debate are now being rolled out across the internet and in real life in a feeble damage-limitation exercise.

The last three weeks have shown that the AWL shares all the hallmarks of the bureaucratic-centralist sects they criticise. In scenes reminiscent of the collapse of the Socialist Workers Party, only on a smaller and sadder scale, comrades who have misgivings about the article are told not to express them publicly. Instead they are asked to lie about what they think and defend the group from the onslaught of criticism. Phone calls and impromptu home visits from full-timers await those who dare to ignore this dictat.

It is untenable to remain in an organisation that produces a narcissistic public response that attempts to blame everybody else, fudges the issues and then changes the subject completely; an organisation in which the majority of people vociferously defend a bigoted article; an organisation that demands and enforces loyalty over critical thinking.

If critical self-examination, an irreconcilable opposition to xenophobia and bigotry, and allowing public dissent are not part of a tradition, then that tradition is toxic and I will not remain a part of it ●

Notes

1. www.workersliberty.org/story/2013/10/04/political-islam-christian-fundamentalism-marxism-and-left-today-0.
2. <http://internationalsocialistnetwork.org/index.php/ideas-and-arguments/fighting-oppression/266-awl-on-islamism-analysis-without-history-words-without-meaning>.
3. www.cpgb.org.uk/home/weekly-worker/984/awl-matgamnas-chauvinistic-tirade.
4. www.workersliberty.org/story/2013/10/22/marxists-and-religion-left-seriously-disoriented.

Fighting fund

Valiant

The last day of October saw a valiant effort from three comrades to see us over the line in the race to reach our £1,500 fighting fund target, but unfortunately we didn't quite make it. Despite the tremendous £100 PayPal donation from TR, another for £10 from LT and a £25 bank transfer from DK - all on October 31 - our total for the month was tantalisingly short, finishing on £1,441.

Hopefully we can make up that £59 deficit in November, which has started well mainly thanks to 17 standing order payments received in the first few days. In particular let me acknowledge those of AD (£36), SD and CG (£30 each), BP (£25) and JA (£20). And thanks too to comrades JH and OL for their cheques, both for £20.

There were also two PayPal donations - from EJ (£25) and MD (£10). But I have to say that two contributions from exactly 12,500 online readers last week is a small return. I know many of them were interested in the items

on our home-page carousel relating to the Alliance for Workers' Liberty and the Socialist Workers Party, so perhaps I should not expect them to be *Weekly Worker* supporters.

There again, you don't have to agree with our politics in its entirety to appreciate the work we do in publicising the efforts of those who oppose the bureaucratic-centralist failings of the left. We consider it a duty to publish things like Patrick Smith's resignation letter to the AWL (which also appears in this week's *Weekly Worker* - see above) and the internal debate featuring in the SWP's *Pre-conference Bulletin*. If you appreciate this, you should help us raise the cash we need to keep on doing it!

After six days of our November fund, we have £339. But that is a bit behind the going rate. Please do what you can, comrades! ●

Robbie Rix

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

ISN

Swamp things get together

Daniel Harvey examines the politics underlying recent regroupment efforts

The International Socialist Network's October 26-27 'politics conference' saw a left 'grouping' (actually too disorganised to be a faction in the proper sense) around Tim Nelson and Paris Thomson narrowly winning votes against the right (led loosely by Richard Seymour) on rank-and-file strategy and on any immediate regroupment with Socialist Resistance.

While a merger with SR was rejected, a wider, broader regroupment project was agreed. This will include not only SR and the likes of Workers Power, but the anti-cuts campaign, Plan C, the Industrial Workers of the World and the Anarchist Federation - which seems speculative, to say the least. The result is not exactly dazzling for people with a principled Marxist outlook then, but it does mean the comrades in and around the ISN and the Anti-Capitalist Initiative, which were scheduled for an imminent merger, will have a breathing space until later next year. Hopefully this is going to give comrades in both groups some time for real thought, debate and critical reflection, which is obviously desperately needed.

At the moment it appears that the Anti-Capitalist Initiative is shedding members - the prospect of a merger with the ISN, and more importantly with Socialist Resistance, has caused many autonomist-leaning activists to bolt. The ACI's nominal leadership, as well as members of the ISN, are heavily integrated with Socialist Resistance now and, from what I have seen, it looks impossible to separate the groups politically. So a refusal on the part of the wider membership of the ISN to merge with them in the long term would likely mean some kind of split, unless perspectives change.

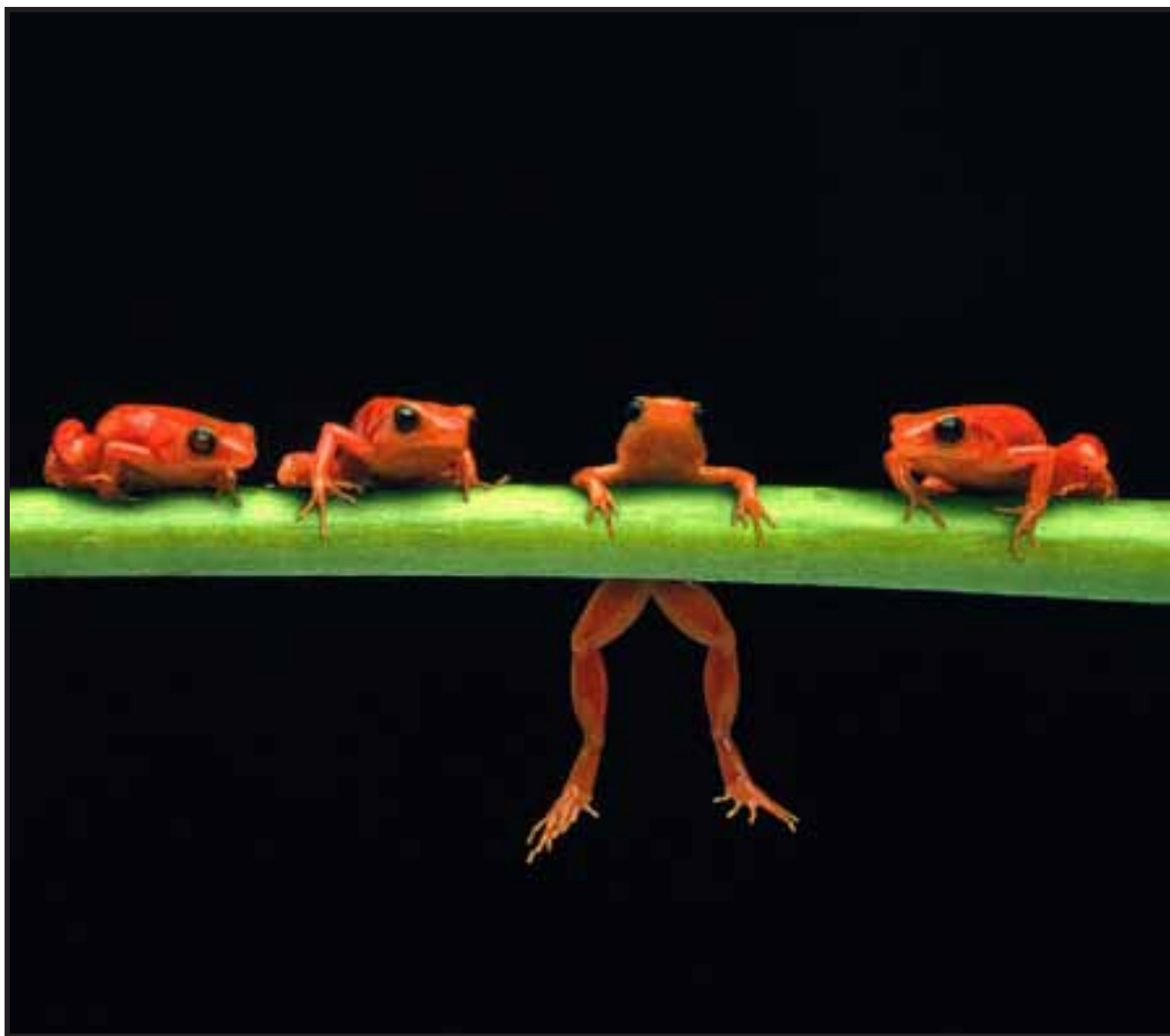
That means that there is a window of opportunity for debate before a premature and unstable regroupment process is sealed. Others from outside need to engage too - we have, after all, every reason for wanting to unite the left on a principled basis.

In that spirit, I went to the November 2 joint ISN-ACI-SR meeting in London's Kings Cross, expecting to hear the best case possible being argued from the rightwing side of the debate in the different groups involved. The line-up included Ed Rooksby, who recently had an article published in the Socialist Workers Party's *International Socialism* about the need for a "transitional" reformism (October); John Riddell, a prominent centrist-Trotskyist theoretician from Canada; and Kate Hudson, familiar to many as a former Communist Party of Britain and then Respect member, and who today figures large on the steering group of Left Unity.

