

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

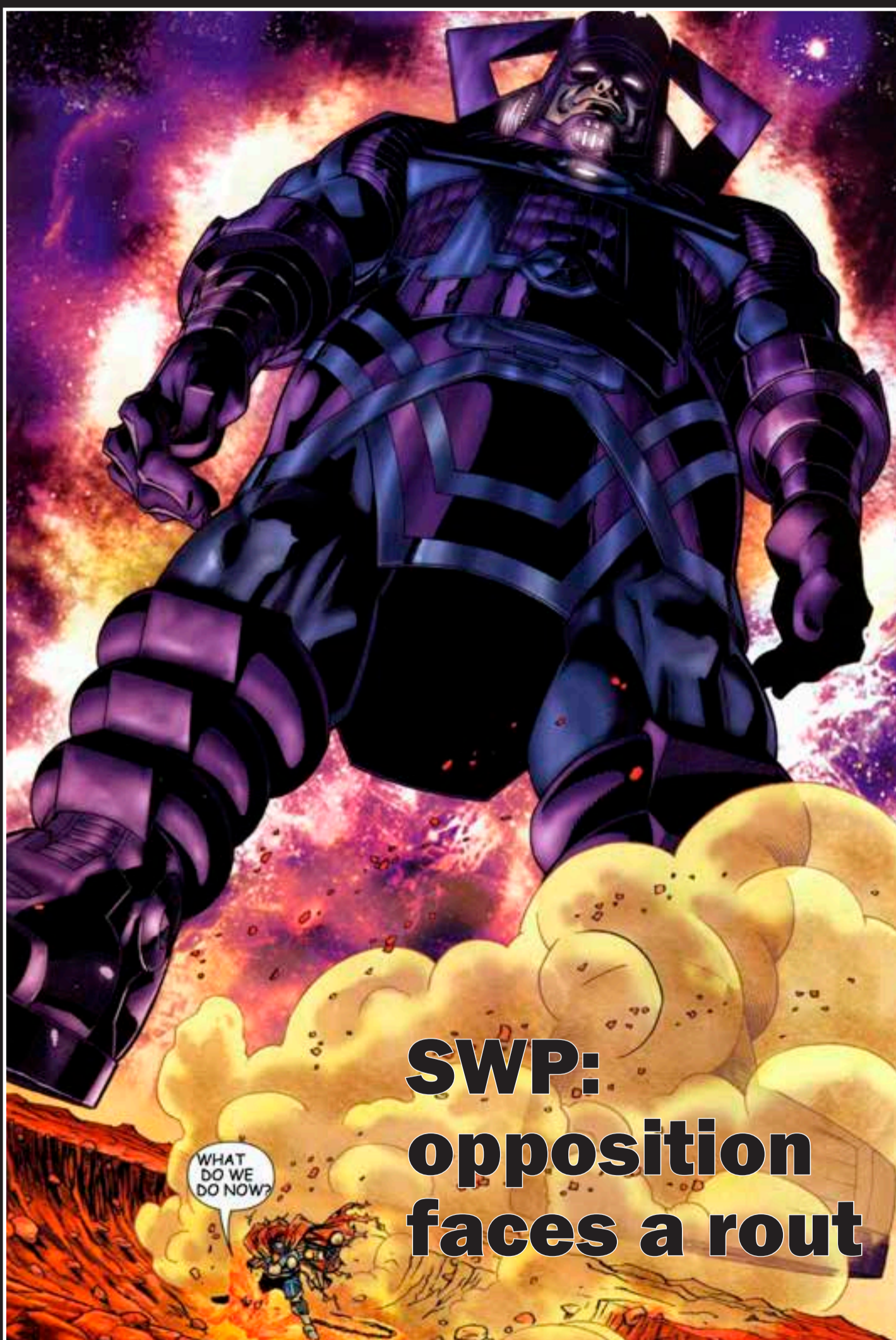


# weekly worker

**Remembrance Day:  
sanctifying imperialist  
adventures, wars and crimes**

- Israel needs an enemy
- Iran's nuclear talks
- Debating Communist Platform
- Anarchists and art of deception

No 986 Thursday November 14 2013 Towards a Communist Party of the European Union [www.cpgb.org.uk](http://www.cpgb.org.uk) £1/€1.10



**SWP:  
opposition  
faces a rout**

# LETTERS



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

## Non-refutation

I very much look forward to the deeper engagement with the 'Russian question' that Jack Conrad motivates in his recent article ('Getting the Soviet Union right', November 7). I also agree with Conrad that the term, 'workers' state', has lost all value as a descriptor of Stalinist regimes. The content of Trotsky's thinking on the Soviet Union, however, cannot be dismissed by simply discarding an outdated label.

The two reasons Conrad gives for rejecting Trotsky's analysis are a little puzzling. He says the USSR under Stalin was a police state, in which the working class exercised no power. But does Conrad actually think that Trotsky, as one of Stalin's principal victims, was unaware of the brutality of a regime whose methods he on several occasions compared to those of Hitler? One must rather attempt to understand why Trotsky characterised the USSR as a workers' state despite the bureaucracy's political monopoly and a use of force that was more ruthless and widespread during his lifetime than at any time since.

Conrad further states that the collapse of the Soviet Union provides the ultimate refutation of Trotsky. I fail to follow his reasoning. Trotsky argued that the Stalinism in Russia was an inherently unstable social and political formation. The bureaucracy was unable to establish property forms particular to itself or to create a society in its own image. It presided over a nationalised property regime inherited from the October revolution, which it attempted to defend with dictatorial methods that were bound to undermine collectivised property in the long run. Stalinism, in other words, contained no long-term historical possibilities. The USSR would either be redeemed by proletarian political revolution or undergo capitalist restoration at the hands of a faction of the bureaucracy. These possibilities are laid out in *The revolution betrayed*, Trotsky's major work on the USSR.

That Trotsky's pessimistic variant is the one that came to pass is not an argument against his theoretical conclusions. To my mind, this outcome rather confirms that his analysis, despite difficulties made more apparent by the passage of time, came closer to capturing Soviet reality than its two Marxist rivals: bureaucratic collectivism, which viewed the USSR as a new form of class society, and state capitalism, which saw it as a different modality of the social order defended by its cold war rivals. Both theories tended to credit Stalinism with a viability it has been shown not to have possessed.

**Jim Creegan**  
New York

## Blame it on oil

Jack Conrad believes that as long as the left remains contaminated by Stalinism we will never gain mass support. Most of the left blame Stalin for the negative features of the Russian Revolution, while those more sympathetic to Stalin turn to deviations from Marxism-Leninism to explain the demise of the Soviet Union. I used to belong to this latter camp, but I am no longer convinced by these explanations of why the revolution went wrong and eventually collapsed.

On the political level we need to look deeper. For instance, rather than advocating the democratic rule of the working class, Marx advocated the dictatorship of the proletariat. And, according to Lenin in *State and revolution*, 'dictatorship' means rule untrammelled by any legal restraint. Trotsky himself went along with this. Neither Marx, Lenin or Trotsky evinced any real awareness that dictatorship could lead to abuse of power. And whatever opposition Trotsky displayed to the Leninist theory of the

party was binned after he joined with the Bolsheviks in 1917.

Thus, unintentionally, Marxism led part of the socialist movement towards totalitarianism, and Lenin's theory of the party helped this process along. Also, not having a clear understanding of the nature of social change meant the Marxist attempts to change society caused countless unnecessary deaths. Had there been a better understanding of the relationship between reform and revolution, things might have turned out differently. Lenin's absolutisation of the split in the working class meant such an understanding could not develop. This mistake contributed to the most dangerous racists and fascists gaining power in Germany.

As for the collapse of the communist-led states in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, it is redundant to blame their return to capitalism on Stalinism. Firstly, we need to understand that these regimes were socialist in essence, although this has been constantly disputed by the ultra-left. What the collapse of these regimes is telling us is that in the era of peak oil no regime is immune from collapse. Soviet oil production began to peak around 1988. But even before this, the Reagan administration had convinced the Saudis to stop supporting high oil prices which helped to keep the Soviet regime afloat. The Saudis flooded the market with cheap oil and prices collapsed. Since the Soviets were dependent on oil for most of their foreign currency earnings, something had to give. Having reached a regional peak oil, they could not increase their oil production themselves, at least not on the basis of the extant technology, and had they done so to earn more foreign currency this would have collapsed prices further.

With the USSR no longer able to provide cheap oil to the regimes in eastern Europe, they quickly unravelled. This process was aided by *glasnost*, or more openness and democracy. Soviet peak oil, the collapse of oil prices instigated by Reagan and the Saudis, more military pressure on the Soviet leadership with Star Wars, came at a time when the Soviet Union needed to increase grain imports with a falling income from oil.

Rather than Stalinism leading to the collapse of the east European regimes and the Soviet Union, it was mostly caused by the economics of oil. It not so much, or only, Stalinism which leads to the marginalisation of the left, but more because Marxists live in the past and also the fact that the masses are usually won over to the revolutionary left only in the most extreme of circumstances.

**Tony Clark**  
London

## Past tense

A deep tension weakens the analysis in Jack Conrad's article on the USSR. He writes that 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"; and claims that "anyone who has studied the course of the Soviet Union, especially after 1928, can only but recoil in horror". If everyone could only "recoil in horror", how did the Soviet Union, by inspiring the masses the world over, force reforms on the ruling class?

I'd also ask that you consider this question: would you say the same about some monstrously corrupt workers' union, where the bureaucrats kill opponents and suppress militants? Should people base their analysis on emotional recoil? Or does class analysis sometimes reveal truths that contradict naive moral intuition?

**Stephen R Diamond**  
email

## Coward

So Eddie Ford joins the rest of the soft left apologists for Len McCluskey's betrayal

at Grangemouth. ('Gangster bosses and special measures', November 7). So the "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."

But on this occasion it just wasn't appropriate, because the "Grangemouth workforce were unlikely to vote for an occupation" and, anyway, McCluskey "is a left bureaucrat at the end of the day" with "political limitations" so what could he do except "temporarily retreat in order to fight another day"?

Not as bad an excuse as the *Morning Star* of October 25: "Grangemouth's workers have called bully-boy Ineos bosses' bluff by saying they are willing to accept cuts if owners back down on a brutal closure threat" - but getting there.

So we have a programme for occupation up to the point when one becomes necessary and then, when the capitalist owner attacks us viciously by closing the plant, we outwit him and the entire class struggle by running away! What else could any decent left bureaucrat do? If you are a pig, then you surely must grunt.

An occupation under workers' control immediately raises the question of who owns, or rather who should own, the plant and what production is for. Is it for the profit of capitalism or for the production of fuel for transport and heating oil and gas needed by workers, the middle classes and their families this winter?

An occupation would have raised the political level of the entire class struggle. Every trade union militant and socialist activist would have rallied vast sections of the working class movement behind it. Of course, a trade union bureaucracy will never take such revolutionary action unless severely pressured from below by a rank-and-file movement seeking to oust them and replace them with more militant and revolutionary leaders who are prepared to take such actions - with them if possible, but without them if necessary.

This is why your criticisms of Workers Power, the Socialist Workers Party and Jerry Hicks are well wide of the mark. Only a fight will reverse the attacks on the working class. McCluskey ran away over Vauxhall on Merseyside and the British Airways dispute to save 'British' jobs. He is not retaining his forces to fight another day; he is a cowardly bureaucrat who values his job and bloated privileges over the fate of his members. He would only fight if threatened from below with defeat or a movement he could not control. And who wants those kinds of sham leaders?

**Gerry Downing**  
Socialist Fight

## Dead end

I write in response to Michael Chessum's letter (November 7) stating that socialists should be feminists. Nothing could be further from the truth. Socialists should be opposed to feminism, not because we hate women, but because we fight to end oppression on class and not gender lines. Feminism wants equality for women under the capitalist system. Their movement does not want to overthrow capitalism. Because of this it's a dead end for socialists, regardless of their gender.

Yes, I am in favour of equality for women, but you cannot fight to save capitalism and replace it with socialism at the same time. Socialists should see beyond a person's gender and fight for the interests of their class and nothing but this.

**Steven Johnston**  
email

## Stand together

On November 9-10 1938, Nazi stormtroopers led a wave of violent attacks on Jewish people and property throughout Germany and Austria,

which the Nazis had annexed. During these pogroms, 91 Jews were killed, thousands were taken from their homes and incarcerated in concentration camps, 267 synagogues were destroyed, and some 7,500 Jewish-owned shops were smashed and looted. The *Kristallnacht* pogroms presaged attempts to remove Jews from German life completely.

Many Jews left hurriedly to seek refuge in friendly countries, including Britain, but Britain was already in the grip of an 'aliens scare'. Newspaper headlines declared: "Alien Jews pouring in", and claimed that "Refugees get jobs, Britons get dole". The media accused Jewish asylum-seekers of 'overrunning the country'. Despite wide public revulsion at the violence of *Kristallnacht*, powerful elements in British politics and business continued to admire Hitler and the Nazi regime.

Seventy-five years later, racists and fascists inspired by the Nazis continue to attack minorities in Europe. In Hungary, neo-fascists target gypsies and Jews. In Greece, Golden Dawn members and supporters brutally attack migrants and political opponents. Here in Britain, minority communities, especially Muslims, have been targeted in an atmosphere that is increasingly hostile towards migrants and refugees.

