

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



weekly **worker**

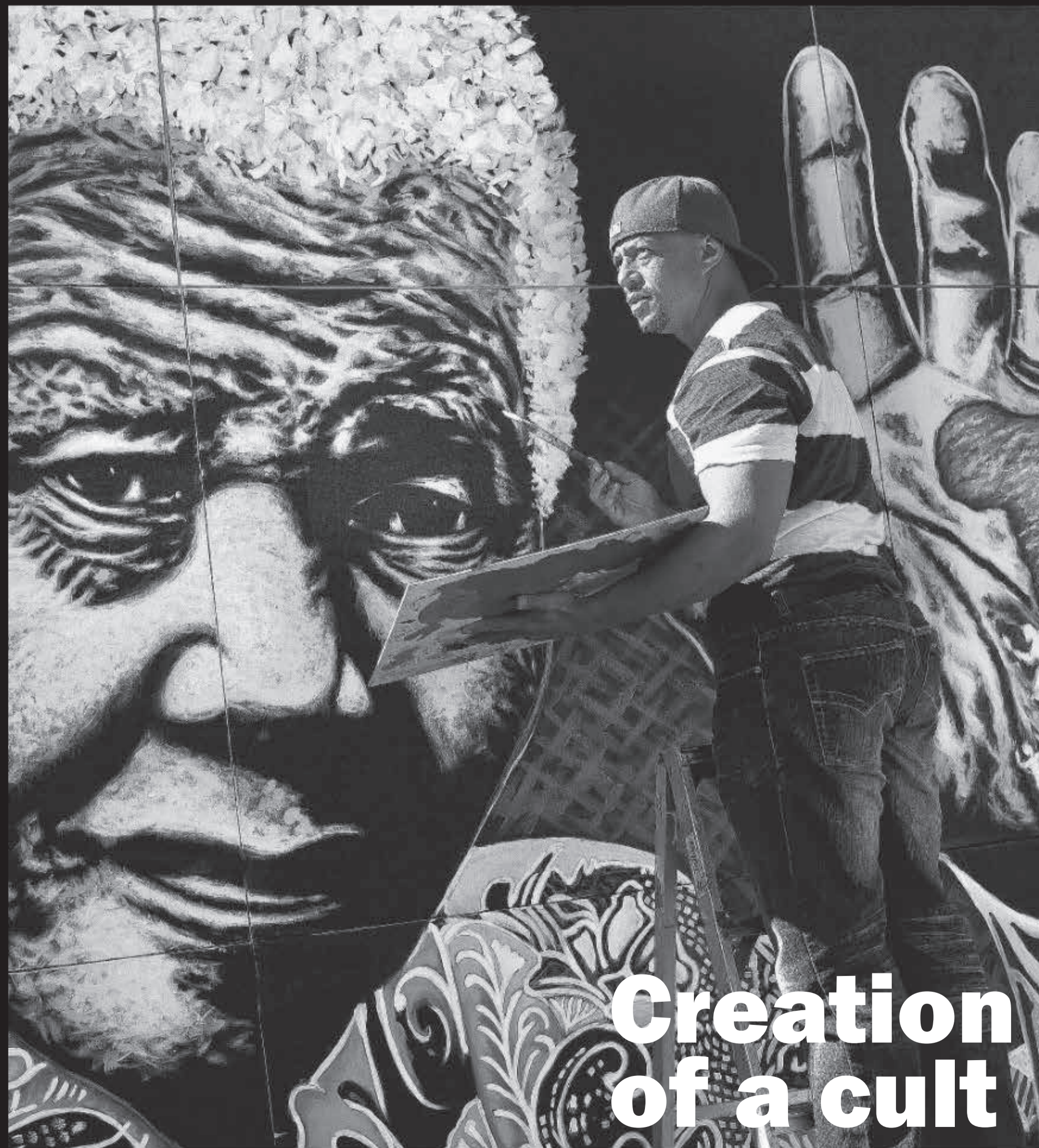
**Yasser Arafat's one-state
solution back in vogue: a
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Creation of a cult

LETTERS



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

Fellowship

On Saturday, the weekend before the National Conference of the Socialist Workers Party, a long-standing member continued his take on the party, penning some thoughts on leadership. But this time the tone was decidedly different, regrettably sadder. Early on in his piece he gave notice: "I will be writing more, over the next weeks, about the years I have spent in the SWP." Unlike with the former national secretary, Martin Smith, here we may be offered an extended swansong.