There were about 30 people attending, but Socialist Resistance seemed to make up the bulk of the meeting. In contrast there were just three people from the ACI - Simon Hardy, Luke Cooper and Joanna Ramiro - along with two from the ISN: Kieran Crowe and Tom Walker. It seemed obvious from the start that the right wing of the ISN and ACI do not have anywhere near the same organisational level or ability to draw in their comrades as does SR, and as a result the latter is really dominating the discussion on this side of the debate.

Real-world reformism

It is worth outlining the arguments. Both Rooksby and Riddell take historical inspiration from the early



Fragile basis for unity

Comintern's turn away from the Leninist 'dual power' model, based on workers' councils, after the failure of the German revolution. This rests on the assumption that advanced capitalist countries, with their stable states, are immune to a workers' revolution, but are vulnerable to reformist movements that act within the state.

The one example talked about the most was, of course, Syriza. It nearly won the 2012 election in Greece on the basis of rejecting the troika's proposed bailout and austerity package. At Syriza's last congress, however, the leadership pushed to dissolve internal groupings. Furthermore it has been canvassing a coalition deal with the totally discredited Pasok social democrats. On this score, Ed Rooksby was willing to concede in response to contributions from the floor that Syriza would almost certainly fold under external pressure from the European Union, rather than accede to demands coming from the Greek working class.

John Riddell, however, still held out the belief that Syriza would be driven to break with the EU and into initiating an extended period of reformist national government. He based this belief on the experience of Latin America, where reformist governments in Bolivia, Ecuador, Brazil and Venezuela have been able to survive despite pressure from the United States. These governments he saw as transitional, suspended semi-permanently between reform and revolution, and as constituting a growing anti-imperialist alliance that would reinforce a radical upturn throughout the continent.

Riddell unfortunately brushed over some very problematic dynamics in Latin America, which contradict his main argument that reformist governments create a transitional kind of *Zeitgeist* in favour of more radical demands. Outside observers who look at what is taking place on the

ground in these countries can see that in each of them there have been some significant crackdowns on the very workers' movement which brought these reformists to power in the first place. On top of this, there have been slow-motion capitulations to neoliberal economics in important respects, as corrupt layers carve out empires for themselves in state enterprises and the grossly enlarged bureaucracies. State programmes have replaced initiative by workers and the poor, and that in turn has led to atomisation.

Evo Morales, for instance, rode into power as president of Bolivia on the back of the radical movements in 2005, with the miners at their centre. Yet he deployed the police to suppress the miners' unions when they resisted raising the retirement age to 65 - which was particularly galling, seeing as many die long before this. At the same time he has made concessions to the fascist gangs running amok in the richer south of the country, watering down his own, quite limited, reform programme in the process.

In Venezuela striking workers are routinely denounced as *guarimberos*, or clandestine enemies of the revolution working for the opposition, and there are hundreds of outstanding disputes with state employees whose attempts at collective bargaining are rejected out of hand. The 2004 petition against Hugo Chávez's leadership, supported by a substantial section of the population, led to signatories being purged from the state apparatus. At the same time the military is maintained enlarged and on higher pay, and separated from the rest of the population.

But the response from those who hold onto Rooksby and Riddell's centrist Trotskyism is that a special kind of dialectical relationship between the workers' movement and the reformist government exists. This has to be carefully calibrated by revolutionaries operating in the broad party. Which does not really seem to

accord with real-world experience. In Brazil, for instance, the Mandelites in the Workers Party resigned from the Fourth International in order to fully support Lula as president. He ran as a safe pair of hands for capitalism - and Brazil remains one of the most unequal countries on earth. As do Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia. But like them Brazil is now characterised by a demoralised and far less active revolutionary movement.

For her part, Kate Hudson came out with a potted apology for the long line of failures in Europe. For example, Rifondazione Comunista had featured in the discussion - particularly its voting for Italian participation in the Nato occupation of Afghanistan. But she explained that left parties are hampered by the existence of larger, more traditional parties. She is not wrong here. In France the 'official communist' Parti Communiste Français, with its support for Mélenchon and the Front de Gauche, prevented the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste from making any progress. In this country, the existence of the Labour Party and the 'first past the post' electoral system have effectively blocked all attempts at a left alternative party. This line, of course, closely follows the analysis of SR's Alan Thornett.

Dichotomy

There is a bizarre dichotomy between, on the one hand, wanting to be a revolutionary minority giving full support to a reformist political party over which we will have no control, and, on the other hand, the absolute rejection of any engagement with existing social democratic parties on the basis that they are corrupt and neoliberal. This contradictory position is what the CPGB's Mike Macnair has called "third-period Bernsteinism".

Despite numerous glaring failures, this is now common sense for a lot of the left. It is difficult to tell whether

or not it is inevitable that the ISN and ACI will go down this route. But on the evidence most prominent members have been won over to that perspective.

Admittedly they are aware of the problems. So Kate Hudson intimated that there needed to be very careful planning on the part of a left leadership in making agreements with coalition partners. She cited the example of the detailed contracts drawn up between coalition partners in Germany. Simon Hardy in his intervention from the floor proposed devising rudimentary programmatic safeguards, as he is advocating for the Left Party Platform in Left Unity.

What this means in practice is difficult to tell - rejecting all coalitions with capitalist parties, not supporting any kind of foreign interventions, not supporting austerity and cuts? All well and good, but what about our vision of an alternative society? Ed Rooksby talked about a specifically revolutionary kind of reforms: ie, 'structural' reforms which have revolutionary ramifications.

If he is talking about workers' control in the workplace, or the dissolution of the armed forces and the police, the reformist party does not sound very reformist any more - which rather contradicts the schema of hiding its true character in the first place. The only way this 'transitional bridge' between reform and revolution can be affirmed is by holding onto this quasi-mystical belief, particularly of Alan Thornett and John Riddell, that a reformist government can overcome the basic hostility of the state apparatus, and that the armed bodies that defend it will happily allow themselves to be dissolved.

Socialist Resistance has historically held the idea that reformist parties of any kind lead to some kind of radicalising spiral. That long periods of reformist government are necessary before arriving at a possibility of socialism. This despite all the facts showing no such thing. But if the left in the ISN and ACI can develop some kind of minimum-maximum programme, then that would represent a huge leap forward. We could then begin having a serious discussion on regroupment on a Marxist basis.

They also need to reject the method of groups like Workers Power, which demands public support from its members for every dot and comma of its programme. This inevitably causes splits, and the disintegration of the left into hundreds of tiny fragments. The alternative is acceptance of (as opposed to total agreement with) a programme which lays out a long-term, strategic approach, incorporating both immediate demands and the long-term vision for a future communist society. Such a programme would leave space for debate, for the refinement of ideas and for tactical adjustment according to circumstances.

In any case, there needs to be some serious discussion, including in the joint ISN-ACI-SR magazine, *The Exchange*, which I gather is going to feature an actual debate in its next issue, unlike the previous two boring editions. But there is a major obstacle to be overcome in the prevailing Cliffite programphobia still lurking in ISN circles. However, for revolutionaries to unite on a politically sound basis a programme is an absolute necessity. Our unity should be predicated on our ultimate goal, which keeps us working together.

Our desire for another, radically different kind of society has got to be the glue holding it all in place, and should be the starting point for any serious Marxist regroupment ●

GRANGEMOUTH

Gangster bosses and special measures

The Grangemouth capitulation shows the limits of trade unionism, writes **Eddie Ford**

There is no point in denying the scale of the Grangemouth defeat. Unite blinked on October 24 and the bosses got *everything* they wanted. Ineos, the Swiss-based company that owns the petrochemical plant, agreed to make a £300 million ‘investment’ in the plant and in return the union leadership agreed to a pay freeze, a three-year no-strike pledge, the closing down of the final salary pension scheme, and harsher redundancy terms - not to mention changes to union arrangements on the site, including no full-time union convenors.

Yet only two days earlier the union had declared “victory” over Ineos when a clear majority of its members voted down the company’s very same “survival plan”. But Ineos responded by announcing that the plant would close and that triggered Len McCluskey’s humiliating climbdown.

Initially, the dispute was over the treatment - or mistreatment - of the Unite convenor, Stevie Deans, also chair of the Falkirk Labour Party, with the company accusing him of “inappropriate” use of company time by engaging in “political” campaigning. Presumably it is a terrible crime for a trade union official to do his job and, of course, the company bosses *never* engage in political lobbying or agitation.

Grangemouth processes 200,000 barrels of crude oil every day and supplies 70% of the fuel to Scotland’s filling stations. It is of vital importance to the UK economy as a whole, employing 1,370 permanent workers (800 of whom were directly affected by the dispute) and a further 2,000 subcontractors. Another 10,000 jobs depend on the site.