As Jewish people mindful of this history, we are equally alarmed at continuing fascist violence and the toxic sentiments expressed by many politicians and much of the media against migrants, asylum seekers, gypsies and travellers.

We stand shoulder to shoulder with migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers in their efforts to live here in freedom and safety, to contribute to society, and be treated as equals. As Jews, we stand together with all communities seeking to combat racism and fascism here and elsewhere.

**David Rosenberg, Linda Shampan and 200 others**  
*Jewish Socialist*

## Factual error

There seems to be a factual error: the judgement of the SWP disputes committee on W's accusations, I understand, was not that all accusations were "not proven"

('Insiders call leadership to account', October 31). The committee found that there had not been a rape, and that the accusation of sexual harassment was not proven.

**John Mullen**  
email

## CWI illusion

Despite the claims of the Democratic Socialist Movement leaders in South Africa that they are building Wasp (Workers and Socialist Party) as a party of struggle, all signs point to an opportunist move to channel the revolutionary anger of the masses into the idle chatter box called parliament. The mother body of the DSM (and therefore Wasp) is the Committee for a Workers' International.

The DSM proudly holds up their Irish, EU and US parliamentarians and candidates as great examples of revolutionaries in parliament. But in all of these regions the capitalists have waged massive attacks on the working class. What the CWI has achieved is getting a few more crumbs from the masters' table, not stopping any of the large-scale attacks on the working class. If anything, what the CWI has helped do is sustain the illusion that fundamental change can take place through parliament.

In the current stage of world revolt against the capitalist system, where in many countries the masses have turned their backs on parliament and taken the path of open revolt against their regimes, the line of the CWI, of turning the eyes of the masses back to the capitalist parliament, is opportunist, and helps prop up a system of wage-slavery. Contrary to what the CWI claims, they play the role of turning a section of the vanguard fighters against the revolution for socialism.

At the launch of the Wasp earlier this year, a worker who attended asked, after hearing the input of the Irish Socialist Party member: "Is there socialism in Ireland?" This sums up the illusion that the CWI creates over their parliamentary work.

**Workers International Vanguard Party**  
Cape Town

## Fighting fund

# Supplementary

**O**ur November fighting fund got a much needed boost this week when TM popped into the office to hand over a fantastic £300. The comrade very much regrets no longer being able to carry out practical tasks for the *Weekly Worker* and that is his way of making up for it.

But why do I say "much needed"? Well over the next couple of weeks we will be producing extra pages. The November 21 issue will be carrying a four-page supplement produced by Labour Party Marxists for the November 23 annual conference of the Labour Representation Committee. Then, the week after, there will be another, bigger supplement, aimed at the founding conference of Left Unity on November 30. And printing those extra pages costs money, as TM knows only too well!

But he wasn't the only one to help us out with a generous donation. In the post came two handy cheques. The first was from BJ, who writes: "No, I haven't forgotten you. I hope to make this a regular occurrence." We hope you do too, comrade! And the second

was from KT, who was too modest to write anything. His £20 was very much appreciated anyway.

And this column would not be complete without me listing all those regular donors whose standing order payment has been received over the last seven days. This week it was GD (£25), DV (£20), SWS (£15), LM (£12) and SM (£10) who came up with the goods. However, despite there being 11,304 online readers last week, none of them gave us a donation using our PayPal facility.

Despite that, the £452 that came our way takes our November total to a reasonably healthy £791. But we need £1,500 each and every month just to cover the cost of our regular 12-pager. So this month we really should be aiming for nearer £2,000. TM has shown the way and I'm sure there are a few others who would like to follow his lead, even if they can't be quite so generous! Are you one of them?

**Robbie Rix**

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

## MIDDLE EAST

# An enemy at all costs

Alongside the Saudis, Israel is pulling out all the stops to prevent a settlement with Iran. **Tony Greenstein** looks at Binyamin Netanyahu's contortions



**Binyamin Netanyahu: no, no, no**

If there is one thing that the Israeli state requires, whoever its leader may be, it is an enemy. And they do not come more suitable than the Islamic republic of Iran.

In previous years, Israel demonised Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser as 'the new Hitler' (in the Middle East there is always at least one 'new Hitler' that the Israelis can proclaim is the latest 'existential threat'). The Palestine Liberation Organisation rolled over so comprehensively that it is no longer possible to treat Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestine Authority in this way. As for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the left wing of the PLO, they are just not strong enough, while Hamas (which Israel helped create, of course) is not in the same league as Iran. It is usefully caged up in Gaza as a warning against any settlement with the Palestinians. Likewise, Hezbollah, although it has never dropped out of Israeli sights, has shown every sign of keeping to its ceasefire in Lebanon.

But Iran is another story. The last president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, with his questioning of the holocaust and threats to wipe Israel from the face of the planet, allowed Israel to paint Iran as irredeemably anti-Semitic. The fact that it is host to the largest Jewish community in the Middle East outside Israel - some 25,000 people - is ignored.

And Iran's development of nuclear technology and uranium enrichment, which could possibly be used for nuclear weaponry, was a godsend for prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu. Only Israel is allowed to possess nuclear weapons and refuse to sign the non-proliferation treaty. So for the last five years Netanyahu has been threatening to bomb Iran and take out its nuclear facilities. But there is just one small problem. The US has interests to protect in the region and does not want another conflagration.

The election of Hassan Rowhani as Iran's new president, with a clear mandate to seek a settlement with imperialism, while more than welcome in the US, not least economically, is extremely unwelcome to Netanyahu. That is why, in his October 1 address to the United Nations, Netanyahu described Rowhani as a "wolf in sheep's clothing".

This was, of course, predictable. Iran aims to become the regional superpower and Israel will brook no challenge to its authority. Demonising Iran is but a part of that process. As readers will know, while Rowhani is portrayed as a 'moderate', the repression he heads is as barbaric as ever. The oppression of the Kurds is particularly vicious, with many of the large number of execution victims being Kurdish, alongside those of other national minorities. But this is not what disturbs Netanyahu.

However, the wing of the US ruling class represented by Barack Obama, John Kerry and Hillary Clinton see no good at all coming from the Israeli threats - quite the contrary. One of the by-products of the Iraq war was the geopolitical strengthening of Tehran and a military attack on Iran could rebound on the US politically. For example, the close relationship with Nouri al-Maliki, the pro-American prime minister of Iraq, is unlikely to survive an Israeli attack on Iran.

The majority of the US ruling class (as witnessed in the opposition in the House of Representatives to the bombing of Syria, following the British parliament's similar decision), and more importantly the people of America, are opposed to a military attack on Iran. This is not the case with a substantial minority of the US establishment, of course - the neo-conservatives, the Dick Cheneys and Elliot Abrams, and the million-strong Christian Zionist movement under pastor John Hagee. They have their work cut out 'proving' that Iran is a

year or so away from developing its own nuclear weapon and the means of deploying it. While its possession of nuclear technology might be regarded as enough to justify an attack, it would primarily be a pretext for reconfiguring the politics of the Middle East and the elimination of a regime which is independent of the US.

Part of Israel's strategy has been an unofficial alliance with Saudi Arabia, whose regime is almost wholly dependent on the US. The kingdom has, for a long time, been worried about what it sees as radical Islam. Saudi oil wealth is mainly situated in the minority Shi'ite areas of Saudi Arabia and is therefore vulnerable to a rebellion. Coupled with a Shi'ite majority in Bahrain, a strong Iran is a major worry for the Saudis.

But the US has good reason for seeking a settlement. Every attempt at regime change has failed and the US people are war-weary. The unprovoked bombing by Israel of Iran's nuclear facilities could set the Middle East alight and blow away most of the client regimes. This is the great fear of the Democratic leadership under Obama, although it is one that the Republicans and their foreign backers may be willing to risk in order to secure American hegemony in the Arab east.

But another problem for Israel is that Iran is at the margins of its ability to strike militarily. It is significant that the French under François Hollande are prepared to play ball with the Christian Zionists and Netanyahu. Through support for Israel, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, Hollande is seeking to regain a foothold in the region for French imperialism. However, the US has never been as weak as it is today. Like a wounded animal it may still hit out in blind fury, but it cannot maintain the level of expenditure we saw in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Yet for Israel Iran must remain an enemy at all costs ●

## 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 17, 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 4: 'Circumstances that determine accumulation'.

Organised by CPGB: [www.cpgb.org.uk](http://www.cpgb.org.uk).

### Radical Anthropology Group

Introduction to anthropology: the human revolution

**Tuesday November 19, 6.15pm:** 'Bronislaw Malinowski: sex and family life in the Trobriands'. Speaker: Chris Knight. St Martin's Community Centre, 43 Carol Street, London NW1 (Camden Town tube). £10 waged, £5 low waged, £3 unwaged.

Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: [www.radicalanthropologygroup.org](http://www.radicalanthropologygroup.org).

### 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](http://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](http://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](http://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](mailto: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](http://www.lewishamstopwar.org.uk).

### No more blacklisting

**Wednesday November 20, 1pm:** Lobby of parliament, Old Palace Yard, London SW1, opposite Houses of Parliament.

For details of other activities and news around blacklisting see: [www.ucatt.org.uk/blacklisting](http://www.ucatt.org.uk/blacklisting); [www.uniteunion.org/how-we-help/list-of-sectors/construction/constructionblacklisting](http://www.uniteunion.org/how-we-help/list-of-sectors/construction/constructionblacklisting); [www.gmb.org.uk/campaigns/blacklisting](http://www.gmb.org.uk/campaigns/blacklisting); [www.hazards.org/blacklistblog](http://www.hazards.org/blacklistblog).

### Young trade unionists

**Wednesday November 20, 7pm:** Meeting, Unite House, 128 Theobald's Road, London WC1. Arguing for trade unions with young people.

Organised by Southern, Eastern and London Region Trades Union Congress Young Members' Network: [www.tuc.org.uk/about-tuc/serutuc\\_subgroups.cfm](http://www.tuc.org.uk/about-tuc/serutuc_subgroups.cfm).

### Reflections from Palestine

**Wednesday November 20, 7.15pm:** Public meeting, William Morris Meeting Rooms, 267 The Broadway, Wimbledon, London SW1. Talk by campaigners recently returned from Palestine.

Organised by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign: [www.palestinecampaign.org](http://www.palestinecampaign.org).

### Infidel feminism 1830-1914

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

Organised by Bishopsgate Institute: [www.bishopsgate.org.uk](http://www.bishopsgate.org.uk).

### Labour Representation Committee

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

### Reclaim the night

**Saturday November 23, 6.30pm:** March for women's rights. Assemble Old Eldon Square, Blackett Street, Newcastle upon Tyne.

Organised by Trades Union Congress northern region: [www.tuc.org.uk/northern](http://www.tuc.org.uk/northern).

### Remember John Maclean

**Sunday November 24, 1pm:** Commemoration, Eastwood Cemetery, Thornliebank Road (by Thornliebank Railway Station), Glasgow G46. Graveside oration, followed by social at the Shawbridge Tavern, 231 Shawbridge Street, Glasgow G43.

Organised by Scottish Republican Socialist Movement: [www.scottishrepublicansocialistmovement.org](http://www.scottishrepublicansocialistmovement.org).

### 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.

## IRAN

# End sanctions now

Whatever the final result of negotiations, writes **Yassamine Mather**, it is the millions of ordinary Iranians, not their rulers, who have suffered

**D**etails of Iran's proposals at the much heralded negotiations with the P5+1 powers that took place last weekend in Geneva were supposed to be secret. However, rumours about what has or has not been agreed have filled the Iranian and international press. The destiny of 75 million Iranians, if not the entire population of the Middle East, is at stake, yet they, like the rest of the world, have to rely on media leaks or unofficial briefings from one side or the other to know whether life-threatening sanctions will be reduced or the conflict will continue or even escalate.

In fact, for all the claims of secrecy we now know what the interim concessions made by Iran are:

- to stop the 20% enrichment of uranium for three months, until regular International Atomic Energy Agency inspections can resume, and in the long term reduce uranium enrichment to 3.5%;
- to reduce its stockpiles of 20% uranium through oxidisation;
- to halt the installation of new centrifuges at the Arak facility and allow full inspection there.

That amounts to a complete reversal of Iran's nuclear policies for most of the last two decades. No wonder the five foreign ministers, including John Kerry and William Hague, changed their plans and hurried to Geneva. In return Iran will get access to government funds frozen in Asia, estimated at around \$20 billion, plus the end of sanctions on the sale of gold, some petrochemical goods and aeroplane spare parts.

Not much to boast about in exchange for what are major concessions by the Islamic Republic - and definitely not the "sale of the century" for Iran, as Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu was claiming even before the talks started. On November 9 supreme leader Ali Khamenei called on Iranians to pray for the delegation in Geneva and newspapers in Tehran were generally welcoming the deal that seemed to have been reached.