What struck me was that this accursed blogger pitched his discussion in terms of how leadership can be conceived. Unfortunately he only considered one conception, but I thank him for motivating me to develop some inchoate ideas I have been living with. What's necessarily involved in leadership? What makes a good follower? Is there anything else involved in successful practice other than leaders and followers? Why has socialist discourse, perhaps especially since 1914, always stressed how crucial leadership is? And what is lost with that approach, what dangers does it carry?

To put my conclusion first: we need to speak readily not simply of leadership, nor even of leadership-followership, but leadership-followership-*fellowship*, with the last-mentioned being the condition sustaining the very possibility of a healthy relationship between the other two.

Although I'm probably treating fellowship as a synonym of comradeship, given the perverse contortions the term 'comradeship' has been twisted into, let alone the people themselves, I find it somewhat liberating to use a different word, if only to try and think about all this in a new light, and so hopefully in a more productive way.

So I ask the reader to focus on what 'fellowship' denotes here. Although it may seem matey, pretty male, strictly speaking it's neutral, unlike 'brotherhood' or 'sisterhood'. For those who know their history, the USA had socialist fellowship organisations from the end of the 19th century, and in Britain the Lawrence-Healy group split from the Revolutionary Communist Party, entered the Labour Party, and was at the birth of Socialist Fellowship, co-founded by Fenner Brockway and Ellis Smith.

Returning to our triad, any element, on its own, is one-sided. (For those who must, then, call this non-dialectical.) I think that not just recent history shows that an undue stress on leadership - and its obverse, obedience - is corrosive, demoralising, ultimately destructive, necessarily infantilising the membership, rendering them passive, stunting their development, and preventing some of them growing into a possible alternative leadership.

It should be noted in passing that, be it management trainers or party trainers, there are always leadership schools, never followership schools or fellowship schools. It seems genius has to be cultivated, but being a drone comes with the genes. And don't even think about a comradeship school - who do you think we are, revolutionary socialists or something?

Moving on, a conceptual improvement on considering just one element is to investigate the leadership-followership *relation*. This, at least, admits the possibility of reciprocal determination. So instead of an all-knowing, all-seeing view from the top table, supping claret with Archimedes, we can envisage that the followers may themselves come up with interesting and seemingly useful

ideas, that can be tested, thereby taking the lead themselves.

But I suggest that something more is needed: the recognition of the force of fellowship, its powers and susceptibilities, the virtuous possibilities within it, bringing alive, bringing health to what too often is a mechanical, top-down relationship between leaders and followers. The living of fellowship, rather than just followership, is enlivening, it's invigorating, it excites, it can even bring warmth and joy into our political work. And how often do we hear that kind of talk or feel those emotions?

The reason why fellowship adds a spark is because it gives ontic depth to the living of the followership-leadership relation: its recognition allows us to get away from a flat ontology (Roy Bhaskar). When members are organised not just as leaders, as followers and by the leadership-followership relation, so that sometimes they lead, other times they follow, but are also organised in and through fellowship, then the affective bonds between members improve their quality of life, including their political work.

Fellowship helps sustain a healthy followership-leadership relation, not least by encouraging sanity in the organisation (no small feat), realistic expectations, a sensible pace of working, reducing the chances of burn-out, raising the 'retention' rate, accepting that one can be a life-long militant and vary the intensity of involvement without experiencing shame and guilt, and in general lead a balanced life that doesn't harm physical and mental health.

So it would set off the loudest alarm bells if some ruler of an office, a bureaucrat completely off her head, were to declare in a party bulletin that in the upcoming debate one side would have 40 minutes and the other 17. How could a fellow treat their fellow member in such an inegalitarian way? It would strike everyone as madness, pure and simple. It wouldn't be accepted in the workplace, or the union branch, so why would it be acceptable within the party? Sheer madness, nothing less. That comrade would end up being voted off the central committee; in a healthy party it would have led to social death.

I'll finish by speaking to the principle of limited terms of office. I've always respected Julius Nyerere for not dying in office, but stepping down. Even the US presidency is limited to two terms. But British revo soc organisations? Peter Taaffe: 49 years and counting; Sean Matgamna: 47 years and counting; Alex C, those that are to come ...

Does it really have to be this way? Well, no. Left Unity at its founding conference decided to have in its constitution term limits for occupants of nationally elected posts: "No member may hold a nationally elected post within the party for more than three consecutive years, following which s/he may not stand for election to that post for two years" (clause 4b, page 2).