Billionaire stripper

Ineos claims it was losing £10 million a month at Grangemouth and has a pension fund which is £200 million in deficit and on the point of going bust - an unprofitable business. Not everyone is convinced though. Richard Murphy of Fulcrum Chartered Accountants, who studied the Ineos accounts on behalf of Unite, concluded that Grangemouth actually made a £7 million profit last year, even after the pension shortfall was factored in. He told the *Daily Record* that Ineos did something “unusual” in recording investment in the plant as a loss, leading him to suspect that they were using ‘creative accounting’ techniques to paint a deliberate bleak picture of the plant and thus secure taxpayers’ cash (October 25).

Whether true or not, and it certainly sounds more than plausible, the Scottish and UK governments held constant talks with Ineos and Unite throughout the dispute - the thought of Grangemouth closing must have kept Alex Salmond awake at night - especially now that the referendum campaign is up and running. Indeed, Calum MacLean, the Grangemouth boss, emphasised how Jim Ratcliffe - the billionaire majority-shareholder/owner of Ineos - had spoken several times to Salmond and ministers in London, as he debated whether to give up on Grangemouth or not. Obviously firm believers in socialism for the rich and naked capitalism for the poor, Ineos asked for assurances that its application for a £9 million grant from Edinburgh and a £150 million UK loan guarantee were “on track”. MacLean also refused to rule out limited redundancies at Grangemouth. Rubbing salt in the wound, Ratcliffe triumphantly declared the Unite capitulation as a “victory for common sense” and even thanked the union for its “dramatic U-turn”.



Jim Ratcliffe and yacht

You should expect nothing else from an operator like Ratcliffe, who founded Ineos in 1998 and amassed his vast wealth by turning himself into a global asset-stripper - acquiring the nickname ‘JR’ (after JR Ewing, the manipulative and semi-sociopathic oil baron from *Dallas*). Ineos itself is the fourth biggest chemicals business in the world and is the *largest* privately owned company in the UK, estimated to have an annual turnover of \$44 billion. Not doing too badly then. Never one for missing a trick, in April 2010 Ratcliffe moved Ineos’s head office from Hampshire to Rolle, Switzerland, to save the company £100 million a year in tax and VAT.

Almost inevitably, Ratcliffe owns two super-yachts. According to the 2007 *Sunday Times* ‘rich list’, his personal fortune came to £3.3 billion. But by 2010, thanks to the financial crisis, the poor man’s wealth was said to have plummeted to a mere £150 million. Not to worry though - Forbes calculates that as of March this year he is on the up again, being worth a more respectable £1.1 billion.¹ Grangemouth workers, needless to say, are overpaid.

All in all, Ratcliffe is not the sort of guy who messes around or easily makes concessions - he *always* plays hardball, as the BBC’s recent profile revealed.² In fact, a Unite official told the BBC *Today* programme that the Grangemouth/Ineos representatives acted like “1920s gangsters” - totally obdurate and intransigent. It is hardly surprising therefore that McCluskey collapsed and accepted the plan, “warts and all”, to use his own words.

What alternative?

Large sections of the left have torn into McCluskey. A typical response came from Workers Power, which condemned the Unite leader on the grounds that he “shamefully fled the battlefield”, when instead the union could have “altered the whole history” of the dispute by organising the immediate occupation of the plant with “flying pickets and solidarity action around Britain’s other refineries” - which would “soon have had an effect in the petrol stations across the country”.³ Similarly, *Socialist Worker* lambastes McCluskey for posturing “as a lion”, only to “turn into a mouse when the bosses cut up nasty”, when what was needed was to “occupy the plant instead of being held to ransom”.⁴ As for Jerry Hicks, runner-

up to McCluskey in this year’s election for Unite general secretary, he angrily declared that Grangemouth had been “botched from the very beginning” and “ended in surrender” - though he thought McCluskey was a donkey rather than a mouse.⁵ He also argued, just like the Socialist Workers Party, that Unite should “end immediately its disastrous attempts” to reclaim Labour - castigating the union’s “infantile, unfunny comic capers of infiltration through recruiting members to the Labour Party”.

So what should have been done? The CPGB’s *Draft programme* (section 3.7) says that, when “faced with plans for closure”, we should raise the demand to “nationalise threatened workplaces or industries under workers’ control” - and under certain circumstances it would be a perfectly legitimate tactic for workers to occupy the workplace in order to back up this demand. Indeed, it would be a matter of pure self-defence.

Having said that, however, it is difficult to see how this could have happened on this occasion. As I understand things, the majority of workers cheered when they heard news of the settlement. We certainly need to appreciate that the Grangemouth workforce were unlikely to vote for an occupation, given that there had been no concerted campaign to win and prepare them for such a tactic. If they had been prepared to occupy and demand nationalisation under workers’ control, that would certainly have put enormous pressure on both the UK and Scottish governments. But that is to stray into counterfactual speculation. Therefore, whilst we can easily criticise McCluskey on this or that point, even his entire strategy - he is a left *bureaucrat* at the end of the day - it is equally fair to say that, given his political limitations, he was faced with a Hobson’s choice: continue to resist and risk the total defeat of the union, or temporarily retreat in order to fight another day.

And we have to ask what *viable* alternative is on offer from the likes of Hicks, the SWP, WP, etc? Precious little, if truth be told. Break the link with Labour? That would certainly strengthen the Progress faction and at last bring to fruition its long-term strategy to de-Labourise Labour. And, having waltzed out of Labour, the unions should do what exactly? Sign up to the pathetic farce that

is the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition? A sad fantasy.

What we need to do is learn the *political* lessons of Grangemouth - posturing calls for trade unions to break with the Labour Party are more than useless. There needs to be a serious and patient struggle for genuine left unity, involving work both inside and outside the Labour Party. In fact what the dispute has done is highlight yet again the limitations of trade unionism, especially under conditions of economic stagnation - we can ignore George Osborne’s stupid prattle about Britain’s “unprecedented growth” in the last quarter, etc. Whatever some on the left might think, if things are bad for capitalism, that does not automatically mean that things are getting better for us - quite the opposite, if anything.

The obvious danger posed by Grangemouth is that it could be a prelude for more open and vicious attacks on the working class - the bosses thinking they have been given the green light. Look, they might say, our businesses too are ‘uncompetitive’ - therefore we need to attack the workforce in the same way that Ineos has successfully done.

Falkirk

Meanwhile, the rightwing press, the Tories and others continue to harass Labour over Falkirk. Keep stoking the anti-union fire. Hence the dramatic *Daily Mail* headline - “Did Unite tamper with grandmother’s statement? Key witness’s bombshell accusation in Falkirk Labour vote-rigging storm”.⁶ We read that a Lorraine Kane “triggered” a major probe into “alleged electoral corruption” when she revealed her family had been signed up to the Labour Party without their consent, refuelling claims that others had become members without their agreement in a bid by Unite to “manipulate” the selection process in favour of their candidate, Karrie Murphy (who subsequently withdrew from the race for the sake of “reconciliation and unity”).

For the *Mail*, naturally, these latest stories “undermine” Ed Miliband’s reasons for closing the internal Labour Party investigation into Falkirk - which cleared Murphy and Stevie Deans of any nefarious activities. A police inquiry also found no evidence of anything criminal - how astonishing. But the *Mail* thinks the new allegations provide “shocking evidence” of the

malpractices Labour investigators uncovered at Falkirk but have so far refused to publish. The *Mail* claims to be convinced that Unite activists “falsified” up to 112 membership documents by “forging” signatures, and “coerced” and “badgered” constituents into signing direct debit forms - what chilling villainy. In some cases, the article alleges, these Unite activists “even paid the joining fees themselves” to get more members on the books - which is perfectly legal under Labour Party rules, indeed positively encouraged historically.⁷

Joining the fun, *The Sunday Times* now says it has seen 1,000 emails to and from Deans - exposing “the plot” to “influence” the selection process. Its spin on the story also included extracts from the internal ‘secret’ Labour report, with officials saying - if we are to trust the veracity of the newspaper - that there were “deliberate attempts to frustrate” interviews with some witnesses. The emails suggest, in the opinion of *The Sunday Times*, that a letter “retracting” key evidence in the Labour investigation was not written by the witnesses, but by union officials and approved by Deans - who has almost become public enemy number one. To such an extent, in fact, that David Cameron felt compelled to brand Deans as a “rogue trade unionist” who single-handedly “nearly brought the Scottish petrochemical industry to its knees”. Even more horrifying, Cameron went on, Deans was part of a “leverage unit” - another *Mail* exclusive - deployed by Unite to “intimidate” Ineos bosses during the dispute. Imagine how scared Ratcliffe must have felt.

Deans himself resigned from his job at Grangemouth on October 28. He has also stepped down from his post as chair of Falkirk LP. Unite condemned the “sinister victimisation” of Deans and in the pages of *The Guardian* McCluskey - quite correctly - forthrightly defended Unite’s Scottish chair. Deans, he said, was hounded out by a “hysterical smear campaign against trade unions”, although he had “done nothing more than stand up for the rights of workers” (October 29). He will surely not be the last victim.