But by all accounts France withheld its signature at the 11th hour on November 10. The 'socialist' government in Paris was clearly acting as Israel's representative - any deal requires the signatures of all the P5+1 powers or it cannot proceed. According to the *Financial Times*, "By blocking a deal on Iran's nuclear programme, France has achieved the unusual feat of annoying the American and Iranian governments simultaneously."<sup>1</sup>

The *Times of Israel* elaborates: "French members of parliament telephoned foreign minister Laurent Fabius in Geneva at the weekend to warn him that prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu would attack Iran's nuclear facilities if the P5+1 nations did not stiffen their terms on a deal with Iran ... Netanyahu's angry public criticism of the emerging deal, and his phone conversations with world leaders ... had played a crucial role in stalling the deal."<sup>2</sup>

The next round of talks is due to start on November 20, but 10 days is a long time in politics and even longer in the Middle East. Israel started its campaign against any deal even before the last round had begun and is clearly using every minute of those 10 days to add to what John Kerry refers to as "fear tactics". On the very day the talks broke down, Netanyahu was warning American Jewish leaders that "an Iranian



Deal in sight? US foreign secretary John Kerry and his Iranian counterpart, Mohammad Zarif

nuclear weapon is coming to a theatre near you". Of course, the elephant in the room amongst all this is Israel's own semi-secret nuclear programme.

By November 12 Republican Senator Mark Kirk was echoing Israel's position and proposing new sanctions: "The American people should not be forced to choose between military action and a bad deal that accepts a nuclear Iran." This prompted the White House to warn the US Senate and Congress that tightening the sanctions on Iran could "box America into a march to war" and derail current negotiations.

So if France did raise objections in the last minutes before the signing of the agreement, what were the reasons?

The French economy has been adversely affected by sanctions on Iran - car makers Peugeot and Citroen have practically closed their respective plants in Iran as a result. But France still considers itself the colonial guardian of Lebanon and Syria (a French mandate following the demise of the Ottoman empire). It has a history of supporting the Maronite Christians in Lebanon and has very much resented Iran's role in that country since the early 1980s. Paris also wants the regime of Syrian president Bashar al-Assad removed and is unhappy that there has been no military intervention to achieve that. Last but not least, the French government is very unpopular at home and thinks it can regain popularity by acting as a major world power.

What about Israel? As Moshé Machover explained in a recent *Weekly Worker* article, "A war with Iran would present a golden opportunity for large-scale expulsion of Palestinians, precisely because (unlike the Iraq invasion of 2003) fighting would not be over too soon, and major protests and disturbances are likely to occur amongst the masses throughout the

region, including the Palestinian Arabs under Israeli rule. What better way to pacify such disturbances than to 'expel many people'?"<sup>3</sup>

## Two Irans

Of course, the negotiations have shown a different image of the Iranian government. Its 'moderate' foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, gave an interview to the BBC, the very organisation accused of being an integral part of British intelligence by various factions of the regime until a couple of weeks ago. During this interview he denied that sanctions had played any role in moderating the nuclear stance of the Islamic Republic - after all, Iran has managed to produce 35,000 centrifuges.

Whatever the truth of this claim, it is certainly the case that some Iranian institutions seem to have been unaffected by sanctions. For example, a Reuters investigation has discovered that a major foundation controlled by ayatollah Khamenei, Setad Ejraiey Farmane Hazrate Emam (literally the Headquarters for Executing the Order of the Imam), despite running a \$95 billion empire, has escaped scot free. The \$95 billion refers to official holdings of real estate, corporate stakes and official assets, but in fact the recent revelations do not show all of Setad's assets and it largely remains a clandestine financial organisation.

The foundation was created in the aftermath of 1979 revolution, selling the expropriated properties abandoned by allies of the *ancien régime*. However, its more recent wealth comes from the privatisations carried out under former presidents Mohammad Khatami and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, making it one of the richest financial groups in the Middle East. It is amazing that Setad, with major interests in Iran's industrial

and financial sector, in petrochemicals, oil and telecommunications, has not been hit by sanctions.

Western governments clearly knew that Setad had gained control of large chunks of the Iranian economy and were aware that it was directly controlled by the supreme leader. Yet for some unknown reason Setad seemed to be exempt from sanctions. In July 2010, the European Union included Mohammad Mokhber, president of Setad, in a list of individuals and entities it was sanctioning for alleged involvement in "nuclear or ballistic missiles activities". But two years later, it mysteriously removed him.

This summer, as another 37 companies were added to the list of companies facing sanctions, treasury officials reminded the US Senate committee overseeing them that Setad was under the direct control of the supreme leader, yet the US decided to exempt it from sanctions. During recent revelations, when Reuters asked officials to explain the rationale behind this decision, they replied that they did not want to be accused of "attempts to topple the government".

The Reuters exposé confirms what we in Hands Off the People of Iran and other opponents of sanctions have always said: the Iranian *people* are the real victims. Sanctions, heralded as 'targeted' and 'intelligent', have had little effect on the nuclear programme - and certainly not on the accumulation of wealth by Islamic foundations controlled or owned by senior clerics.

Meanwhile millions of Iranians are suffering because of the unavailability of essential medication. Although drugs are not on the sanctions lists, restrictions on Iranian banks and financial institutions have produced such a drastic devaluation of the currency that Iranian pharmacies

and hospitals have not been able to buy western medication for years. As stocks have run out, patients with chronic diseases such as diabetes, thyroid malfunction and asthma have developed major complications or even died, having been forced to reduce the dosage of the drugs they need or use cheaper equivalents made in Asia or Africa. Thousands of cancer patients have died in the absence of medication that saves patients' lives daily in the rest of the world.

Operating theatres have been making do with faulty devices, because some types of surgical equipment have been deemed to be 'dual use' (ie, having a potentially military purpose), and this has caused fatalities, according to medics in Tehran and other major cities. Iranian babies have become ill as a result of the injection of out-of-date vaccines.

So next time we hear talk of 'intelligent' sanctions that will only affect the rulers of this or that country, let us remind them of the horrible consequences of the undeclared war between the west and the reactionary rulers of the Islamic Republic.

Even if the talks due to resume on November 20 end in the signing of an agreement, the three-stage negotiation will take at least another year to complete. In the meantime, most of the existing sanctions will remain in place. Iranians will still die as a result, but the multi-billion dollar institutions under the patronage of the supreme leader will continue to flourish ●

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## Notes

1. *Financial Times* November 11.
2. [www.timesofisrael.com/israel-will-attack-if-you-sign-the-deal-french-mp-told-fabius](http://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-will-attack-if-you-sign-the-deal-french-mp-told-fabius).
3. 'Netanyahu's war wish' *Weekly Worker* February 9 2012.

# Facing a rout

There are signs of increasing demoralisation amongst oppositionists, writes **Peter Manson**

It is now abundantly clear that the December 13-15 conference of the Socialist Workers Party will see a repeat of the rigging process that occurred in the two earlier conferences held this year. The central committee is intent on winning the vote by whatever means - including through the exclusion of opposition delegates wherever possible.

All over the country district aggregates of SWP members are taking place - they will all have been held by the end of November. Using its small army of full-time staff, the central committee has been mobilising all its known or potential supporters among "registered members" - many of whom do not pay dues or take part in normal branch meetings or SWP activity, but will hopefully turn up to vote with the loyalist camp. New recruits, provided they joined before September 16, may "attend, speak, vote and stand to be delegates", according to the CC's 'Rules for aggregates', circulated by national secretary Charlie Kimber to all SWP members on November 4.

Comrade Kimber advises aggregate organisers how to deal with those who turn up: "If people are not paying subs, they should be asked to do so ... It is not, however, a condition of attending the aggregate that comrades are paying subs." Or a condition of being elected as a delegate, he could have added. In other words, things are stacked in favour of the CC, which holds the details of all "registered members" (anyone who has filled in an application form over the last few years). Even if they have never attended an SWP event before, they are invited to come and have their say at the pre-conference aggregate - they might even get the chance to come to London as a delegate with expenses paid.

Comrade Kimber then goes on to explain the speaking rights to be enjoyed by, on the one hand, the CC speaker, who will open the aggregate with an introductory speech "for a maximum of 25 minutes"; and, on the other, the main speaker from the opposition Rebuilding the Party faction, who "will then speak for a maximum of 12 minutes".

If there is a second CC speaker, "they will speak from the floor for a maximum of six minutes", following which "the faction may nominate a speaker to speak from the floor for four minutes". All other speeches from the floor "should be a maximum of three minutes to allow the greatest possible participation". Finally, "the faction will sum up for five minutes and the CC will then sum up for seven minutes".

So CC speakers have a total of 38 minutes, compared to a mere 21 for the opposition. And the rest of the meeting will be taken up by as many three-minute contributions from the floor as can be crammed in. Contrary to what the leadership pretends, this is not democracy. Democracy depends on informed decision-making, which in turn depends on the whole argument being put forward by those in the best position to present it authoritatively. But that is not the SWP method. At the November 9 North London aggregate, for example, SWP veteran and leading oppositionist Ian Birchall was not even called to speak.

Yet, according to comrade Kimber, "these rules ... have been agreed between the CC and the faction", which means: "It is not acceptable to attempt to change them by vote at the aggregate." In the run-up to the March



**Opposition should have demanded democratic representation**

special conference, although the CC attempted to enforce such speaking times, it did not claim that they were the "agreed" "rules" and, as a result, at some meetings members voted to allow equal speaking rights for the opposition. But now the CC insists that these speaking times cannot be changed. If the RP faction really did agree to all this, then it is a bad case of shooting itself in the foot.

## What kind of debate?

The North London aggregate demonstrates how the CC behaves where it has majority support, however narrow. It was not only members of the faction who were denied election to conference, but also comrades who are regarded as insufficiently uncritical of the leadership. Among

the latter were SWP writer on the Middle East, Anne Alexander, and Mark Campbell, who was the left's candidate for general secretary of the University and College Union last year, when he stood against incumbent Sally Hunt. Comrade Campbell is by no means an oppositionist, and in fact has generally sided with the leadership against the faction. But he has raised concerns about 'SWP democracy'.

In fact, as a member of the national committee, the 50-strong body that meets every two months and whose decisions are supposed to be binding on the CC, comrade Campbell put forward the following motion to the November 10 NC meeting - ie, the day after the North London aggregate:

"National committee recognises that full debate at SWP annual conference on issues currently confronting the party is a necessary step towards

bringing factional organisation to an end at the conclusion of conference.

"We note the benefit of wide representation of members' views at conference and encourage those voting at district aggregates to cast their votes for delegates with a view to electing a balanced delegation, which includes all major views and currents within the district, as well as ensuring broad representation of the party's local experience in the trade unions and student unions, united front campaigns and our organisational work."

So comrade Campbell was in effect calling for oppositionists to be elected to conference in proportion to their local support. It goes without saying that his motion was defeated - it won 12 votes at the NC, but there were 25 against, with three abstentions. However, it seems that the very fact he was proposing it meant he himself was beyond the pale for CC loyalists, and so this leading SWP trade unionist has been blocked from coming to conference as a delegate (although as an NC member he is entitled to attend, but with no right to vote).

According to the internal *Party Notes*, at the national committee meeting "The CC argued that we need to make the aggregates as political and comradely as possible. The CC believes there must be polemical debate on the issues before us, and voting based on the politics of the candidates. But the CC believes there must also be a space for people to be elected who do not define themselves as members of the faction or supporters of the CC position" (November 11).

So, using the need for 'comradely debate', the 'democratic process' and concern for the individual member as a cover, the leadership attempts to justify its campaign to restrict the opposition to the smallest number of delegates it can get away with. If you are with us, vote against the opposition, no matter how experienced and respected, and only for loyalist delegates (including those 'non-aligned' newcomers - which in practice is likely to be the same thing). Leading oppositionists are estimating that, although they probably enjoy the support of over 40% of the active membership, they will be lucky to have half that proportion at conference, and many of their most authoritative figures (like comrade Birchall, for example) will not be among them.

What then is wrong with the majority at aggregates deciding who their delegates should be? Nothing at all, of course. But comrade Campbell has it right: what matters is not winning the vote, but *winning the argument*. That is why it is essential that all major tendencies are represented at conference. A democratic, partyist culture would mean that this was widely accepted: it would be second nature for individual members to consider the need for "a balanced delegation" and "broad representation" when casting their votes.

## Disputes committee

Saturday's NC meeting also discussed the proposals coming from the "disputes committee review body" for reforming the SWP's disciplinary process. Following the crisis provoked by the disputes committee (DC) to exonerate former national secretary

'comrade Delta' of serious sexual misconduct, there was uproar in the organisation not only over the revelation that the DC that cleared Delta was in reality a 'jury of his mates', but also over the obvious shortcomings in the way the DC treated the complainants, resulting from the desire of an entrenched leadership to protect its own bureaucratic interests. It was this that provoked the devastating crisis that has left the SWP in a state of chaos for the last year.

The NC heard a debate around the following motion, moved by former women's organiser and author on women's rights, Sheila McGregor:

"When a complaint about rape, sexual misconduct or domestic violence is made, the DC should investigate the matter in order to decide only on the fitness of the comrade complained against to be a member of the SWP or play a leading role in the organisation, and not to make any pronouncement on the facts of the complaint.

"The DC will, of course, offer support to any comrade making such a complaint in finding suitable counselling and will politically fully support the right of any comrade who wishes to take such a complaint to the police."