That's an example of fellowship, supervening above the leadership-followership relation, mediating it even perhaps beyond the immediate co-interests of leaders and followers. This clause means that Left Unity has to continually produce people with ideas and confidence adequate to the task. There are no guarantees that this strategy will succeed, but it is a bold attempt to give fellowship a chance, and by thinking through how it can be involved at all times in our work it will necessitate us changing our organisational forms, our norms of behaviour, even our expectations of one another.

Jara Handala
email

Gag rule

In the various reports in your paper (December 5) on the recent founding conference of what is, and was already, Left Unity, it is reported that the so-called 'safe spaces' policy has been remitted.

It would seem then that Left Unity has no disciplinary process, should any problems arise, other than the informal resort to requesting the leadership body to arbitrate. In point of fact, this is not the case and the 'safe spaces' policy remains in full force and is being used to exclude comrades thought doctrinally lacking by those administering it.

That the policy has the potential to be used by those motivated by factional enmities is already apparent, in that individuals administering the policy are leading members of the Left Party Platform. That at least one such person also works closely with the police and has a partner who boasts on his Facebook page of liking porn is worrisome to say the least.

Given that there is a gag rule contained in the 'safe spaces' policy, I must again request anonymity for fear of further sanctions.

Name withheld
email

Distorters

In opposing the reformist 'aims' agreed at the LU conference, I didn't say they stood in contradiction to "the Left Party Platform", but to "socialism" ('Making a safe space for left ideas', December 5). Why must you distort things in this way?

What's more, if Peter Manson thinks the Class Struggle Platform proposes nothing but immediate demands, he should read the whole thing (available on the Left Unity website) rather than the truncated version (who decided it should be edited down?) that appeared in the conference papers on the day.

Richard Brenner
Workers Power

Only for leaders

Can someone please clarify to me why "the stipulation that meetings of such caucuses should be open to all members" is "undemocratic"?

This is a dividing line between a tendency and a faction, and to me it's enough that both Marx and traditional bourgeois politics all around frowned on 'hidden factions' and factionalism (not just the Bolsheviks). Secret caucus meetings should be a no-go, except for the executive committee - and even then for the most pressing and relevant matters only.

Jacob Richter
email

Wealth gap

Nelson Mandela was a very inspirational and courageous figure. He suffered so much in jail on Robben Island, enduring decades of hard labour, but refused to be broken by the evil apartheid regime. He did so much to force the regime to introduce democracy in South Africa.

The regime didn't concede defeat out of the goodness of their hearts - it cannot be denied (whatever the mainstream media will say) that it was due to the actions of ordinary (mainly working class) people in South Africa and their allies around the world.

Obvious factors were the extremely courageous actions of black youths in Sharpeville and Soweto, brutally massacred by the regime, and the effect those massacres had on mobilising international opinion into boycotting South African goods and companies like Barclays Bank, which were propping up apartheid.

Less obvious, except perhaps to people in South Africa itself, was black, white and 'coloured' workers uniting in trade unions, with perhaps the

possibility of general strikes (via 'dual power') leading to socialist revolution, forcing the regime to release Mandela and end apartheid. Their prime motive was to preserve capitalism and their own wealth, and so far that has been successful.

This was the position of the organisation I was a member of at the time (the Militant Tendency, now Socialist Party) and the South African organisation it was linked to via the Committee for a Workers' International (the Marxist Workers Tendency of the African National Congress, now the Democratic Socialist Movement). The DSM has played a leading role in forming, in conjunction with some of the surviving miners, a new political party - the Workers and Socialist Party (Wasp). They have an obituary to Nelson Mandela on their website, which is well worth reading.

It should not be forgotten that Margaret Thatcher called Nelson Mandela, when he was languishing in jail, a "terrorist". One report on British TV said that in an opinion poll within South Africa nine out of 10 white people said the same thing about him. The racist mainstream media in that country didn't want to acknowledge that he was actually a lawyer (perhaps they didn't want the idea that black people could be intelligent enough to qualify in that field!) But the so-called South African Communist Party, that had and still has strong links with the ANC, has certainly not proved revolutionary despite the Tories being concerned about "communists"!