Speaking on November 5, Ed Miliband again reiterated his opposition to a fresh Falkirk inquiry or publication of the internal report - though he would look at any “new evidence” and revealed that a second police inquiry was “underway”. He boasted about acting “swiftly and thoroughly” in the Falkirk case, and reminded his audience that Murphy was no longer in place and that the Falkirk party had been put under “special measures” - thus nobody who had been recruited during the period covering the allegations would be able to vote in the selection for a new candidate, thus negating local party democracy and basic natural justice in one stroke.

Unite and local Labour Party members in Falkirk are thus under attack from two angles. On the one hand, there are the “gangsters” of Ineos and, on the other, the Labour leadership and its “special measures” ●

eddie.ford@weeklyworker.org.uk

Notes

1. <http://www.forbes.com/profile/james-ratcliffe/>
2. BBC Radio 4 November 3 (www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b03g89cg/Profile_Jim_Ratcliffe).
3. www.workerspower.co.uk/2013/10/grangemouth-unite-dispute-2013.
4. *Socialist Worker* October 29.
5. www.jerryhicks4gs.org/2013/10/pressrelease-press-release-press.html.
6. *Daily Mail* November 3.
7. www2.labour.org.uk/membership-rates-explained.

USSR

Getting the Sov

On the 96th anniversary of the October revolution, Jack Conrad engages with the Russian question

The Soviet Union still matters. Though it passed into history in August 1991, the Soviet Union casts a distinct shadow. Indeed it is impossible to understand contemporary capitalism - that is, capitalism in the 20th and 21st centuries - unless you understand the USSR. The welfare state, Keynesianism, the mixed economy, state regulation, the promotion of bourgeois democracy as a universal elixir - all were, in their various ways, a response to the Soviet Union. Not merely the Soviet Union as a superpower with its 15 constituent republics, 10 time zones and Moscow capital. But crucially the manner of its birth. The October 25 1917 Bolshevik uprising shook the world (November 7, according to our Gregorian calendar). Since then capitalism has been managing its historic decline.

A mortified ruling class recognised that, because Russia had made proletarian revolution, so could Germany, France, Italy, Britain... even America. Capitalism saw death approaching and responded with a raft of concessions. Aspects of socialism were negatively anticipated. True, disciples of Friedrich Hayek malevolently advocate a return to their 19th century social ideal: a capitalism with money solidly based on gold; a capitalism relieved of trade unions, labour legislation and unemployment benefit; a capitalism unencumbered by business taxes; a capitalism where the law of value is unfettered. In all probability the Hayekian nightmare will remain a Hayekian nightmare because of the latent strength of the working class. Either way, contemporary capitalism is unmistakably shaped by the October revolution.

The shadow of the Soviet Union is with us in other ways too. Any Marxist, socialist or revolutionary who has sat in a pub, worked in a factory, waited at a bus stop, canvassed for a leftwing candidate or sold papers on a big protest demonstration - and talked to so-called ordinary people - will have been asked an elementary, but nonetheless profound question: 'What about Russia?' Almost without exception it comes with an instant follow-up: 'If things went so disastrously wrong in the USSR, why will you lot be any different?'

The reason why that question is constantly asked is twofold. Firstly, there exists a genuine desire for serious answers. The soaring, thrilling, eminently reasonable aims upheld by classical Marxism are well known. So is the inspiration provided by the October revolution and subsequent establishment of the Communist (Third) International. By the same measure, however, anyone who has studied the course of the Soviet Union, especially after 1928, can only but recoil in horror.

Yes, there are fringe elements who look back fondly upon the Soviet Union's "social ownership of the means of production" and who naively promise that their version of national socialism will produce altogether different results. Robert Griffiths, Harpal Brar, George Galloway, Alan McCombes and Kate Hudson come to mind.

Such figures discredit the left with their dreadful nonsense. And I think we can safely say that, while socialism remains contaminated by their Stalinist nostrums, we shall never gain mass traction. Quite rightly, so-called ordinary people have no wish to follow the path taken by the Soviet Union, even if it is invariably paved with the



Shook the world

best intentions.

Understandably, in the main, national socialists try to keep moral distance from Stalin nowadays. His "mistakes" and even "crimes" are forthrightly condemned (see the CPB's *Britain's road to socialism* programme). Nevertheless, that is combined with all manner of excuses for the policy of forced collectivisation and rapid industrialisation. Omelettes, we are lamely told, cannot be made without breaking eggs.

There is another, second, reason why so-called ordinary people constantly ask the Russian question. Public opinion is manufactured and manipulated by the bourgeois establishment. From A-level history courses to TV documentaries,

from newspaper opinion pieces to popular history books, the message is unrelenting, utterly cynical and, when it comes to key facts, sneakily dishonest. The standard account goes something like this.

Tsarist Russia was experiencing rapid economic growth and this would surely have led to the flowering of liberal capitalism. Unfortunately, tsar Nicholas was not a gifted man and stayed morbidly autocratic. Exhibit one: the duma was kept powerless and treated with barely concealed disdain. While the common people yearned for change, they were childish and easy to manipulate. Ideal conditions for Lenin. A ruthless revolutionary, he was an elitist and a fanatical believer in the monolithic party. Exhibit two:

What is to be done? Lenin's dogmatic intolerance split the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party in 1903. Just like the British Labour Party the nice Mensheviks wanted to base themselves on the popular masses. Tragically, circumstances encouraged extremism. With the war against the central powers going from bad to worse, tsarism collapsed in February 1917. Liberals and moderate socialists lacked the gumption needed to consolidate democracy. Lenin seized his moment and imposed a Bolshevik dictatorship. Stalin took up the brutal methods of war communism. Exhibit three: the first five-year plan. By the time Stalin was interred in 1953, tens of millions had been killed, starved or otherwise driven to a premature death.

A concoction of fact and fiction, which not only blames Lenin for Stalinism, but conveniently allows Marxism and fascism to be bracketed together in the same 'totalitarian' category. The operative conclusion being, of course, that revolution leads to chaos and should be avoided at all costs.

Interestingly, a not dissimilar message was pumped out during the rise of capitalism. Clerics and court chroniclers, moralists and philosophers, poets and playwrights condemned those who would meddle with the natural order. God had ensured the proper functioning of society by ordaining mutual, feudal duties and obligations upon lord and vassal alike. Love of money and a life of trade corrupts the spirit and

Soviet Union right

invites usurpation, faction and murder. Whereas today it is Russia which serves as the quintessential warning against radical social change, then it was Italy. Eg, Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice* demonstrates how proto-capitalist society undermines natural human values. He who controls money controls power. Shylock is not only deemed a “Jewish dog” by those amongst whom he lives. He embodies the dependence of Venetian aristocrats (Bassanio) and respected citizens (Antonio) on moneylenders. Notoriously the only human value Shylock holds dear is exchange value ... and he wants his “pound of flesh”.

The long decline of feudalism and the rise of capitalism is an acute embarrassment for the modern establishment. After all, what it reveals is not a seamless transition from one social system to another. Rather, there was economic dislocation, counterrevolutionary reversals, foreign invasions ... and a prolonged propaganda war. Those with a vested interest in the old order deployed every available ideological weapon against the new. There is a dangerous inference that can be drawn. Those with a vested interest in capitalism likewise use the first attempt to establish socialism as an object lesson, a warning, a means of associating anyone who dares challenge the existing order with oppression, bureaucratic rule, grinding poverty, mass killing and inevitable failure.

Justification

Stalin’s national socialism now only makes sense in the counterfactual world of ‘if’. And, admittedly, the Soviet Union would find historical vindication *if* it had evolved to become ever more democratic, *if* its people had enjoyed ever more prosperity, *if* socialism was at long last becoming real. Something Isaac Deutscher imagined was actually beginning to happen in the 1960s. Not only did the dizzying figures claimed for Stalin’s five-year plans deceive. Deutscher was thoroughly seduced by Nikita Khrushchev’s de-Stalinisation and the grandiose promises contained in *The road to communism* (1961). Eg, economic growth would proceed at “locomotive” speed and US national income would be surpassed in 1970. By 1980 the Soviet Union was to leave the US “far behind” and begin to realise the “higher phase” of communism.

Obviously the precedent lodged in Deutscher’s mind was bourgeois society. British capitalism began with piracy, the transatlantic slave trade, expropriating the peasantry and killing off the first generation of factory hands through superexploitation. Nevertheless, capitalism revolutionised the means of production and thereby laid the material foundations for the rule of the working class and in due course general human freedom.