After a debate comrade McGregor was prevailed upon to withdraw her motion, because it would 'not look good' if the NC voted against it. But why should the NC vote against it? While it may have its weaknesses, it seems to me to provide a reasonable basis for dealing with such complaints. The notion that an internal committee should decide on whether or not member A has raped member B, when it is often (as with Delta) a case of one comrade's word against another, is absurd. The *Weekly Worker* has been arguing along the lines of comrade McGregor's motion all along.

The committee also heard a motion, moved by faction supporter Amy Gilligan, the sole SWP member in the Socialist Worker Student Society in Cambridge. This attempted to challenge the CC's desire to protect itself through secrecy by hiding behind the need for 'confidentiality'. While "Confidentiality is an important part of bringing forward any complaint", read the motion, it is "crucial that the issue of confidentiality does not take on greater importance than the case itself" and it certainly "must not be used as a gagging clause".

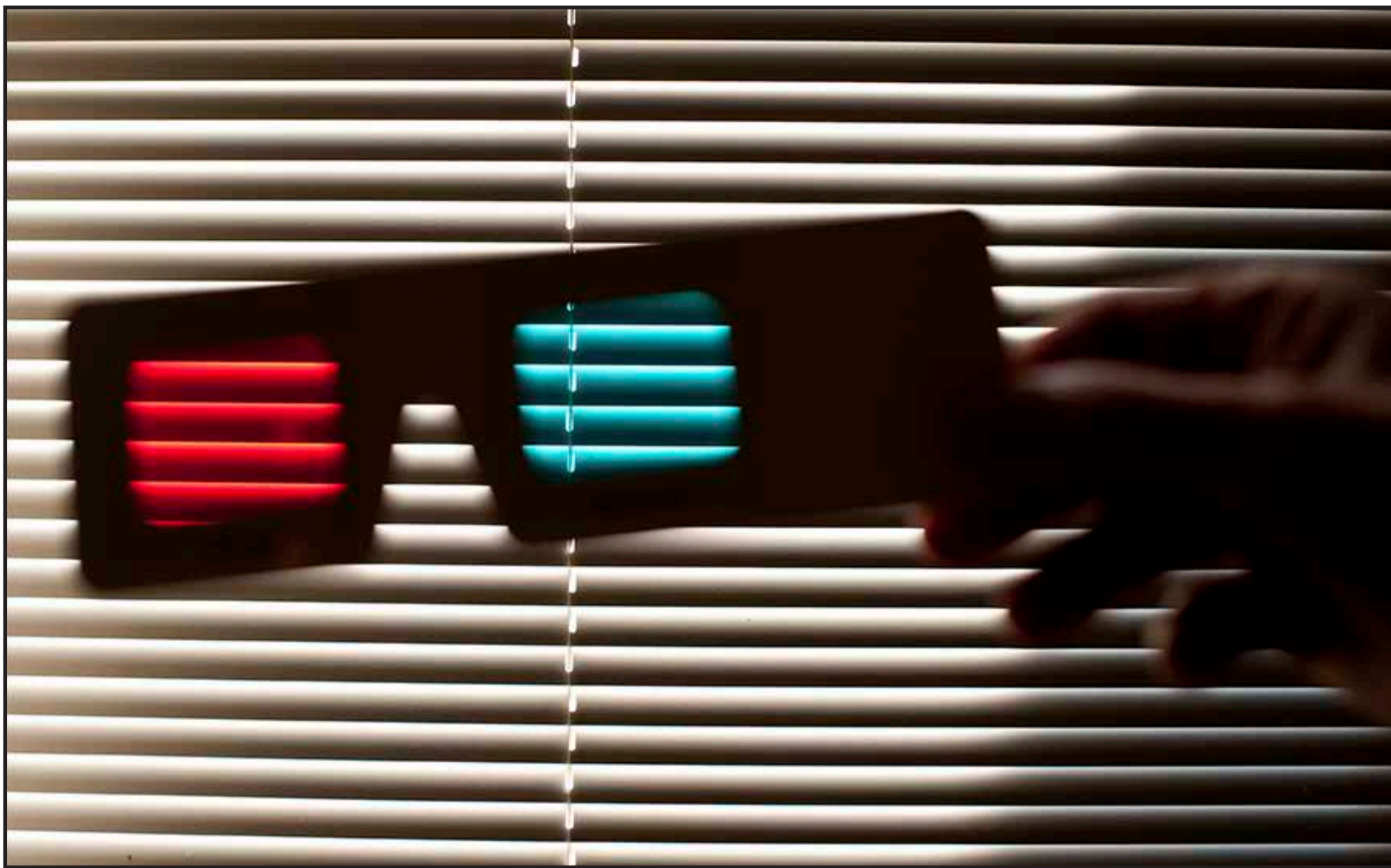
Once again, this is spot on. But only the eight faction members present voted in favour, while 33 members of the two loyalist factions opposed the motion. So 'confidentiality' is the main issue then?

Clearly the opposition is looking at the possibility of a defeat in December that will be more overwhelming than the one it suffered at the March special conference. No wonder the prevalent mood in its ranks is one of demoralisation, with many comrades talking openly about life after the SWP. Bereft of any serious *political* alternative to the 'International Socialist tradition', the opposition can only fragment or fade away in the long term.

But the departure of another batch of oppositionists after the December conference will not resolve the SWP crisis. There can be no return to the old certainties and the SWP is facing an increasingly unclear future ●

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## DEBATE



Limited vision

# CPGB's theoretical confusion

The Socialist Platform statement for Left Unity is more scientifically correct than the amended version featured in the CPGB's Communist Platform, argues **Nick Rogers**

**M**embers of Left Unity who attend the founding conference on November 30 will be confronted with a range of statements drafted by internal platforms proposing aims and principles for the whole organisation. Two of the statements will bear striking similarities, composed as they are of many identical sentiments and formulations: the statements of the Socialist Platform and the Communist Platform. The reason is simple. As readers of the *Weekly Worker* will know, the Communist Platform statement is an amended version of the Socialist Platform statement.

The CPGB proposed a number of amendments to the September 14 meeting of the Socialist Platform. Most were supported in an indicative vote, but the meeting had previously passed a proposal that the final decision should be deferred until a longer process of discussion had taken place. The CPGB, accusing the leadership of the Socialist Platform - and specifically Nick Wrack - of political collapse, proceeded to launch its own platform. Again the left provides its enemies with material for many a *Life of Brian*-sourced jibe.

I am not the best person to comment on the conduct of the meeting itself - I was catching a flight out of the country as these events unfolded. Extending discussion of the issues that the CPGB had raised with its amendments is not in itself illegitimate. But, as it turns out, the well-attended September 14 meeting was the last opportunity for the Socialist Platform to amend its statement of aims and principles prior to the deadline for submitting them to the founding conference. No further meeting of the Socialist Platform is

proposed before that conference. The leadership of the Socialist Platform does, therefore, appear to have used a procedural manoeuvre to effectively block the membership of the platform from amending the statement before the November 30 conference.

However, it is the CPGB's strategy in proposing the specific set of amendments tabled at the September 14 meeting that I want to question in this article. Some of the amendments I would have happily voted for. But I regard the main line of thinking behind them to have been misconceived.

## Communism

The CPGB's rationale for the amendments has not been argued in much detail in the pages of the *Weekly Worker*. The most cogent explanation comes in the edited version of Jack Conrad's speech to this year's Communist University.<sup>1</sup> There Jack explains that the CPGB sought "to strengthen, clarify and bring to the fore" those elements of the Socialist Platform statement that deal with the maximum programme - specifically to inject a vision of what the CPGB calls "full communism" (although the word 'communism' is not explicitly used).

The Socialist Platform statement meets the CPGB's usual criteria for a communist or Marxist programme: explicit commitment to the principles of working class independence, internationalism and the prioritisation of democracy. For the CPGB it is therefore a novel departure to seek to add sentiments to a programmatic statement such as: "Our ultimate aim is a society based on the principle of 'From each according to their abilities; to each according to their needs'. A

moneyless, classless, stateless society within which each individual can develop their fullest individuality".

Now, I have no objection in principle to developing our vision of the future society that will replace capitalism. I certainly have no time for the argument of those organised around the Left Platform that the best way to coalesce a party of opposition to austerity and neoliberalism is to steer away from discussion of comprehensive alternatives to the social system that produced these attacks on living standards and social conditions for fear of narrowing the field of potential supporters. On the contrary, part of the explanation for the failure to mobilise a serious movement of opposition to 30 years of neoliberal assaults, including its most recent manifestations, is that we have failed to convince very many people (even among those who have suffered the most) that there is a different way to organise society that is both viable and better than the capitalist society that surrounds us. In fact the left has barely tried to make that argument. This collective loss of nerve leaves us defenceless against the remorseless logic of those who assert that 'there is no alternative'.

The problem I have with the CPGB's strategy to "strengthen" the statement of the Socialist Platform is that it replicates the theoretical confusion of the CPGB's programme around the concepts of socialism and communism.

As is well known, the theoreticians of the Soviet Union and its allied states made a sharp distinction between the post-revolutionary stages of socialism and communism. Socialism was defined as nationalised property with

a (purportedly) planned economy. According to this schema, the Soviet Union achieved socialism in the 1930s. Yet manifestly many of the features of the future society discussed by Marx and Engels - take just the withering away of the state as an example - bore no resemblance to the reality of Soviet life: eg, the bloated, bureaucratic, unaccountable and murderous state machine. Any who dared to highlight the dissonance with the thinking of classical Marxism were referred to Marx's 1875 *Critique of the Gotha programme*, where he discussed a *first* and *higher* stage of communist society. In *State and revolution* Lenin applied the label *socialism* to the first stage and reserved *communism* for the higher stage. So, according to the regime's defenders, the evident failures of Soviet society could only be overcome when the Soviet people advanced to communism. The conceptualisation of socialism and communism as two very different kinds of societies served to justify Stalinism.

Jack Conrad correctly argues that the Soviet Union and other states in the same mould were neither socialist nor effecting a transition to socialism under the rule of the working class. Without even the basic elements of democracy how can any except the minority who hold the levers of state power rule? But it is my contention that Jack confuses matters by arguing that socialism represents the rule of the working class and is transitional to communism. Jack maintains that only communism is "a globally organised society which knows no money, no state, no country, no women's oppression, no limit to human achievement". This formulation perpetuates a key

aspect of Stalinised Soviet theory. It relegates the achievement of the most transformative aspect of the socialist vision to a future beyond the lifespan of anyone currently alive<sup>2</sup> - Mike Macnair has argued that the transition will take one or two hundred years. This is a version of the maximum programme that is useless for holding to account the leadership of a Communist Party.

Above all, it radically distorts what Marx wrote. Only in the *Critique* does Marx discuss two phases of communist society. It is an over-interpretation to regard these phases as sharply different societies. For a start, they are clearly part of the same mode of production - both are phases of "communist society". And even in the first phase capitalism has already been decisively superseded: "Within the cooperative society based on common ownership of the means of production, the producers do not exchange their products; just as little does the labour employed on the products appear here *as the value* of these products, as a material quality possessed by them, since now, in contrast to capitalist society, individual labour no longer exists in an indirect fashion, but directly as a component part of the total labour."<sup>3</sup>

Marx is describing a society in which there is no longer private property in the means of production, class distinctions have been left behind ("it recognises no class differences because everyone is only a worker like everyone else") and the law of value (and with it commodity fetishism, abstract labour, etc) has ceased to operate. Everyone may work, but in the absence of any other classes the working *class* itself dissolves.

Elsewhere in the *Critique* Marx

discusses the transition from capitalism to communism: “Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but *the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat*.”<sup>4</sup>

The CPGB’s programme (and the CPGB’s proposed amendments to the Socialist Platform’s statement) conflate this transitional period and the first phase of communist society and apply the label ‘socialism’ to it. Therefore, in the Communist Platform statement references to the rule of the ‘working class’ and socialism are synonymous. Jack Conrad and I debated this question at length in the *Weekly Worker* three years ago,<sup>5</sup> when the CPGB’s new *Draft programme* was being debated - I was then a member of the CPGB. The implications are not merely semantic.

The need for a transitional period between capitalism and new post-capitalist mode of production (called either socialism or communism by most Marxists) is real enough. After the working class has achieved political power many tasks will remain to be completed, including overcoming the political and economic resistance of the capitalist class; making the revolution global; creating more equal levels of economic development across the world; absorbing the petty bourgeoisie into the working class; bringing all the means of production into common ownership; and superseding the market with democratic planning. The working class organised into a Communist Party is the hegemonic force in society and takes the lead - over a period no doubt of some decades - in implementing this programme.

These are the essential elements of the communist maximum programme. For, once a new mode of production has been created, the dynamic of internal development takes on entirely new forms. The society may be “economically, morally and intellectually still stamped with the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it emerges”. It may be a society which has still to overcome the division of labour,<sup>6</sup> which has still to fully release the potential of the productive forces it inherits and which has still to establish needs-based distribution on a universal basis. But this is a society without classes and therefore without a state in the sense of institutions existing to perpetuate class-based rule and (most pertinent for us as communist militants) without a Communist Party - defined as it is by its relationship with the working class.