Unfortunately, for many of the poor masses in South Africa, little has changed since apartheid (there are still shanty towns) and disillusionment in the ANC is rampant - particularly after their support for the massacre of 34 striking Marikana miners last year. The ANC is mired in corruption and big business still runs the country, albeit with some black bosses rather than them all being white, as in the apartheid era. There is a massive gap in wealth between rich and poor, and white people own most of the farms as well as businesses (which is ominous considering what has happened in Zimbabwe).

We had a minute's silence for Nelson Mandela and for others fighting (or who had fought) injustice around the world at an anti-fracking protest in Salford on Sunday. Whereas some of our political views may differ, we quite often (at least) recognise when someone with quite different views is an ally in our fight against mutual enemies.

Steve Wallis
Manchester

Crackpots

I see that the *Weekly Worker* (sic) has once again been trawling quotes of mine in some earnest attempt to make a point. The fake CPGB has existed in some form or another for - what? - 30 years? I can certainly remember rubbing unfraternal shoulders with 'Mark Fischer' in the real Young Communist League in the mid-1980s.

He has given his entire adult life to an organisation which has never managed to muster more than 50 members. I'm familiar with the notion of the 'primitive accumulation of cadre', but 50 members to show for 30 years? Primitive? That's positively prehistoric.

Yet the same rhetoric masquerading as politics is churned out week after week. If only the rest of the left would listen to and be led by this crackpot, failed outfit, the left would be on the road to ... somewhere or other. I'm not that bothered, to be honest. Your irrelevancy speaks for itself. But, when you drag my name into it, this becomes kinda personal. Grow up and account for your own magnificent failure.

Mark Perryman
email

Xmas sacking

Following the chancellor's autumn statement, Santa and his elves will be coming to Middlesbrough town centre with presents from the government for the good boys and girls of Teesside. As we're all in this together, there'll be a sack of presents for hard-working people and a sack of presents for rich people.

Come along and join us in celebrating the season of austerity. We'll be meeting up in the main foyer of Middlesbrough bus station at 10.30am on Saturday December 14 and bringing the government's festive sneer to various locations around the town centre, accompanied by some topical carol singing. Festive attire is strongly encouraged. Wear your Christmas jumper with pride.

Our protest is being organised in support of the People's Assembly 'Can you afford Christmas?' day of action on December 14, highlighting the impact of the government's vicious cuts programme on living standards.

For further details of this action and information on our activities more generally, please check out the Teesside People's Assembly blog at www.TeessidePA.tumblr.com.

Steve Cooke

Teesside People's Assembly against Austerity

Tables turned

Reports have emerged of Sussex Autonomous Students (sussexasn.tumblr.com) literally turning the tables of the SWP when it tried to run a stall at a demo last week. This is not a way to conduct serious politics and not something to support.

Can we be surprised that this is happening though, with the mishandling of the 'Delta' fiasco, other political criticism or the tuggery at some Marxism festivals? Alex Callinicos threatened "lynch mobs" earlier this year, and it looks like they've now arrived.

Jon D White

Socialist Party of Great Britain

Irreconcilable

In 'His side is winning the class struggle', Hillel Ticktin writes: "So the question that concerns us is not whether either of these two policies is 'right' from the standpoint of the ruling class, but what is likely to happen" (December 5). This dichotomy between action and interest is alien to materialist analysis, which must always use ruling class interest as an important long-term clue to its policies. A materialist analysis is required for why capitalism chooses not to use its Keynesian toolbox.

The missing explanatory component concerns relations within the big bourgeoisie; the significance of the right-populist epithet, 'crony capitalism', has gone unrecognised. The bourgeoisie depends on commodity fetishism not only for obfuscation, but to coordinate as a class, and the paralysing divisions of the ruling class (at least in the US) are products of the intervention of the state. The intervention the ruling class needs to restabilise economically destabilises it politically, by creating irreconcilable differences within the class.