Was Stalinism a barbaric latter-day equivalent? Many eggs were broken, yes, of that there can be no doubt. But even by 1980 there was no omelette. Historically, the Soviet Union proved incapable of matching the west in terms of labour productivity. National income always lagged “far behind” the US. Moreover, in the 1970s the Soviet Union began to stagnate. In the 1980s absolute decline visibly set in. True, a working class was created out of deracinated peasants; a class that was subject to a brutal regime of absolute exploitation during the 1930s

and 40s. But this class was atomised to an extraordinary degree and therefore it could neither think nor act as a class.

Say, however, the Soviet Union still existed and was at last realising Khrushchev’s goals, then, under those circumstances, the programme of national socialism would be able to make a claim on the future. Naturally, some of the basic propositions of Marxism would have to be severely modified or completely abandoned. Eg, socialism requires the conquest of political power by the working class in advanced countries; socialism entails the most extensive democracy; socialism sees the withering away of the state machine and the absorption of its necessary functions by society at large. But the historic experience of the Soviet Union does not disprove Marxism. The Soviet Union did not chart a non-Marxist road to socialism. What we saw emerge in the 1930s was an unsustainable, ectopic social formation, a society which, at the cost of terrible suffering and huge waste, has to all intents and purposes returned to type.

From the mid-16th to the mid-19th century Russia supplied the Atlantic powers with primary raw materials - grain, wood and furs. In return it got high-tech military knowledge and hardware. Hence, though Russia was formally independent and could deploy a powerful army in the European arena, it was in effect a semi-colony. Economically Russia was dependent on imperial sponsors (Netherlands, France, but mainly Great Britain). There was another dimension to Russia perceptively captured by Trotsky in his *History of the Russian Revolution* (1930). Because of tsarism’s policy of southern and eastward conquest - and therefore its large, non-Russian subject population - Trotsky described Russia as a “colonising semi-colony”.

Anyway, today each of the Soviet Union’s 15 successor states is characterised by varying degrees of neo-colonial dependency. The Russia federation, for example, possesses an arsenal of nuclear weapons, a huge conscript army and a permanent UN security council seat. But, as under tsarism, economically it languishes towards the bottom of the feeding chain. Russia once again relies on the export of primary raw materials - oil, gas, metals and timber.

Gamble

The October revolution can be equated to Russia’s 1642, 1776, 1789 ... and yet it was something more. Tsarist militarism, aristocratic landlordism and clerical reaction had to be swept away. And the Bolsheviks were certainly committed to modernising the country. Russia needed democracy, electrification, industrialisation, education and secularism. Lenin called this “completing the bourgeois revolution”.

Originally the plan was to carry out a proletarian-led revolution which would put into power a coalition government of working class and peasant parties. Capitalism not only remains, but especially in the countryside is given *greater* scope to develop. Hence the “revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry” was designed to be a temporary state of affairs. The Bolsheviks were committed to a *provisional* revolutionary government. After 10 or 15 years Russia was expected to have been economically and socially transformed. There would then be free and fair elections and, depending on

the results, the party of the working class should be prepared to constitute itself as the opposition.

While in 1916 Lenin began to couch plans for Russia’s modernisation in terms of opening up the road to socialism, the international dimension should never be forgotten. Making revolution in Russia was always placed in the context of sparking working class revolution in Europe. In other words, Russia’s revolution was to be the first great battle in the global transition to the communist mode of production. So the ambition was far higher than the English, American and French revolutions. True, they came with the uplifting promise of freedom, liberty and equality. But in reality this translated into the freedom for capital to dominate, the liberty of capital to exploit, the legal equality of capital and labour in the marketplace.

By the 20th century capitalism was pregnant with a new social order. The October revolution was the first attempt to return humanity to humanity, an attempt whose aspirations compare with the human revolution in Africa that occurred 200,000 years ago (or thereabouts). A subject explored by Chris Knight and popularised by this paper. Doubtless after many failures and false starts our ancestors made the transition from nature to culture. Over many thousands of years humanity lived in conditions of abundance, militant egalitarianism and original, or *ur* communism. The October revolution was intended to begin the transition from class back to classless society (only on a far higher material level).

Lenin was though painfully aware that within Russia itself, while it was quite feasible for the working class to take power, there was absolutely no chance of leaving behind the state, the division of labour, women’s oppression and all the other baggage of class society. Russia was a peasant country and that necessitated or reproduced the state, the division of labour, women’s oppression, etc. Nevertheless, there was every reason to believe that revolution in Russia would set Europe alight. Tsarism was falling apart under the pressure of military successive defeats and all the evidence indicated that the German and Austro-Hungarian empires were in an advanced state of decay too. The war opened up deep contradictions and it was obvious that the domestic peace agreed by the treacherous social-chauvinists could not hold much longer.

That is what Lenin gambled on - Russia sparking revolution first in Germany, Austria and Hungary, then throughout Europe. And socialist revolution in Europe would allow the Russian Revolution to proceed from the tasks of “completing the bourgeois revolution” uninterruptedly to the tasks of socialism. Instead of the working class party retreating into opposition and biding its time, such conditions would allow Russia to join the European Socialist Republic. And a revolution uniting Europe and half of Asia had every chance of rapidly spreading to every corner of the globe. Hence Russia was to be the vanguard of the communist revolution.

Lenin’s grand strategy must be borne in mind when assessing subsequent events. Trying to locate some original Bolshevik sin that explains first the eclipse of soviet

democracy under war communism and then the 1928 counterrevolution within the revolution is surely both foolish and misplaced. Not only did Britain, France, Japan, America and other capitalist powers aid, abet and actively intervene in the 1918-22 civil war (Winston Churchill wanted to “strangle the Bolshevik baby in its cradle”). After Trotsky’s Red Army had decisively beaten the Whites, Russia was subject to blockade, subversion and constant threats of renewed invasion. Crucially, however, the revolutions in Germany and Austria-Hungary were stopped short due to ‘official’ social democratic timidity, short-sightedness and willingness to be bribed. In return for substantial concessions the Russian Revolution was left impoverished, ravaged and isolated.

This background provides the *main* explanation for the replacement of election by appointment in the Communist Party, the ditching of the militia system for a conscript army, the hollowing out of the soviets, the seizure of peasant grain, the Kronstadt and other mutinies, the promotion of one-man management, etc, etc. All of which happened under Lenin’s leadership.

There are those who think everything would have been different had Trotsky been decisive and taken change in 1924. Some things would undoubtedly have been different. However, objective conditions were bound to asphyxiate the revolution sooner or later. Unless isolation was overcome, there could be no other possibility. Perhaps the last chance was Germany in the late 1920s. Yet the fact of the matter is that Stalin had already secured his hold over the Communist Party apparatus. In 1926 what is called ‘socialism in one country’ became official policy. The umbilical cord with internationalism was cut.

An astute politician and an energetic organiser, Stalin adapted to backwardness and isolation. The second edition of his famous *Foundations of Leninism* (1924) symbolised this. Whereas the first edition unhesitatingly maintained that it was impossible to build socialism in one country, the second, ‘corrected’, edition, issued a matter of only months later, insisted on the exact opposite. The proletariat “can and must build the socialist society in one country”. Showing the slide into scholasticism, a couple of quotes from Lenin were provided to *prove* the ‘theory’.

We can legitimately discuss whether or not Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev and other communist leaders were right to hang on in Russia when they knew that working class rule was shrivelling, becoming a mere formality. In 1919 Lenin was prepared to countenance a retreat. He successfully won the Communist Party’s 8th Congress to retain a minimum section in the new programme. Yes, the communists had to be prepared once again to operate as an opposition party. However, the civil war and the emergency measures required to secure victory burnt all their bridges. Driving the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries underground, alienating the peasants with grain seizures, fixing soviet elections left them with no option but to carry on. There was no civilised

route back. Either they had to rule as a minority and accept the consequences or go down in a counterrevolutionary conflagration. The unexpected historical paradox being, of course, that Stalin combined minority rule with a counterrevolutionary conflagration. The counterrevolution came from within, not from without.

Theories

Why did the October revolution go from being the hope for humanity to a counterrevolutionary bloodbath? We on the left need honest and convincing answers. Certainly there has to be an explanation that relies on something more substantial than vague subjective “mistakes” and “bureaucratic” methods (*Britain’s road to socialism*). Here ‘official communism’ cannot produce anything worthwhile, not least because it promoted those very “mistakes” and yearned to emulate those very “bureaucratic” methods. Hence ‘criticism’ of Stalin is always balanced by apologetics. Eg, “central planning” abolished unemployment - which is as true as it is irrelevant. After all, no slave-owner in ancient Athens or Rome would have left their slaves idle. Nor did Stalin and his successors.

What about Trotsky? Was the Soviet Union a degenerate workers’ state in the 1930s? Surely not. The last shreds of democracy had long been discarded, trade unions operated as a transmission belt for the regime, living standards were being mercilessly forced down, police spying was ubiquitous and the purges were in full swing. Millions were to perish. Add to that the ignominious collapse in 1991 and Trotsky’s theory is surely impossible to sustain.