As to how fast, to what extent and by what methods internal contradictions and conflicts are resolved in such a society we can only speculate. Only in the broadest sense can we answer Marx’s question, “What social functions will remain in existence there that are analogous to present state functions?”<sup>7</sup> Or indeed what modes of popular organisation will develop that are analogous to the role of a mass Communist Party. Reality will not be as clean as even the most scientifically correct schema. Stages will overlap and interpenetrate. But there is no theoretical basis in Marx’s writings for saying, as does the CPGB’s programme: “In its first stages communism has not reached complete maturity or completely rid itself of the traditions and remnants of capitalism. *The class struggle and private property continue and so does the need for the state*” (my emphases in all quotes).

Or: “While socialism creates the objective basis for solving social contradictions, these contradictions need to be solved *through a correct political line* and the development of mass, active democracy. This is essential, as communism is *not a*

*spontaneous development*.”

It is not only in the *Critique* that Marx discusses communist society. Throughout the three volumes of *Capital* Marx constantly makes reference to how society will be organised in a future he usually describes as a “free association of producers”. He always takes care never to be prescriptive - especially when it comes to methods of distribution (and, for that matter, never mentions the state or the law of value in relation to such a society). For instance: “Let us finally imagine, for a change, an association of free men, working with the means of production held in common, and expending their many different forms of labour-power in full self-awareness as one single social labour force ... The total product of our imagined association is a social product. One part of this product serves as fresh means of production and remains social. But another part is consumed by members of the association as means of subsistence. This part must therefore be divided amongst them.

“*The way this division is made will vary with the particular kind of social organisation of production and the corresponding level of social development attained by the producers.*”<sup>8</sup>

## Programme

The Communist Platform statement therefore goes beyond what can be said on a strictly scientific basis (and indeed beyond what the *Weekly Worker*’s own ‘What we fight for’ column says) when it asserts that “Our ultimate aim is a society based on the principle of ‘From each according to their abilities; to each according to their needs’”. Communists do seek to extend this principle as far as practicable (even within present-day capitalist society), but whether it is ever forms the basis for all economic relationships will not be the decision of a Communist Party. Communist society itself will determine that.

We should pay heed to what Marx said in the *Critique* about it being “in general a mistake to make a fuss about so-called *distribution* and put the principal stress on it, any distribution of the means of consumption is only a consequence of the distribution of the conditions of production themselves.”

In this regard paragraph 3 of the Socialist Platform statement already provides a perfectly adequate definition of what Marx meant by communism: “Socialism means complete political, social and economic democracy. It requires a fundamental breach with capitalism. It means a society in which the wealth and the means of production are no longer in private hands, but are owned in common. Everyone will have the right to participate in deciding how the wealth of society is used and how production is planned to meet the needs of all and to protect the natural world on which we depend ...”

The Communist Platform statement carries over most of this paragraph with only minor amendments, but deletes the sentence about “a fundamental breach with capitalism”. I can only assume that this is because, according to the CPGB’s schema, a change in property relations and the fullest extension of democracy do not mark the completion of the transition away from capitalism.

Marx begged to differ. When he sat down in 1880 to draft the programme of the French *Parti Ouvrier* he thought it sufficient to say simply this about the society that would supersede capitalism: “That the producers can be free only when they are in possession of the means of production; that there are only two forms under which the means of production can belong to them: (1) the individual form which has never existed in a general state and which is increasingly eliminated by industrial progress; (2) the collective form, the material and intellectual elements

of which are constituted by the very development of capitalist society.”

It goes without saying that we are allowed to build on what Marx wrote (or break with him where we disagree). And we can seek to say more about the society to which we aspire (for instance, it would be interesting to think about the different ways that work might be organised once commodity production ceases) but, as a general principle, in programmatic statements we should avoid speculation and strive for precision.

So is “a moneyless, classless, stateless society” a precise enough characterisation of the nature of the society socialists and communists aim to create? It is certainly concise. Whether we agree on the meaning of these terms is another matter. I think they are aspects of a society that qualifies as Marx’s ‘free association of producers’: ie, common ownership of the means of production, popular decision-making. Commodity production and the law of value have been left behind, but elements of rationing may still be required, attitudes to work might not have been completely transformed. Hence, Marx’s speculation about labour certificates (distributed in part in exchange for work undertaken) being required to share in society’s limited supply of products for personal consumption. He insists such a form of distribution is not money - in Marx’s vision labour certificates cannot be transferred or accumulated and therefore do not fulfil the function of reproducing capital. The belief that the abolition of money only happens under ‘full communism’ (and an entirely needs-based distribution of society’s production) is based on a different (and, again, non-scientific) understanding of what money is.

It is the same with the concepts of ‘classless’ and ‘stateless’. If these are aspects only of ‘full communism’ (and the proposed elimination of all social conflict and the potential for hierarchical relationships), then these ideas take on a utopian rather than a scientific flavour and do not contribute to programmatic clarity.

The Socialist Platform’s statement could be improved. The formulation, “a voluntary European federation of socialist societies”, appears predicated on a continuation of the current international state system. Our vision should be of a borderless world. Ironically, the CPGB amendment I would have most strongly supported - on Europe - in the indicative voting was the only one to be defeated.

Nor is the Socialist Platform statement clear enough about the leading role of the working class in the political and social transformations we seek. And the CPGB’s amendment to incorporate the phrase, “sweeping away the capitalist state”, would have added greater clarity to the statement’s existing discussion of radical political and institutional change.

Nevertheless, overall the Socialist Platform statement seems to me to be clearer, less confused and, from a Marxist perspective, more scientifically correct than the amended statement the CPGB is proposing ●

## Notes

1. J Conrad, ‘Communicating across the archipelago of isolation’ *Weekly Worker* August 29 2013.
2. To be fair, there is some support for this conceptualisation in Lenin’s *State and revolution* and a very strong basis in Bukharin’s and Preobrazhensky’s *ABC of communism*.
3. K Marx *Critique of the Gotha programme* Moscow 1976, p16.
4. *Ibid* p26.
5. N Rogers, ‘Communist transition’ *Weekly Worker* August 26 2010; J Conrad, ‘The phases of communism’ *Weekly Worker* September 23 2010; and N Rogers, ‘Debating transition and neoliberalism’ *Weekly Worker* October 28 2010.
6. The CPGB’s *Draft programme* by contrast asserts that “the full socialisation of production is dependent on and can only proceed in line with the withering away of skills monopolies of the middle class and hence the division of labour”.
7. K Marx, *Critique of the Gotha programme* p26.
8. K Marx *Capital* Vol 1, London 1990, pp171-72.

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## DEBATE



Vision without theory is blind

# Inspiring view of future society

Is the distinction between socialism and communism necessarily Stalinist? Mike Macnair replies to Nick Rogers

It is not the usual practice of this paper to print an immediate reply alongside polemical articles critical of the paper or of the Communist Party of Great Britain. Usually, we prefer to let the article stand on its own and reply, if necessary, in a future issue; to help the discussion to develop over time.

The present case is different. When this issue appears we will be just over two weeks away from the Left Unity founding conference. For that conference, the CPGB and this paper are advocating a vote in the first place for a draft statement of aims proposed by the Communist Platform of Left Unity. We assume that the conference vote will be conducted democratically: that is, that there will be some form of preference or exhaustive voting to ensure that there is an actual majority for the statement of aims eventually adopted. On this assumption, we will urge comrades at the conference to cast their second-preference vote in favour of the Socialist Platform.

Comrade Nick Rogers' article (pp6-7) argues that the Socialist Platform is *preferable* to the Communist Platform. Given that we are engaged in an immediate discussion about how to vote in 16 days' time, we think that it is necessary to print comrade Rogers' article with an immediate reply. Nonetheless, this article is only partly a reply on behalf of the CPGB Provisional Central Committee. The comments which follow on 'Why two platforms?' reflect CPGB PCC and aggregate discussions. Beyond this, I am engaged in defending the formulations of the CPGB's agreed *Draft programme* - though I should say, as usual and as the title indicates, that this is a *draft* programme. However, for the particular direct response to

comrade Rogers' arguments I am individually responsible.

## Why two platforms?

Since comrade Rogers begins with the similarity of the two platforms and "material for many a *Life of Brian*-sourced jibe", I should begin by restating the reason why there are two platforms. Comrade Rogers recognises that the Socialist Platform leadership at the September 14 meeting "used a procedural manoeuvre to effectively block the membership from amending the statement", but from his tone he clearly regards this matter as less serious than we do.

In my September 8 email to the Socialist Platform organising group on behalf of the CPGB PCC, printed in this paper on September 12, I wrote that the proposal to take indicative votes only on the basis that the meeting would be insufficiently representative was "an error of principle in relation to democratic functioning, which is considerably more serious than any decision one way or another about any of the proposed amendments could be".

Nonetheless, on September 14 the organising group insisted on a 'take it or leave it' approach to their draft; and backed this up by an appeal to *absent* signatories (in a meeting which, with around 40% of signatories present, was *unusually* 'representative' relative to labour-movement meetings generally) and to those who might in future be persuaded. It was this that we characterised as a political collapse into the *methods* of the labour bureaucracy.

Unamendable, 'take it or leave

it' documents, referenda, directly elected presidents, party leaders, and officers - all these are components of *one* political method, originally developed by Louis Bonaparte: a means of *neutering* universal-suffrage majority voting and making it serve as an instrument of deception. It is the method used by the Blairites to neuter internal discussion in the Labour Party.

Comrade Rogers writes: "The Socialist Platform statement meets the CPGB's usual criteria for a communist or Marxist programme: explicit commitment to the principles of working class independence, internationalism and the prioritisation of democracy." His formulation "the prioritisation of democracy" tones down what CPGB has in fact said in the past on this front: "radical democracy both in the state and in the workers' movement". When we say now that the Socialist Platform leaders on September 14 collapsed into the methods of the labour bureaucracy, what we are saying is - mainly - that they wrote into the platform a commitment to radical democracy, but then immediately advertised in practice that they have no intention of implementing this commitment, but instead would stick by 'all the old crap'. The same goes for the agreed formulation opposing all imperialist war and adventures. The comrades defended the presence of the social-imperialist Alliance for Workers' Liberty on September 14 and are happy to have them serving on the steering committee. Indeed there has been a golden silence observed over the recent furore following the Islamophobic article penned by the AWL's guru, Sean Matgamna. So we are saying, precisely, that in spite of the apparent advance represented by the draft platform, the

conduct of September 14 shows that comrades have *collapsed into* the rotten old methods.

Since the comrades have not deigned to argue directly and politically against the amendments, but have instead offered arguments of the type used by Neil Kinnock in Labour, John Rees in Respect, and so on, it is unavoidable for us to *infer* that what is actually involved is a desire to preserve ambiguity in relation to left Labourism: that is, that it should remain *possible* to interpret the platform as offering 'clause four socialism', and - on Europe - that it should remain *possible* to interpret the platform in a way consistent with participation in social-nationalist campaigns for British withdrawal from the European Union. The overall effect is to make the *reality* of all the positive political commitments of the platform at best severely problematic.

## Substantive

The main burden of comrade Rogers' critique of the Communist Platform is, however, substantive. He objects to the formulations of basic aims, which he says reproduces what he regards as confusion in the CPGB's own *Draft programme*. In the first place, he argues that the CPGB's formulations about the transition to communism are Stalinistic and unduly postpone "the most transformative aspect of the socialist vision to a future beyond the lifespan of anyone currently alive". Secondly, he argues that they are inconsistent with what Marx wrote (chiefly in the 1875 *Critique of the Gotha programme*, but also elsewhere) and, in particular, unduly speculative.

Hence, he says, paragraph 3 of the Socialist Platform's draft

aims "already provides a perfectly adequate definition of what Marx meant by communism" when it states: "Socialism means complete political, social and economic democracy. It requires a fundamental breach with capitalism. It means a society in which the wealth and the means of production are no longer in private hands, but are owned in common. Everyone will have the right to participate in deciding how the wealth of society is used and how production is planned to meet the needs of all and to protect the natural world on which we depend ..."

My response to these arguments necessarily has two levels. The first level is why the left, including Left Unity, needs to say more about aims and the nature of socialism than Marx was willing to say in the 19th century. The second level is in defence of the CPGB's *Draft programme*, rather than of the very summary statement of aims that is the Communist Platform statement: it is about why the *Critique of the Gotha programme* (and Marx's side comments elsewhere) are only a limited guide to what we should be saying on this issue in the 21st century.

## Aims

The first issue is *why* it is necessary to set out strategic aims as well as immediate ones. One aspect of the answer was given by comrade Nick Wrack in his speech to Communist University in August, when he talked about the importance of an alternative vision.<sup>1</sup> Comrade Rogers himself makes the point that "part of the explanation for the failure to mobilise a serious movement of opposition to 30 years of neoliberal assaults, including its most recent manifestations, is that we have failed

to convince very many people (even among those who have suffered the most) that there is a different way to organise society that is both viable and better than the capitalist society that surrounds us”.

An equally fundamental point is the core of our present problems - crisis, growing inequality both within and between nations, the inability to reach international agreements about human-induced global warming - are problems of *capitalism as such*, so that it is quite impossible - or at least extraordinarily difficult - to think of solutions which would not damage the (limited) functionality of capitalism. Conversely, traditional projects of reducing inequality and other reforms by redistribution *within a single capitalist state* produce flight of capital, worsening the economy to allow the right to get back into the governmental saddle (as in France today), even where they do not produce something worse (sanctions, etc).