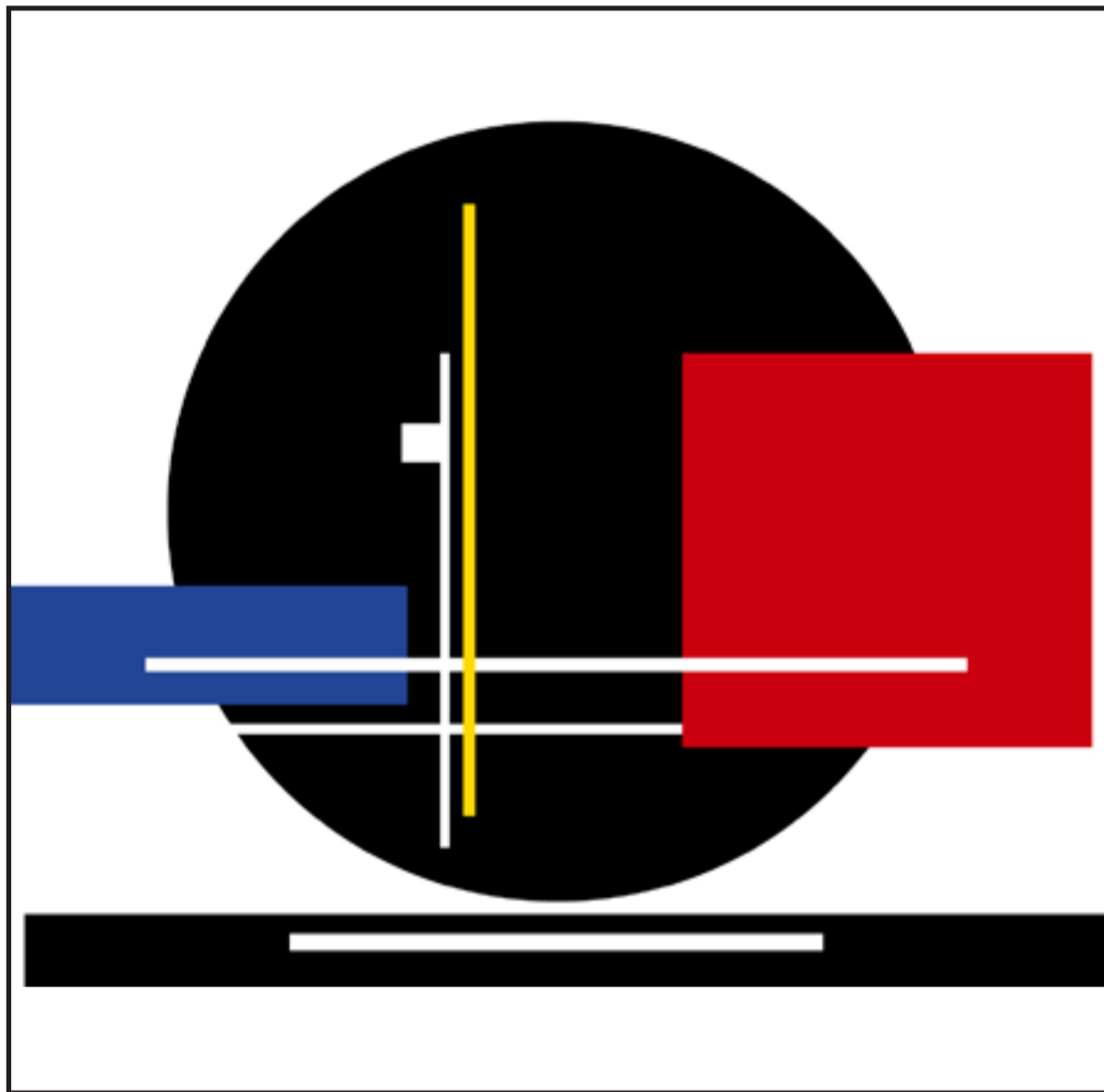
Maintaining class solidarity is a vital part of what policy "is 'right' from the standpoint of the ruling class" (see my article, 'Capitalism and socialism express conflicting reciprocity norms: a reinterpretation of Marx's theory of capitalist decline', on the *Juridical Coherence* website - <http://juridicalcoherence.blogspot.co.uk>).

Stephen Diamond
email

COMMUNIST PLATFORM

Plans for the hard left

Jack Conrad outlines the thinking of the CPGB's Provisional Central Committee



At Left Unity's November 30 founding conference the Communist Platform achieved its main objective. Our arguments, votes and contributions from the floor helped make this new political formation a safe space for left ideas. Left Unity's constitution is a labyrinthine nightmare. But thankfully some of the worst clauses and sub-clauses have been blunted or removed altogether. So, for the moment, Marxists, communists and revolutionary socialists have the possibility of openly organising and openly campaigning for their views.

The Communist Platform has constituted itself the hard left in Left Unity. The 'Aims and principles' of the Communist Platform are far-reaching, theoretically coherent and, above all, meet the needs of the age. Objective circumstances cry out for global communism, not Fabian socialism, not a Keynesian mixed economy, not action for the sake of action, not empty platitudes about equality, justice and fairness.