Of course, Trotsky lacked the mass of reliable information we can now access. Moreover, he was assassinated in 1940. There is no reason to believe, however, that he would have stuck to what he called a “provisional” designation had he lived. Indeed Trotsky declared himself open to the idea that the Soviet Union could evolve towards an altogether new kind of exploitative social formation. Nevertheless, there are all manner of epigones who, speaking in his name, dogmatically insist that the USSR was a workers’ state right up till 1991 (some even bizarrely argue that it was a workers’ state under Yeltsin). Displaying complete theoretical bankruptcy, they equate a workers’ state or/and socialism with nationalisation. A position which owes everything to clause-four Fabianism and nothing whatsoever to authentic Marxism.

What about the Soviet Union being an example of state capitalism, as variously argued by Karl Kautsky, Amadeo Bordiga, Paul Mattick and Tony Cliff? Yes there was international competition, draconian labour laws and slave labour (*State capitalism in Russia*). But no money, no wage labour, no capital. What this school does therefore is not only fail to explain the Soviet Union. It fails to grasp the basics of capitalism.

Clearly we must reject guilty evasion, apologetic excuses and the twisting of facts to fit the label. Marxists have an obligation to come up with a coherent, scientific, fully theorised explanation of the Soviet Union ●

LENINISM



'Leninist' nationalism

The party we need

Is 'actually existing Leninism' the right model? In this edited version of his speech at the CPGB's Communist University earlier this year, **Moshé Machover** explains why it is wrong

In the late 1970s, the 80s and much of the 90s it seemed to many that capitalism could be made to serve the people, and that there was no need for an alternative. But this has changed, and there are more or less spontaneous expressions of hostility to capitalism, disbelief in its ability to deliver reform and so on.

Let me mention some slogans that were raised in connection with this sentiment in Israel. Not because Israel is at the forefront of anti-capitalist spontaneity - on the contrary, compared to other advanced capitalist countries, it is one of the least developed in terms of a socialist or a leftwing consciousness. But in July 2011 the biggest demonstrations ever in the history of Israel were seen. They started in Tel Aviv and spread all over the place. One of the two most popular slogans was: "The market is free - we are slaves". This, I think, is a very profound expression of disenchantment with the free market, with capitalism. The other was: "The response to privatisation? Revolution!" It was a very popular chant. I do not think the people chanting it understood exactly what this meant, but it expressed in some emotional sense what they were feeling.

Something similar happened in various countries, including in the Arab spring which occurred in both the Arab east and Arab west. People started to mobilise against neoliberalism and so on, then they came up against a repressive regime and found

themselves demonstrating to remove the tyrant. So the sentiment assumed a more overtly political form in those places, but the underlying reason for this was universal.

Missing ingredients

What is missing is a couple of ingredients which are really two aspects of the same thing. There is no real organisation. The protests were for the most part spontaneous, and the weakness of this kind of action was revealed very quickly. In the best possible case a spontaneous movement is able to remove a figurehead - a tyrant, a Mubarak - but then it dissipates. There could be a coup, or else there could be elections, in which the protestors have no-one to vote for; some organisation or other which does not express the demands of the demonstrators will win because it is there.

In Egypt actually both of those things happened. First of all the Muslim Brotherhood won because it was an organised party that was already in place; and *then* there was a coup. So it ends with very little. It reveals the energy of the masses, their inventive ways of conducting the debate, but the organisation is not there.

What is also missing is vision - vision of an *alternative*. And here is my biblical text for this sermon, from Proverbs 27.19: "Where there is no vision, the people are in disarray." (This is

the correct translation; the King James version ends with, "... the people will perish", but that is a mistranslation.)

Vision means having a positive programme for an alternative society. It is obviously inadequate to be 'anti-capitalist'. Can you win votes for a negative platform, for an 'anti'? What are you *for*, comrade? Do you have an alternative? The other thing one needs is an organisation which pulls together the working class and its allies, an organisation armed with that alternative vision. That is what is missing and it is what we need.

Now, of course, such an organisation needs to give substance to the vision. A vision by itself in some sort of moralistic sense is not enough: we need a method of identifying and examining problems, of analysing society and envisaging how it ought to be.

Marxism fits this bill. I am not saying that Marxism is perfect, or represents the ultimate, never to be superseded body of ideas, but it is the best that we have. And I am pretty sure that whatever does supersede it will also incorporate much of what we have in Marxism.

Almost 100 years ago, in 1915, Lenin wrote a very popular short article, 'The three sources and three component parts of Marxism', which I first read in the introduction to one of the translations of *Capital*. The three component parts of Marxism which Lenin lists are: German philosophy, English political economy (my apologies to Adam

Smith), and French socialism.

Let me paraphrase those components a little bit, so that they are less specific in a western European sense. For 'philosophy' I read 'method of thinking', 'method of analysis'. As for 'political economy', this is the 'science' component of Marxism. And in place of 'French socialism' I would put 'vision' - a vision of an alternative society. In other words, there is method, science and vision.

Comparing this to other bodies of theory, what is in competition? Anarchism? Social democratic reformism? Anarchism, for example, represents a poverty of philosophy, a distrust of science generally and a faulty vision of the future which does not actually make sense - it is unable to deal with the running of a complex, advanced society. It is too atomistic, too dispersed, too localistic. Or compare Marx to, say, RH Tawney, an ideologist of Christian social democracy - he is the best they have, at least in the English-speaking tradition.

Marxist party

So we do need a Marxist party. I would actually prefer to call it 'Marxian', because 'Marxist' sounds a little bit too much like a rigid doctrine, although I do not want to insist on that. But I do think it would be better for a Marxist party not to label itself as such. I do not mean that it should disguise or hide the fact that it is Marxist and draws inspiration from Marx, Engels, and so on.

It should *be* Marxist rather than calling itself Marxist.

If you look at the English section of the Matzpen website, there is a set of principles where Matzpen is defined as a Marxist organisation, but this is redundant. The principles themselves leave you in no doubt that the organisation is based on Marxist thinking. No non-Marxist organisation could subscribe to them. Similarly, if you look at the Socialist Platform of Left Unity, it does not actually say, 'This is a Marxist platform'. But if you read it you are in no doubt that Marxists wrote it.

The advantage of this is that it tends to avoid debates about whether Marx said this, that or the other. You have instead to argue for or against each part of the platform, each part of the programme, on its own merits. It is good to educate oneself and educate young members to be able to support or oppose each paragraph, not because 'Marx said so', but because it is correct (or not).

That would prevent discussions of the kind which I saw recently in the *Weekly Worker* around the falling rate of profit, around the arguments put forward by either Marx or Engels in the third volume of *Capital*, chapters 13-15, about the tendency of the rate of profit to fall as a result of the rising organic composition of capital, which is itself a consequence of rising productivity. There was too much of a discussion on whether it was Marx who said it, or Engels who put it in, or

whether Marx thought it at one point in his life and did not later. There was only one contribution that actually argued the case itself - it was wrong, but at least it was arguing about it on its own merits. I wrote an article, also in *Weekly Worker*, a long time ago, where I gave my own reasons for thinking it is wrong.

But whether Marx said it or not is Marxology. The real question is whether the idea and the conclusion can be defended logically and empirically.

Mind you, it is the science part of Marxism that is in most need of amendment. A philosophical idea can last for hundreds of years and still be very usable - you can find people adhering to very ancient philosophies without much change. But in science that does not happen. No scientific doctrine of the mid-19th century can remain intact today without serious amendment.

The best comparison is Darwin's *Origin of species*. Mostly it is right and it has survived very well. (I also think that *Capital* too has survived very well, but that not everything it contains is correct.) If there is something attributed to Darwin when actually it was TH Huxley, 'Darwin's bulldog', who said it, it does not really matter. What is important is, does it stand the test of present-day understanding of evolution? And obviously not everything does. Similarly you cannot expect every conclusion, every statement of Marx on political economy to hold up today. If it did, that would be very unusual in the history of science. And political economy is the scientific part of Marxism - other parts are more philosophic, more visionary and so on.

So the most important thing is not to label the party Marxist, but for it to *be* Marxist and to make it obvious to anyone who reads the programme and who follows what the party does that it *is* a Marxist party.

And we do need a Marxist party, but unfortunately I do not think that it is going to happen any time soon, at least in this country.

Obstacles

In my view there are two major obstacles to it among the ideas held by the people who would actually be candidates to start such a party: that is, people who are Marxists in some form or another. The problem is that among these people there are two commonly held fallacies that block the formation of a mass, united, Marxist workers' party. One of them is the idea that we need a 'broad party'; and the other is 'Leninism'.