There is, however, an even more basic problem. We live in a world after, and marked by, the eventual failure of the Russian Revolution to produce anything more than the post-1991 ‘capitalism with Russian characteristics’, absorption of eastern Europe as periphery countries in the European Union, a China engaged in fleet-building and a new scramble for Africa, and so on. This is the real source of the ideology of ‘there is no alternative’. On the one hand, it leads most of the organised Marxist left to attempt to *hide behind* one or another sort of pretences to be ‘really’ the old Labour left. On the other, it leads many young people who are hostile to the capitalist world order to ‘anything but Marxism’ or ‘anything but socialism’ - whether this ‘anything but’ is new variants on Bakuninist ‘direct action’ politics, which achieve episodic spectaculars leading nowhere, or forms of reactionary anti-liberalism, like Islamism and jihad.

This circumstance requires us to say *more* about aims, and the alternative to capitalism, than Marx and his contemporaries had to. We need to be able to explain, clearly and without fudging or dodging the issue (as, for example, the Socialist Workers Party does), how what we propose is *different*, not only from full Stalinism, but also from what Lenin in 1921 already called “a workers’ state with bureaucratic deformations”. Moreover, given the enormous weight of negative history, we need to be able to demonstrate the *beginnings* of democratic decision-making *in practice*, in the workers’ movement and the organisations of the left.

How this bears on aims can be seen in the interlocking of two of our amendments. The first amendment, to the first point, is the one comrade Rogers criticises: “Our ultimate aim is a society based on the principle of ‘From each according to their abilities; to each according to their needs’. A moneyless, classless, stateless society, within which each individual can develop their fullest individuality.” But this interlocks with part of the second amendment, to the second point, to replace “Capitalism does not and cannot be made to work in the interests of the majority. Its state and institutions will have to be replaced by ones that act in the interests of the majority” with “Neither capitalism nor its state apparatus can be made to work in the interests of the mass of the population. The rule of the working class requires a state to defend itself, but a state that is withering away, a semi-state.” Comrade Rogers does not criticise this amendment.

The interconnection is that the second amendment - based, of course, on a phrase in Lenin’s *State and revolution* - makes no sense without the initial strategic aim of a “moneyless, classless, stateless society”. But the concept is the clearest

possible counterposition to both the Stalinist and Labourite forms of state socialism that is available without falling into the Bakuninist idea of the immediate ‘abolition of the state’ and its modern equivalents (for example, John Holloway’s *Change the world without taking power*).

Lenin, of course, imagined that the Soviet form would provide a state that begins to wither away from the outset. This turned out to be mistaken under Russian conditions: most clearly because there was an actual *shortage* of people qualified to do administrative, military, policing, etc tasks, so that the Bolsheviks had both to compromise with the professional middle class (*spetsy*) and to turn a lot of their own cadre into state bureaucrats. Apart from military skills, this is less of a problem in the ‘developed countries’ in the 21st century. But the idea also ignored the practical problems of accountability in *central* decision-making for those issues which cannot practically be decided locally; and this issue requires of socialists much more thought about constitution-making, drawing on the democratic-republican tradition: freedom of communication (speech, etc), of association and of assembly, information transparency, term limits on public officials at all levels, universal military training and the militia, generalised trial by jury, self-government of the localities, and so on.

However, we are not here concerned with the details (which anyhow belong in the minimum programme or immediate proposals rather than in the statement of aims), but with what the aims should be. And here our basic aim is clearly stated: we are for *general human emancipation*, which does mean a “moneyless, classless, stateless society”.

## Transition to communism

Comrade Rogers’ argument for *not* stating as an aim “a moneyless, classless, stateless society” is based on the limited character of Marx’s observations about the future society (as avoiding speculation) and, more specifically, on the one place where Marx does talk to some extent about how he sees the transition: *The critique of the Gotha programme*. In effect (in dispersed places) Marx projects three phases. The first is the dictatorship of the proletariat:

Between capitalist and communist society there lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.<sup>2</sup>

Though, as Hal Draper has shown,<sup>3</sup> Marx’s usual usage of ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ means merely ‘political rule by the working class’, the formula here suggests (as contemporaneous usage, drawn from the Roman republican idea, did) a *short* period of radical reforms as the transition, not a more or less prolonged coexistence of the working class with the petty bourgeoisie under working class political rule.

The second phase is:

a communist society, not as it has developed on its own foundations, but, on the contrary, just as it emerges from capitalist society; which is thus in every respect, economically, morally, and intellectually, still stamped with the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it emerges.

This second phase is the context of ‘labour tokens’. This society “recognises no class differences, because everyone is only a worker like everyone else; but it tacitly

recognises unequal individual endowment, and thus productive capacity, as a natural privilege”.<sup>4</sup>

The third phase is described thus:

In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labour, has vanished; after labour has become not only a means of life, but life’s prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-around development of the individual, and all the springs of cooperative wealth flow more abundantly - only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!<sup>5</sup>

Nick’s argument is that we should not put into a programme anything beyond the *second* phase in this conception, on the grounds that, first, to do so is speculative, and second, that Marx’s distinction between the two phases of communism was used by the Stalinist bureaucracy to allow it to characterise its own regime as socialist (meaning the second phase) and to put off communism (the “higher phase”) to the indefinite future.

## 138 years on

The *Critique of the Gotha programme* was written in the year 1875, very nearly 140 years ago. During that 140 years a number of developments of great importance to the conception of the transition from capitalism to communism have taken place, to put it mildly. In the first place, *capitalism* has continued to revolutionise the forces of production. Technology and the productivity of labour have advanced immensely. Just for a single (but important) example, in 1870 the share of employment in agriculture in Europe was 51.7%, in Britain 11%. Today it is 5% in Europe, less than 1% in the UK.<sup>6</sup> This increase in the productivity of labour carries with it a long-term increase in unemployment and ‘underemployment’. It has also implied a massive expansion of education.

A secondary effect of these developments is that it is now seriously problematic to identify, as Marx did in 1875, differential individual productive capacity as *mainly* a result of “unequal individual endowment”. To the extent that there are “unequal individual endowment[s]” affecting wages, and not related to serious disabilities, these are now very visibly a *component of the class structure*; while in the UK at least we *expect* unequal endowments in the form of disabilities to be ‘adjusted for’ by employers, and so on.

Secondly, the growth of human productive activities has become such as to begin to press on the habitability of the biosphere (human-induced global warming, overfishing and so on). It should, therefore, be clear that the transition to communism is *not* a matter of incentivising massive future growth of the sort of productive activities in which we are now engaged. One hundred and forty years ago, while Marx paid attention to issues of soil exhaustion and contemporaries discussed ‘peak coal’ as a limit to growth, this was not obvious. The ‘labour tokens’ approach to distribution is precisely one which incentivises increased individual labour time (problematic, given endemic unemployment, and antithetical to the interest in human self-development) and precisely because it in this sense mimics the capitalist work incentive and *would* drive a tendency to undirected ‘growth’.<sup>7</sup>

Third, in the 20th century the Stalinists experimented with forced collectivisation to ‘deal with’ the

petty bourgeoisie. The results were terrible. There is not the slightest reason to suppose that a ‘non-Stalinist’ forced collectivisation is possible (forced collectivisation *implies* the police state) or that it would have any superior results. As of 2009 there were in the UK, a very advanced and long-standing capitalist country, 4.75 million small and medium-sized businesses.<sup>8</sup> While the top end of these are capitalist operations, and some of the smallest are ‘sham self-employment,’ we are still concerned with a large chunk of the economically active population of around 31 million. The problem is, of course, all the more significant for countries with subsisting peasantries, and so on. It is therefore necessary to contemplate a significant period of *working class rule* with a subsisting petty bourgeoisie, therefore implying only *partial* demonetisation of the economy.

Fourth, and very much secondary, since Marx’s time there has been a massive production of historical knowledge (published manuscripts, archaeological results and so on) and of historical work by Marxists of various sorts (and by partially *Marxisant* historians) on prior transitions between modes of production. Whatever the theoretical approach to transition, on the basis of the historical evidence it would be extraordinarily unlikely to find in a post-revolutionary transitional period a simple model like the communist society “just as it emerges from capitalist society” in the *Critique of the Gotha programme*. The transitional society is more likely to be a complex combination of interpenetrated, contradictory capitalist and communist features.

Moreover, two at least of Marx’s features of the “higher phase of communist society” are quite clearly presently posed by the problems of ‘late capitalism’. They are “the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labour”; and “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs”.

To take the second first, I have already referred to the *capitalist* state’s *current* efforts on disability discrimination. Stingy as they are, these still involve substantial direction of resources to people with disabilities over and above those without, on the basis of needs to enable maximum autonomy and individual development and participation. Allocation of resources according to need, not according to labour contributed. But this is only the tip of an iceberg. The whole apparatus of the national health service is needs-based, although Conservative and New Labour governments have been trying to force it in the direction of marketisation. 21st century socialists certainly do not advocate access to medical treatment based on labour contributed. Exactly the same applies to education.

“[E]nslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour”, meaning, more exactly, the specialisation of function - some people get to spend their whole lives engaged in agreeable work, while others get landed with shit jobs or none at all - is a tougher problem and less obvious, since capitalism continues to *multiply* specialisms of one sort and another. But overcoming this problem is precisely posed by two issues.

The first is the endemic unemployment and underemployment of current capitalist society; the fact that the high productivity of labour means that this does not lead to mass starvation, but rather to demoralisation; and in the ‘advanced’ countries the extent of ‘make-work’ jobs. That is, that (worthwhile) work is already “life’s prime want”, and access to it needs to be rationed (shorter working week, etc).

The second is that the specialisation of function - the division of labour between the permanent leaders and the permanent led - is one of the most immediate problems of the labour movement and the left. The crisis in the SWP is no more than a superficial symptom of the fact that bureaucratic centralism, with permanent leaders and petty cults of the personality, is increasingly untenable. And this in itself is no more than a species of the “enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labour” - except that the real antithesis is not between mental and physical labour (most ‘physical’ jobs need considerable brainwork), but between the labour of doing as you are told and the labour of decision-making.

## Stalinist?

Comrade Rogers argues that “The conceptualisation of socialism and communism as two very different kinds of societies served to justify Stalinism.” And that our characterisation of communism “is a version of the maximum programme that is useless for holding to account the leadership of a Communist Party”.

It should be apparent from what I have just said that this is just a smear. My argument here is that - precisely because of the development of the forces of production between 1875 and now - the transition to communism begins to *go beyond* Marx’s “first phase” from the outset, while it *also* initially retains contradictory market forms surviving from capitalism, due to the rejection of forced collectivisation.

This perspective quite clearly *does* pose immediate tasks, against which the leadership of a Communist Party in the transitional period can be held to account. How far are you progressing with needs-based production? With getting beyond the division of labour, through increased access to education, through rotational employment, through term limits for public officials and managers?

The fact that the Stalinists used a distinction between ‘socialism’ and ‘communism’ as an ideological cover and backing for calling the grotesque Soviet regime ‘socialist’ is quite irrelevant. The Stalinists used the *whole of Marxism* to one extent or another as ideological cover for their regime. Should we therefore repudiate all the categories which they used in this way? The question is, rather, what policy represents a *real alternative* to the Stalinist ideology?

In other words, the questions of transition beyond the division of labour/specialisation of function, and of production with a view to human needs and human self-development, not to ‘growth’, are *presently* posed by the development of capitalism since 1875, not put off to the indefinite future. And this concept of transition and communism offers a *far more* inspiring view of the future society than any variant of Marx’s 1875 “first phase” ●

## Notes

1. ‘Self-liberation, not manipulation’ *Weekly Worker* August 29.
2. K Marx *Critique of the Gotha programme* chapter 4: [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/ch04.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/ch04.htm).
3. <http://marxmyths.org/hal-draper/article2.htm>.
4. K Marx *Critique of the Gotha programme*, chapter 1: [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/ch01.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/ch01.htm).
5. *Ibid*.
6. S Broadberry, G Federico and A Klein *Unifying the European experience: an economic history of modern Europe* Vol 2, chapter 3: ‘Sectoral developments, 1870-1914’ ([www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/economics/staff/.../wp/eurosector5a.pdf](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/economics/staff/.../wp/eurosector5a.pdf)) *EU Agricultural Economics Briefs* No8, July 2013; ‘Less than 1% of British workers now employed in agriculture for first time in history’: *The Independent* June 5.
7. I have criticised Cockshott’s and Cottrell’s variant on the ‘labour tokens’ scheme broadly in these terms, but in much more depth, in ‘Transition and abundance’ *Weekly Worker* September 2 2010.
8. [http://stats.bis.gov.uk/ed/sme/Stats\\_Press\\_release\\_2009.pdf](http://stats.bis.gov.uk/ed/sme/Stats_Press_release_2009.pdf).