I will be very brief on the 'broad party' idea, as I want to spend more time on Leninism. The problem with the broad party is that it is based on a compromise, on concessions, which are always made by the radicals to the more moderate, more rightwing elements. This is actually the inherent logic of the broad party and it is proved time and time again by experience; not only our own experience, but also the historical experience. There is an inevitable drift of broad parties of the left towards the centre of the political spectrum - that is in the very essence of the broad party. The other thing that is wrong with it is the absence of vision. This is always the first concession - the left agrees not to talk openly about overthrowing capitalism and replacing it with socialism.

Yet the urgent need is for an organisation *with* a vision, not the broad party of the kind advocated by various people, including those who define themselves subjectively as Marxists, as revolutionaries. They become defensive about this, and the content of the party that results is largely negative and defensive demands, because it lacks vision.

An additional, related problem specific to the conditions of the United Kingdom is the electoral system. A

broad party, more than a Marxist party, requires rapid electoral success. And the perverse electoral system we have for the UK parliament erects a very high hurdle and is very likely to result in disillusionment for many people due to lack of success. In European countries where there have been at least initially successful broad parties, including the Scottish political arena, there has been a proportional, or a more proportional, electoral system than we have in the UK.

I want now to come to Leninism. In order to describe the version which is inimical to the formation of a Marxist party, I use the term, 'actually existing Leninism' - just as the term, 'actually existing socialism', was used to describe something which was not socialism at all. 'Actually existing Leninism' is Leninism as it is practised, almost universally, by groups who define themselves as Leninist and as it is understood by individuals who consider themselves Leninists.

Leninism, whatever it is, is not a philosophy. I do not know of anyone who would say they are a Leninist because of *Materialism and empirio-criticism*. Nor because of Lenin's writing on imperialism, which is part of the corpus of 'actually existing Leninism'. Here we can see a big distinction with Marxism, which is a whole set of ideas - philosophy, political economy and vision.

No, I do not think people are Leninists on these grounds. 'Actually existing Leninism' is primarily the organisational model which is supposed to have been practised by the Bolsheviks before 1917 and incorporated in *What is to be done?* This model is known as the 'party of a new type', and defined by 'democratic centralism'.

Now, as a matter of fact this understanding of Leninism is common to three traditions in the workers' movement which are otherwise at each other's throats: 'official communism', Maoism and Trotskyism. All three are self-avowedly Leninist in this broad sense, and they have all understood Leninism more or less in the mould I have described.

Accepted story

The problem is that this is an invention. It has nothing to do with the real, historical Lenin, and certainly not the historical Lenin before 1917. It was invented after the Russian Revolution and became a sort of accepted story. But as a matter of fact this kind of Leninism has never worked, except under very, very exceptional circumstances, for the purpose of creating a mass workers' party.

The exceptional circumstances occurred when self-avowedly Leninist - 'actually existing Leninist' - parties became nationalist movements. This mutation happened to some Maoist groups, and to one Trotskyist group: the only Trotskyist group which ever became a mass party, which was in Sri Lanka.

There were also mass parties of this type in various parts of the world during a short period following World War II, until about 1956. It seemed that during that period socialism - that is, 'actually existing socialism' - was winning worldwide. First we had the Soviet Union, then we had China, then eastern Europe - and it was continuing to advance. Many people were impressed by this and several 'official communist' parties in various parts of the world - such as Italy and France, but also places like Iraq and Indonesia - were boosted as a result.

But for the most part, in all other cases, there were not mass parties, but a mass of parties. These Trotskyist groups multiplied like amoebas. And this is not a coincidence - it did not happen by chance. This fissiparousness is inherent in the model. It is a

model for creating fissiparous sects.

So if we give up on the idea of 'actually existing Leninism', then what about genuine Leninism? After all, we reject 'actually existing socialism' and we have genuine socialism: it never actually got to be implemented, but as a concept it is there before the Russian Revolution, during Stalinism, and afterwards. When one describes oneself as a socialist or even a communist, this is what one means. So what about adopting the genuine Leninist model of a party?

The trouble is that, whereas there is something like genuine socialism, *there is no such thing* as the genuine, specifically Leninist model of a party. Like the dagger that Macbeth saw before him, it is a phantom.

How do we know it is a phantom? Because we have read Lars T Lih on the true understanding of *What is to be done?* and it turns out that Lenin did not have any special model of organisation except in one sense. The main basis of his thinking about the party was the Social Democratic Party of Germany of the Second International, but, being thinking revolutionaries, he and his comrades adapted this model to the specific, existing conditions of tsarist Russia. So what is really specifically Leninist about this model is something that we do not need - we are not living in tsarist Russia. And if what we think we need is the model of German social democracy, then, while I do not think this fits modern conditions either, it is a good starting point for modification in line with those conditions. And if that *is* what we need then there is nothing specifically Leninist about it. It is a democratic party model, which allows factions, which accepts resolutions by majority vote, etc.

What about democratic centralism? Well, I cannot say that there is no such thing. The trouble is that there are several such things, and not in the sense that they are imaginary or that they are a concoction by Zinoviev. Historically it was understood in several different senses, including by the Bolsheviks themselves.

So if you say, 'Our party is democratic centralist', it does not absolve you from having to explain what you mean by this, and it certainly should not absolve you from arguing the case on its own merits - on why, for example, it is best to take decisions by majority vote. Why not unanimity, or super-majority, which in fact are very anti-democratic, but which are popular ideas now. Or the idea that there must be consensus. Now, consensus does not literally mean that 100% of people have to vote for a proposal: it usually means some kind of super-majority. I have previously written about this and I do not want to repeat the arguments here in detail why 'consensus' decision-making is actually anti-democratic, why this is not the rule of the majority, but gives a veto to a minority.

The most empowering form is the majority vote, but this requires some analysis. Similarly, why, for example, decisions that involve or apply to the whole organisation should be taken centrally and not through some sort of federal voting system. Again, this requires its own justification: it is not enough to simply say 'democratic centralism'.

Gestural

There is a third sense of Leninism which is, I think, distinct from these other two. It is something I have gone through and I think the CPGB has too. I am referring to a kind of gestural Leninism to signify that one is not or no longer a Stalinist. If you had asked me 50 years ago, I would have said, yes, I am a Leninist. And what I would have meant by that is 'Stalin bad, Lenin good'. And this is a healthy position to take. There is no continuity between Lenin and Stalin,

as the enemies of Marxism allege - both the right wing and the anarchists. That is wrong.

I used to be a Stalinist. I was a member of the Israeli Communist Party until I was expelled for questioning some basic tenets. And I believe the present CPGB (PCC) started as a Leninist tendency within the 'official' CPGB and then adopted a gestural Leninism. This denoted something positive - it is not something to be ashamed of. But it was only a start and should be regarded as a first approximation.

While there is no continuity between Lenin and Stalin, Stalin did head a bloody counterrevolution - this is something one has to insist on. It was a bloody counterrevolution which in order to legitimise itself claimed to be a continuation of Leninism, of what it was to be a Marxist. It published Marxist literature (to its own detriment, because some people actually read it and took it seriously). But it is also true that a lot of the decisions that were taken by Lenin, and by others who agreed with him, made Stalinism more possible: they unknowingly paved the way. I refer to Simon Pirani's book on that period, *The Russian Revolution in retreat, 1920-24*. You may disagree with some of what he says - I do not know, as I am not a historian of this period - but actually he raises some very important issues, which I think have to be taken seriously. That is not to say, 'Lenin bad'; it is not to make a villain out of Lenin, who deserves every respect from Marxists. But even beyond that one has to ask if there was something in the thinking of Lenin before 1917 that made such wrong decisions possible.

And I think that there was and that this was not unique to Lenin. You cannot blame Lenin individually: it was generally the case almost totally in the Second International, except that, unlike other leaders of the Second International, he actually became part of a ruling state. I think there was in Lenin's thinking a weakness in the attitude to democracy.

No-one was more in favour of democracy than Lenin - again, I refer to Lars Lih, who repeatedly quotes Lenin on the need for democratic rights like the need for "light and air". That is Lenin's stock expression. However, if you read carefully, there is a feeling that this is a purely instrumental attitude to democracy. In other words, we need democracy in order for the workers' movement to become strong, in order to win power. There is no sense - and here I may be wrong and doing an injustice to some leaders of the Second International, including Lenin - of any advocacy of democracy as an aim, as an inherent and inseparable part of socialism. That is to say, I would define socialism in part as the generalisation of democracy; its extension into all spheres of social life.

We live under a limited, crippled democracy which is confined to an alienated political sphere. In most of social life, the so-called 'economy', there is no democracy at all - there is the micro-tyranny of each enterprise and the macro-anarchy of the market. Socialism is about not only extending democracy, but the extension of democracy into all spheres of social life - especially to 'the economy', which presently has none at all.

But I do not get the sense that this idea was really internalised by the Second International. And the fact that when Lenin and the Bolsheviks came to power they did not have this conception among their aims was, I think, detrimental.

This gestural Leninism was understandable, and I do not regret having defined myself as a Leninist in my youth, but I think today, while not making a villain out of Lenin, one has to be a little more critical about him. And that, of course, applies to Trotsky and other communist leaders as well ●

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.

Brutal signal to opponents

Yassamine Mather reports on the latest wave of executions

Iran's Islamic government might be taking a more 'moderate' approach regarding nuclear negotiations, but as far as internal repression is concerned its stance is as bad as ever before - as bad as the worst periods of the rule of the last president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

In the last week of October alone, Iran's judicial system ordered the execution by hanging of at least 20 political opponents, all from national minorities (16 Baluchis and four Kurds), and the regime banned the 'reformist' daily, *Bahar*, for publishing an article questioning the historical veracity of events involving the first Shia imam.

The Baluchi separatists were executed in retaliation for an attack by a group of armed men on a border post that took the lives of 14 government soldiers in the south-eastern province of Sistan-Baluchistan. Meanwhile, in West Azerbaijan province two Kurds who had been sentenced to death following brief trials were executed. But two other Kurdish political prisoners, both serving 30-year prison sentences for opposition to the regime and membership of an illegal organisation, suffered the same fate. The family of one, summoned to collect his body, were told he was executed in the prison's visitors area.

The brutal hanging of those prisoners carried a deliberate message for all the regime's opponents. Supreme leader Ali Khamenei might have 'drunk the poison' when he made his U-turn as far as international negotiations on Iran's nuclear facilities are concerned, but he has no intention of tolerating any opposition or dissent. On the contrary, it appears that political prisoners and the opposition in general will be made to pay the price for the failure of the regime's foreign policy.

Opposition groups have warned that last week's terror reprisals have all the signs of the type of repression the regime imposed immediately after the end of Iran-Iraq war in 1987. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's version of 'drinking the poison' (peace with Iraq) was followed by the execution of tens of thousands of political prisoners, some nearing the end of their jail sentences. Such measures are intended to demonstrate that, just because the Islamic republic has been forced to make foreign policy concessions, that does not mean it is weakening in its attitude to its internal opponents.

A number of leftwing political prisoners in Evin prison have started a hunger strike in protest at this new wave of terror. In September, just before president Hassan Rowhani's trip to New York, the supreme leader ordered the release of more than 80 'prisoners of conscience'. However, only 42, many of them approaching the completion of their prison terms, were freed. Hundreds remain behind bars.

The 'moderate' Rowhani has said nothing. It is clear that the new president does not want to jeopardise his relationship with the conservative factions of the regime, and the security forces they control. Of course, we should not forget that while in New York Rowhani spent a considerable amount of time discussing Iran's economy with the International



Hassan Rowhani: killing

Monetary Fund and, as the latest 'economic restructuring programme' takes shape, control of the working class and the population at large remains high on the government's agenda.

In another attack on freedom of expression, the authorities shut down *Bahar* on October 28, five days after the publication of a controversial article that cast doubts on whether the prophet Mohammed had appointed a successor. The newspaper's punishment was predictable, since the article contradicted one of the fundamental beliefs of Shia Muslims. The head of the judiciary, Sadeq Larijani, warned that any publication taking up an "unacceptable stance" would face suspension or a ban.

This venture into theological history was something of an exception for the 'reformist' media, which has been mainly concentrating on the continuing house arrest of the leaders of the green movement. However, the victims of the worst aspects of the regime's repression are not under house arrest and their families are not allowed regular prison visits. Although no-one can justify the continued house arrest of the 'reformist' leaders Mir-Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karubi (especially when you consider that Rowhani was supposed to be their ally), for us in Hands Off the People of Iran the urgent task is to save political prisoners whose life is in danger - incarcerated labour activists whose only crime is defending their fellow workers; national and religious

minority activists, whose only crime is not to be Shia.

We also need to publicise and support the struggles of thousands of workers who have had the courage to protest outside their factories, outside the Islamic majles (parliament) or in front of provincial offices, demanding payment of their withheld wages; workers at the Qazvin car manufacturing plant, workers in the petro-chemical industries, workers who have demonstrated in their tens of thousands against the drying up of the river Karoun in Khuzestan province.

Not surprisingly Iran's new-found allies within the 'international community' are not condemning this wave of repression and the Iranian organisations tied to (at times dependent on) US and European money are not in a position to do much. As we have said time and time again, UN institutions, and imperialist-funded 'human rights' NGOs do not campaign for these imprisoned Iranian workers. If last year they were queuing up to support women's rights, and to try leaders of the Islamic regime for crimes committed in the past, they are showing no interest in the recent executions up and down the country. That is why we need a different kind of solidarity: workers' solidarity from trade unionists and labour activists independent of US-sponsored labour organisations and free of any associations with Zionism, Sunni fundamentalists or other reactionary religious or nationalist forces. In this

respect we also need to point to the illusions of large sections of the Iranian left in 'international law', the United Nations and its institutions.

Our solidarity

All in all, not a good week for Iran's new government both internally and internationally. However, the question many comrades ask is, what can we in Hopi do?

The answers are neither simple nor straightforward. Our numbers are few and our resources limited. However, we have been able to give a comprehensive analysis of the current nuclear negotiations, explaining the obstacles and the loopholes of the process, and we have continued our adherence to revolutionary principles when it comes to building solidarity with the Iranian working class. As uncertainty and political change have provoked increased protests against the regime, as state repression is stepped up, we need to do a lot more in building support from trade unionists and workers' organisations, keeping in mind the damage already done by those who have failed to take a clear line on imperialism and indeed global capitalism.

More than ever before, supporters of the Iranian working class must take a principled stance in opposition to imperialist intervention. But campaigns in solidarity with Iranian workers should not be tarnished by association with pro-imperialists, such as the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, the American Federation of Labor/Congress of Industrial Organizations, which have a history of collaboration with successive US administrations.

In the last few weeks during various discussions with labour activists inside and outside Iran, these comrades have expressed their continued concerns about irresponsible attitudes regarding solidarity with Iranian workers. On the one hand, we must do all we can to help incarcerated comrades. On the other hand, at no time can we afford to lower our guard *vis-à-vis* institutions

and organisations associated with US and European powers. It is not an easy task, but we must be aware that anything else endangers the very lives we want to save. So let us concentrate on finding allies amongst activists and organisations that share our concerns about imperialist intervention, who like us understand Iran's complicated politician landscape.

Support for the Iranian working class must include a call for the immediate, unconditional release of labour activists held in prison. In the current climate their lives are in danger.

These include:

- Behnam Ebrahimzadeh, a member of the Committee for the Establishment of Workers' Organisations in Iran (CEWO), who has served three years of a six-year sentence.
- Reza Shahabi, member of the coordinating committee of Vahed bus workers, still in jail for his part in the 2006 strike and for organising workers in this sector. Shahabi is very ill and his condition is deteriorating daily.
- Shahrokh Zamani, a Painters Union militant and another CEWO member. He is currently serving an 11-year sentence and has been tortured on a number of occasions. Zamani is held in Rajaei Shahr prison, one of the worst detention centres in Iran, because he is accused of "insulting the leader", a charge that was added six months into his sentence.
- CEWO member Mohammad Jarahi, who was arrested in January 2012. He, like fellow-prisoners, has had a number of serious health issues, but has been refused release on health grounds.
- Worker activists Pedram Nasrollahi, Mohammad Mohammadi and Abdolreza Ghanbari are also in prison and their lives are in danger.
- In Kurdistan province, in addition to nationalist prisoners, worker activists Vafa Ghaderi, Khaled Hosseini and Ghader Hosseini all face jail sentences and on November 4, hours after the execution of the Kurdish prisoners, Vafa Ghaderi was arrested ●

yassamine.mather@weeklyworker.org.uk

Subscribe
here

UK subscribers: Pay by standing order and save £12 a year. Minimum £12 every 3 months... but please pay more if you can. Your paper needs you!

Standing
order

	6m	1yr	Inst.
UK	£30/€35	£60/€70	£200/€220
Europe	£43/€50	£86/€100	£240/€264
Rest of world	£65/€75	£130/€150	£480/€528
New UK subscribers offer: 3 months for £10			

Name _____

Address _____

Post code _____

Email _____ Tel _____

Send a cheque or postal order payable to 'Weekly Worker' to:
Weekly Worker, Box 928, London WC1N 3XX, UK.

I enclose payment:

Sub £/€ _____

Donation £/€ _____

Total £/€ _____

Date _____

To _____ Bank plc _____

Branch Address _____

Post code _____

Re Account Name _____

Sort code _____ Account No _____

Please pay to **Weekly Worker**, Lloyds TSB A/C No 00744310
sort code 30-99-64, the sum of £ _____ every month*/3 months*
until further notice, commencing on _____
This replaces any previous order from this account. (*delete)

Signed _____ Name (PRINT) _____

Date _____ Address _____