## REMEMBRANCE

# Celebration of imperialist crimes

Eddie Ford wants us to defy the poppy police

Unfortunately, it is that time of year again when the establishment and its media hypocritically pretend to be horrified by war. Yes, we had the ritual of Remembrance Sunday with its solemn wreath-laying ceremony and hushed reverence at the Cenotaph. The millions squalidly butchered - sorry, who 'sacrificed their lives for their country' - in killing fields across the globe are transformed into pawns of an ongoing imperial game.

We are now approaching, of course, the centenary of the outbreak of World War I - obscenely and lyingly described as the 'war to end all wars' when it was just the prelude to yet more slaughter and another world war, only on a vaster scale. The original two-minute silence in November 1919, as we have been constantly reminded by a mawkish media, was a gesture of mourning for those killed in the trenches - their lives snuffed out in order to preserve the British empire. There are now no living veterans of World War I, however, the last one dying in February 2012 - and the numbers of surviving World War II veterans obviously shrink each year. You might think, therefore, that the remembrance ceremonies would be dwindling.

But nothing of the sort - quite the opposite, if anything. Not that it is hard to see why. The two-minute silence and all the rest is used to whitewash, at least partially, the past crimes of imperialism and - more importantly still - to legitimise *current* British military operations. They shall never be forgotten so that we can fight war again. In this spirit, the highly distasteful, North Korean-style, hour-long military parade past the Cenotaph was led by the War Widows Association - their spouses killed in recent military adventures. A large delegation from the Korean Veterans Association also joined the parade, a war which cost the lives of 1,139 British personnel - a drop in the blood-stained ocean though, compared to the staggering number of Koreans and Chinese who were killed (the association is to be dissolved, by the way, seeing how most of the survivors are now in their 80s or older). Naturally, prince Andrew and the defence secretary, Philip Hammond, laid wreaths at Camp Bastion in Helmand province in Afghanistan - the prince remarking he was also remembering those who died in the Falklands, another gallant 'anti-fascist' war to defend British liberties from evil Argentinian Hitlers. Imperialism may not be perfect, it seems, but it always comes decent in the end.

### Consensus

You can all but guarantee that the remembrance commemorations and establishment rewriting of history will carry on for many years to come, unless the workers' movement and the left can organise to challenge the consensus. Regrettably though, there is very little sign of that at the moment. Indeed, the left just disappears on Remembrance Sunday, etc - the likes of the Stop the War Coalition being too scared to mount any sort of protest or demonstration in case they come across as the loony lefties of the popular imagination. Instead, what *open* dissent there is comes from the likes of Islam4UK or Muslims Against Crusaders (both now proscribed organisations, perhaps not coincidentally).

One obvious manifestation of the stifling conformity that surrounds this issue are those tacky plastic red poppies, which last year generated sales of £42.8 million for the Royal British Legion.



Head of state, head of church ... very political

Nowadays it is near impossible to avoid them, and it almost goes without saying that the Cenotaph on November 10 was a sea of red poppies. Then look at the media: virtually everyone is wearing one - regardless of whether they be a political correspondent or quiz show presenter. You stand out if you do not have one pinned dutifully to your lapel. Whilst you can innocently shrug your shoulders and wonder what all the fuss is about - hey, poppies are merely a sign of respect - the cumulative effect is pernicious, acting to reinforce an oppressively dominant viewpoint. Those who hold a contrasting opinion run the danger of being anathematised by officialdom and sections of the press.

The BBC, for example, says that poppy-wearing is entirely voluntary - there is no three-line whip. Of course not. Official guidelines remind presenters, however, that poppies "may be worn on screen from 06.00 Saturday October 26 to 23.59 on Remembrance Day, Monday November 11", just in case you forget. And, in reality, woe betide any prominent media figure that fails to wear one - the poppy police are out on permanent patrol. Jonathan Ross had one *digitally superimposed* on him during a transmission of Film 2003, a BBC spokeswoman explaining that this was the "only way to ensure he was respectfully attired".<sup>1</sup> In 2006 the BBC presenter, Huw Edwards, acquired a poppy halfway through a news bulletin following a complaint from a viewer;<sup>2</sup> and who can forget the Jon Snow scandal of the same year, when the veteran Channel 4 news anchor man, who refuses to wear any sort of political symbol whilst on air, condemned the "unpleasant breed of poppy fascism".<sup>3</sup> Maybe proving his point, an outraged Gulf War veteran declared that "any questioning of the

poppy can only cause anguish to the people that have worn it with pride over the years" - meanwhile another Channel 4 news presenter, Sarah Smith, disagreed with Snow on the rather paradoxical grounds that, given "they are so ubiquitous", *not* wearing one "makes more of a statement than having one".<sup>3</sup> On that basis, the Channel 4 bosses - or the BBC, for that matter - should make poppy-wearing compulsory, along with black ties and tragic facial expressions when a member of the royal family dies.

More recently, on November 3, Benjamin Zephaniah, Rastafarian dub poet and professor of creative writing at Brunel University, took part in the BBC's *Question time* show wearing a white poppy - a pacifist symbol since 1933 and distributed by the Peace Pledge Union, a relatively big movement prior to World War II. BBC staff seemed to have persuaded Zephaniah to pin it rather low down on his shirt, so that most of the time it was not visible. Of course, communists would not promote white poppies or pacifism - though it was certainly the case that when they were first introduced people would lose their jobs for wearing them, and Margaret Thatcher expressed her "deep distaste" for the symbol. But at least Zephaniah defied the poppy police and in that anti-establishment sense we would actively encourage others to emulate his example.

There have been some other objections to the official remembrance jamboree, even if very low-key and of an almost legalistic nature. Norman Bonney, a director of the National Secular Society and an emeritus professor of sociology at Edinburgh Napier University, has called for the Church of England to abandon its role

in the Cenotaph ceremony. He argues in an academic paper ('The Cenotaph: a contested and consensual symbol of remembrance') that the monument's designer, Edwin Lutyens, did not intend it to have any particular religious significance and points out that David Lloyd George's cabinet rejected the Church of England's requests for the Cenotaph to include a cross and to bear Christian inscriptions.<sup>4</sup> The established church cannot claim to speak for everybody in 21st-century Britain, he goes on to say, and wants to see the event stripped of all its religious aspects and replaced with a "secular ceremony with which all can identify".

In response, the church's director of communications, Arun Arora, accused the NSS of engaging in a "rather sad" attempt at publicity-seeking and - even worse - of trying to "politicise" Remembrance Sunday for their own ends. Coming from a spokesperson of the CoE, which obviously wants to retain its monopoly over sanctified grief and official mourning, this is ironic indeed.

Similarly, the good burghers of Plymouth were horrified that the United Kingdom Independence Party laid a wreath at the Burrow Hill war memorial, because it had a Ukip logo in the centre. Uproar. The Tory and Labour leaders on the local council instantly united to denounce Ukip's "very bad taste" - with the Labour boss, Tudor Evans, stressing how his grouping has always strived to make Remembrance Day an "apolitical event", and his Tory equivalent claimed to be "appalled" by Ukip's "overtly political" act. In fact the 'apolitical' poppy is a potent symbol of British imperialist ideology. Doubtlessly with some justification, David Salmon, Ukip's chairman for Plymouth and South West Devon, was "boiling and furious" at this reaction from the mainstream parties - maintaining that they were the same wreaths laid last year and nothing was said then. He was backed up by the British Legion, which issued a short statement saying wreaths were produced every year with logos for all the mainstream political parties.

In many ways it is an extraordinary state of affairs that in a country where Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sasson are still taught almost universally in schools (this writer studied them for his O level in English literature) there is such automatic hostility to anyone who questions the official narrative and rituals that surround war commemorations. But Remembrance Day has been totally institutionalised in a manner akin to Holocaust Memorial Day, and to raise doubts is not just disloyal - it is a violation of the natural moral order. It would be more accurate to say that Remembrance Day is actually *misremembrance* day.

### Brutalised

Yet at the same time we have a reminder of the *real* nature of British imperialism and warfare in general - the conviction of 'Marine A' for the cold-blooded murder - or execution - of a wounded Taliban insurgent in Helmand province in September 2011. Two other soldiers accused of murder were cleared, both insisting that they were "shocked" when A opened fire on someone who was clearly alive. He was given a mandatory life sentence, though it is a fairly safe bet that, once the dust settles, he will get up to two-thirds of his sentence knocked off - he will be formally sentenced next month after psychiatric reports have been presented.

An extraordinary feature of this incident was not so much the murder, but the fact that a helmet camera worn by 'Marine B' captured the

moment of the killing - the footage itself was not released due to the government's insistence that it would be a "recruitment gift" for terrorists. But the audio from the video *was* released, and on this members of the eight-man patrol are heard abusing and laughing at the captured Taliban fighter - 'Marine C', the youngest of the accused men, says: "I'll put one in his head if you want", to which A replies: "No, not in his head, 'cause that'll be fucking obvious". He then leans over and shoots the insurgent in the chest with a pistol, before telling him: "There you are: shuffle off this mortal coil, you cunt. It's nothing you wouldn't do to us." A few moments later A is heard telling his comrades: "Obviously this doesn't go anywhere, fellas. I've just broken the Geneva convention." B laughs and suggests that if someone asked about the gunfire they should claim it was a "warning shot". As it happened, the video was discovered a year later on another marine's laptop during an unrelated investigation.

Significantly, it is the first time a British serviceman or woman has been found guilty of murder during an overseas operation in modern times. The army top brass described the incident as a "truly shocking and appalling aberration" - not the sort of thing our British chaps and chapesses normally do, you understand.

In a word, *bullshit* - something pointed out by Joe Glenton in *The Guardian* (November 8). Glenton, as our regular readers will know, refused to be sent on a second tour in Afghanistan and ended up serving five months in a military prison. For Glenton, the public had been given an unexpected glimpse of "war's unsanitised face", just as "soldier worship" is about to "hit its tedious annual peak". He reminded us that from the outset this episode has been written through with the "brand of self-delusion" that has come to typify the supposed 'good war' being fought in Afghanistan and elsewhere. Whilst he thinks Royal Marine commandos are the best light role infantry in the world "bar none", the question we ought to be "brave enough" to ask is: why is there such surprise when atrocities occur? To understand the actions of someone like Marine A we have to look at their "daily experience", which, of course, can "never be divorced from the overarching political context". In other words, yes, not all soldiers are like Marine A. But it is not just a case of a few 'rotten apples' either. If you send troops into a brutal environment, they will become even more brutalised than they have been trained to be from the start - so don't turn round and talk crap about the 'glorious tradition' of the British army. What happened in Helmand province is *part* of that tradition.

After all, think about it - was what Marine A did that much of an exception? Absolutely not. For instance, files have recently been released about the so-called 'Kenyan emergency' - when tens of thousands were beaten, tortured and killed by the British authorities. Typical acts of a relatively *minor* colonial war, so just imagine what British imperialism can do in a major conflict ●

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### Notes

1. www.theguardian.com/media/2003/nov/11/bbc.broadcasting1.
2. www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-414004/BBCs-Huw-mysteriously-acquires-poppy-half-way-news-bulletin.html.
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## REVIEW

# Caught in the headlights

Mark Bray **Translating anarchy: the anarchism of Occupy Wall Street Zero**  
Books, 2013, pp342, £15.99

For those who were active in libertarian and anarchist circles in 2010-11, it was impossible to get away from a certain tactical orientation that became absolutely ubiquitous: 'Occupy everything'.

In large public meetings that made me, and many people, want to pull their hair out at the roots in frustration at the lack of any political sense whatsoever, there was always a contingent who saw the tent and the sleeping bag as part of a magical solution to turn flagging protests into prefigurative revolutionary moments. In particular, I remember Chris Knight of the Radical Anthropology Group being very excited in a meeting at the University of London Union building in Malet Street, at the prospect that some anarchists camping in Parliament Square, combined with his version of the People's Assembly, would by their example alone usher in what sounded like a new system of soviets throughout the country.

This was, of course, in the context of the European and Arab upsurges which centred on occupations - like Tahrir Square in Egypt, but also in Europe in the Puerta de Sol in Madrid. Then there were the occupations in universities throughout Britain in response to the hike in tuition fees in mid 2010. Activists in New York seemingly were having similar discussions to those in Britain at the time, and in the summer of 2011 they hatched a plan to occupy Wall Street in response to the massive bank bailouts following the 2008 financial crash. The Canadian anti-consumerist group, Adbusters, called for a protest which subsequently became an occupation of Zucotti Park.

At this point, Mark Bray, then a graduate student in New York, turned up, a veteran of more than 10 years of similar actions going back to the Seattle protest in 1999. He did not think very much of what he saw. The political level was very low in his opinion, and overwhelmingly liberal in terms of the demands people were presenting. These were as simple as re-regulating the banks, abolishing 'corporate personhood', or just increasing taxes on the wealthy. However, he went away for a week, thought a bit, and strangely came back to put himself forward as a media spokesperson for the encampment.

What brought about this transformation is a little unclear, but from the sound of it the media hype the camp generated in New York was leading to a continuing upsurge in interest from people outside the usual activist milieu, and turning it into a potentially semi-permanent and rare vehicle for promoting anarchist politics. And he could not pass that opportunity up.

However, there was a dichotomy, as he saw it, between the people involved as organisers at the core of the project and those who were new, inexperienced or just passing through, who did not have anything approaching a developed anti-capitalist critique. But the former were not directly advocating anarchism anywhere in their slogans or materials: they employed bland, populist slogans about the 99%, mutual aid and direct action.

## Anarcho-populism

When Bray first had to field questions from a member of the press, he was asked whether he was a Republican or a Democrat. He says in his book that he hesitated - a bit like a rabbit caught in a car's headlights - and after the journalist suggested he might



Manipulated by a secret core

be an "independent", decided to run with that. As a result, this book really feels like an extended theoretical justification for this early instance of bottling it politically, at being unable to openly declare his long-held, deeply read and researched anarchist political beliefs in front of a hostile world.

He developed the view, however, that, due to the media's fundamental inability to comprehend, let alone present fairly, any understanding of anarchist ideas if described as such, it is better to demonstrate them in practice under different and more liberal-friendly terms. The large general assemblies at the centre of Occupy became the chief propaganda tool for persuading onlookers of the democratic aspirations of the movement. These scenes were related through television and readers will recall the clips of lots of generally quite young people sitting in large circles waving their hands up or down to indicate agreement or disagreement with a speaker. They also featured the 'people's microphone', where everyone in earshot repeats the speaker's words to a wider audience, a custom that developed as a result of police bans on amplification equipment.

The narrative given by the author provides a pretty convincing account of the degeneration of the Occupy model, and will seem quite predictable and familiar to many. In the first place, there is the obvious tension between the almost entirely transitory composition of the general assemblies and the core of activists in the camp. Bray notes that they hardly ever attended these meetings, which endlessly devolved responsibilities to the various working groups. These dealt with the planning of actions, the press, accounting, the 'people's library' and everything else. On the other hand, he also manages to identify the limits in the consensus model of decision-making, which was used universally in these assemblies. Every decision had to be agreed to by 90% of those present, making it very easy for small minorities to derail them and turn them into "shit shows".

This term highlights the obvious tension in using the appearance of your decision-making body as a tool

for propaganda - the semblance of smooth operation becomes more important than the actual addressing of people's needs. This concern for appearances made excluding 'troublemakers' almost impossible, because naive "liberal libertarians", in his words, defended their right to speak regardless. Nonetheless, it seemed successful in the first month of the camp's existence, and plenty of newcomers were involved. But at the same time, a new federal structure of working groups was created behind the scenes, which turned the decision-making assembly into a rubber stamp. Bray describes how after a few months core activists would laugh at the idea of even bothering to seek approval from the assembly. The working groups too became compromised, as a clear hierarchy developed between groups of activists concentrated in each. The 'direct action' and 'press' groups dominated by anarchists effectively developed a veto over the actions of the whole of Occupy.

Other than this structural decay from within, Bray can, and does, point to the obvious negative impacts of police repression - being thrown out of Zucotti Park in mid-November was one key moment. But this does not form the centre of his analysis, and on this point we can be grateful for the author's fairly systematic critique, which gives us a good sense of Occupy's internal dynamics, even though the political conclusions he seems to draw are bizarre and very contradictory.

## Popular front

The phrase, 'translating anarchy', relates to Bray managing to develop during the course of his Occupy experience a political theorisation similar to the Mandelstam conception of how radicals should relate to reformists in a 'broad' formation or party.

This is, I suspect, his way of justifying to himself why he and his comrades toned down their anarchistic language in order to draw people into the movement and experience the process for themselves. In this way, anarchism, he believes, can seem like common sense to people who are

instinctively hostile to "authoritarian organisational forms", and see anarchist methods of direct action as more useful than working through the existing political process.

In this respect he has quite a high opinion of his own skills as a media link. He describes how he has deliberately used wording that can be interpreted as advocating either liberal methods or radical action. He also states ways in which he thinks he managed to employ language in order to discredit liberal notions in general. On evictions, he made a point of emphasising his claim that they were often illegally carried out by bailiffs acting on behalf of banks, in order to show that the law is applied unequally and so reinforce the structural associations between capitalism and criminality. In reality, the videos I managed to find of his contributions from Zucotti Park seem incredibly dull, and have a tiny number of views on YouTube as a result - less than 100 after being up for over two years.

At the same time, Bray has quite a visceral distaste for "authoritarian Marxists" - he blames them for adopting "broad and inclusive" fronts to entice people in and then convert them to their sectarian politics. The irony of this appears to be lost on him - it is, after all, exactly his own method. He has mentioned more than once - and especially in talks about his book to anarchist audiences - the dozen or so Occupy organisers he interviewed for it who converted to some kind of liberal politics. But what about the thousands who went through the politically meaningless "shit shows" and were thoroughly turned off by the sham that the democratic process became by the end of it?

In a way, his concluding chapter, 'Like ectoplasm through a mist', describes this political failure. Many of the Occupy organisers hoped to slip in their radicalism among the foggy and confused political terrain they inhabited. They were trying to be all things to all people - and meanwhile their vaunted 'democratic process' was in reality hideously bureaucratic, relying on a typically Bakuninite 'invisible dictatorship'. Bray seemed to know how to do this very well, gaining significant influence and publicity from the very start.

In terms of what he comes up with by way of solutions, it all sounds a bit hit and miss. He identifies the weaknesses of Occupy's consensus decision-making, yet seems to imply that its 'democratic process' could be made to work if only it could be scaled up to the level of society as a whole. He also identifies toward the end of the book the need for patient, class-based organisation, as opposed to the relentless drive for stunts demanded by the direct action group to keep the attention of the media. He demonstrates how this practice unnecessarily put people in danger of arrest and police violence. He even manages to defend the idea of anarchists forming some kind of bloc to push their politics - although quite how this fits in with his general approach of concealing those politics is left unexplained.

The core point must be the failure of the political method itself: pretending to be an empty vessel for other people's demands, while at the same time claiming to advance a principled perspective of your own using this disguised form. Convincing people is about having the arguments out in the open rather than policing your own discourse, and that of others, in order to play to the cameras ●

Daniel Harvey

## What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# weekly Worker

## Russell Brand rips into bourgeois status quo

# Hippies, clowns and technocrats

The last time Russell Brand barrelled onto the comment pages of the 'quality press', it was for leaving obscene voicemail messages for actor Andrew Sachs. It was a pretty typical bit of Brand attention-seeking, which ended up getting the comedian rather more attention than he probably wanted - provoking a rather silly, but ferocious moral panic, which cost him his job.

Few people, at that time, would have expected - at least one tiresome celeb marriage and endless gurning later - that he would now have provoked a round of establishment soul-searching, less still through his wits rather than his impulsive tendencies, and least of all through a call in respectable bourgeois media outlets for revolution.

If anyone is guilty of a publicity stunt in this whole affair, after all, it is *The New Statesman*, along with *The Guardian* the staple product of establishment leftism, which - in what *should* have been a cringe-inducing 'down with the kids' gesture - handed itself over to Brand for one issue. In retrospect, it seems rather to have been a masterstroke. For Brand seized the opportunity to theme the issue around 'revolution'.

His featured essay is long, digressive, meandering, alternately jokey and jargon-laden, anecdotal and sweeping. It is not going to go down in history as a fine example of the essay as a literary form. It caught onto something in the ideological atmosphere, however, and raised a laughably defensive response from the political class he savaged.

All of which led to *that* appearance on the BBC's *Newsnight*: and if you happen to be one of the approximately four people in the country who have not already watched it (at nine million views on YouTube, probably the most successful 10 minutes in *Newsnight*'s recent history), you might want to do so. As a comedian, Brand is intermittently funny, but prone to irritating self-indulgence. He is most bearable if he has a foil. Why not Jeremy Paxman, the legendarily irate interviewer?

The genius of Brand's performance is not in his 'big ideas' - which he, of course, admits he has borrowed and pilfered from the likes of Occupy - but in Paxman's face. His heart is not in this particular fight. "Aren't you bored? Aren't you more bored than anyone?" Brand taunts him, as he tries to defend the 'political process'. Paxman may sneer at Brand not being "arsed" to vote, but in this interview, Paxman could barely be arsed to be Paxman. Just days later, he more or less conceded defeat in the *Radio Times*, claiming not to have voted himself in a recent election out of the same disgust at the mainstream parties that Brand articulates.

We will take a more serious look at Brand's arguments, but ought first to acknowledge a reason for doing so: the establishment response has been snivelling, disingenuous, defensive and patronising. It is alleged that one should not take seriously anyone advocating populist views who lives in wealth and comfort in California; as if the bloodless wonks who sit on the front benches know more about the atomised underclass than a reformed



Russell Brand and organ

heroin addict. His ridiculing of elections in this country supposedly encourages apathy or worse, as if the ever smaller difference between the competitors is not rather more to blame than one 'bad role model'.

The truth is that Brand's meandering 5,000-word essay perversely has more intellectual substance than more or less anything written or said by the Philosophy, Politics and Economics graduates in Westminster on such occasions that they suspect an 'ordinary' person might be listening. Those frontline politicians who are not afraid of being seen to have half a brain - Michael Gove, perhaps - seem, alas, to have only the half. The rest of them expend all their intellectual energy working out via technocratic pseudoscience exactly which banal slogan, repeated with sufficient persistence, will bludgeon the rest of us into voting for them.

The core of Brand's argument is a somewhat idiosyncratic hybrid

of various forms of run-of-the-mill leftism. In brief, global capitalism is driving itself - and all of us - to destruction: first of all through rampant environmental degradation, and secondly through opening up ever larger disparities in wealth between a tiny clique of super-rich and more or less everyone else - though Brand has a particular concern for a growing underclass, completely alienated from society altogether. To him - and to us - it is obvious that this state of affairs will not be fixed by a run-of-the-mill bourgeois election. 'Revolution' is needed, to bring about an "egalitarian socialist society".

This concern for a growing underclass - and the consequent judgement that social disturbances will inevitably result - is the meat and potatoes of a great many well-meaning patrician social democrats and liberals. Brand departs from them because he hardly seems sure that riots are a bad thing. "At a Liverpool dockers

march," he writes, "the chanting, the bristling, the ripped-up paving stones and galloping police horses in Bono glasses flipped a switch in me. I felt connected, on a personal level I was excited by the chaos ... I like a bit of chaos, however it's delivered."

He also - being a "bit of a tree-hugging, Hindu-tattooed, veggie meditator" - likes a bit of New Age mumbo-jumbo as well. There is a serious political point behind his digressions in that direction; in his view, as with hippiedom more generally, the virtue of various paganisms is their inclusion of the natural world in the moral universe. The spectre of apocalyptic climate change is everywhere.

His more mundane political proposals are mundane indeed: a clampdown on tax havens, an end to public indulgence of high finance ... The former idea he attributes to UK Uncut, and the latter to the People's Assembly and Occupy. On the far left, we hear very much of this sort of stuff from our own; you might write Brand up as a clownish cross between Counterfire's John Rees and anarchist Ian Bone. He differs most especially from the former in that, for Rees, pious noises about tax-dodgers and bailout money serve to conceal his nominally revolutionary politics; for Brand, on the other hand, these things should be sold to the public on the basis that they *are* a revolutionary assault on the profit system.

This inference rather slips in between the lines of the *Newsnight* interview; we must offer the comrade the same answer we offer all those who imagine that these kinds of demands in themselves hit structural weaknesses in capitalism: it is just not how it works. Capitalism is able to survive, even on the bare economic level, only because there is a *relatively* stable global organisation of state power. Brand's primary line of attack on this is his dismissal of voting, which gives this arrangement a veneer of legitimacy, as opposed to direct action and riots, which does not. But that misses the point; the question that needs to be answered is not what tax rate capitalists should be forced to put up with, but how

exactly the disenfranchised can *become* enfranchised; how society could be politically reorganised in such a way that the parasitic caste of professional politicians should become superfluous.

Brand has been accused of valorising the nihilism of social disturbances, somewhat disingenuously. Yet, while we must interpret phenomena such as the riots of two years ago as political *events*, they are by no means automatically political *actions*. Boycotting elections is indeed most often a passive, cynical act of resignation; casting a vote is often an act of enraged protest. What gives either course of action meaning is the 'line of march' - the existence of a meaningful plan for longer-term change. It is this that the far left lacks, above all else; that Brand should not have the answers is hardly the surprise of the century.

The whole episode is a reminder of the *fragility* of the bourgeois grip on the mass imagination - it seems strong only in comparison to the weak and scattered forces that seek to loosen that grip. All it takes is a scatterbrained leftie comedian to rip into the *status quo*, and it becomes momentarily obvious that those who presume to rule us are a corrupt clique with nothing of substance to say on anything. We may expect more of these little affairs.

It is likely, however, that the wrong 'lesson' will be drawn by the far left: that this fragility portends an imminent breakthrough for our side. Rees, in particular, will be chuffed at all the free publicity for the People's Assembly; no doubt Brand will be booked in to rally the troops at the PA's next outing (watch out, Mark Steel). The PA is already divided on whether to vote Labour, Green or far left; it would hardly be fatal to have a boycottist in the mix.

The trouble is that Brand openly avows that he looks to the PA, among others, for answers; but the leading clique have no answers except what they imagine Brand already wants to hear. All too similar by half to the desiccated products of the Westminster village, come to think of it ●

Harley Filben

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