Compared with the other platforms, the Communist Platform showed itself to be united, effective, disciplined and honest. The Communist Platform is based on what its supporters believe in and believe is necessary. No disdain for the lessons of history, no opportunist trimming, no secret agendas, no attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable. If we are to realise human freedom the working class must first form itself into a party, sweep away the existing state and establish a semi-state that is already in the process of dying.

Having discussed Left Unity's formation and the performance of the Communist Platform, our Provisional Central Committee agreed that the time is ripe to up our intervention. The Communist Platform was launched around three months ago

and deliberately limited itself to the 10 signatures needed to be formally recognised in Left Unity. We now want those 10 comrades to constitute themselves an interim leadership and build a much wider membership in the run-up to Left Unity's spring policy conference.

Towards that end a general meeting in early 2014 ought to be considered. Our suggestion is that the 'Aims and principles' should be reformulated, a minimum programme for Left Unity mapped out and a leadership democratically elected. Naturally, in the Communist Platform there must be room for full debate, amendments, alternative approaches, etc.

What about the Socialist Platform? CPGB members will not withdraw at this stage. However, we are of the opinion that the Socialist Platform has proved a failure. Hence it is wrong to assume that it ought to be considered a central site of struggle.

While communists initially welcomed the Socialist Platform, there can be no denying that it is organisationally flabby, programmatically bereft and its main organisers have displayed an unforgivable contempt for the basic norms of democracy. Indeed the Socialist Platform does not take the Socialist Platform seriously. The formulation, "oppose all imperialist wars and adventures", was included, but that did not mean the exclusion of Alliance for Workers' Liberty loyalists - that despite the AWL leadership's *pro-imperialist* positions on Israel-Palestine, the Iraq war and occupation, the Libyan intervention, etc. Revealingly, Nick Wrack, Socialist Platform's main spokesperson, called its 'Aims and principles' a "petition". In other words, a lowest-common-denominator approach to politics.

Not surprisingly the Socialist Platform's 'Aims and principles'

can be read in the dismal spirit of Labour's old clause four. Hence before its September 14 conference the CPGB drew up and submitted a series of amendments. The muddle on the European Union was to be replaced and opposition to the existing constitution made explicit. Extreme democracy in the workers' movement and the sweeping away of the capitalist state apparatus were introduced, along with a commitment to a semi-state and the realisation of full human freedom.

The CPGB had been assured by the Socialist Platform's leadership that amendments were welcome. That turned out to be untrue. Indeed at the September 14 conference comrade Wrack and co insisted that, while amendments could be debated, votes would only be indicative.

If that was not bad enough, the arguments used to support this position were worse. Eg, though there were over 40 comrades present on the day, we were told that what really mattered were those who were not there. An approach that stinks of the rotten methods of the labour bureaucracy.

As it turned out, all our amendments bar one gained a majority in the indicative vote. However, a substantial number of comrades, including most of the Socialist Platform's leadership, voted against "human freedom", "full development of individuality", the proposal that "the organisations of the working class must be democratically, not bureaucratically organised" and that we should not only "defend", but "radically extend" all past gains. A defining moment.

We shall continue to seek a rapprochement between the Communist Platform and the Socialist Platform. However, our main energies will be directed towards the overwhelming majority in Left Unity who are at present members of no platform ●

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 December 15, 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 25, section 1: 'Increased demand for labour-power'.

Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Introduction to anthropology: the human revolution

Tuesday December 17, 6.15pm: 'A Christmas fairy tale: *The shoes that were danced to pieces*'. Speaker: Chris Knight. May Day Rooms, 88 Fleet Street, London EC4. £10 waged, £5 low waged, £3 unwaged.

Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: www.radicalanthropologygroup.org.

G4S crimes

Friday December 13, 6pm: Public meeting, Brunei Gallery, School of Oriental and African Studies, Thornhaugh Street, London WC1. Justice for Palestine and the Stop G4S campaign. Speakers: Angela Davis and Gina Dent.

Organised by War on Want: www.waronwant.org.

Can you afford Christmas?

Saturday December 14, 10.30am: Anti-cuts protest, Middlesbrough town centre. Meet at Middlesbrough bus station.

Organised by Teesside People's Assembly: www.TeessidePA.tumblr.com.

Save Portsmouth shipbuilding

Saturday December 14, 12 noon: March and rally. Assemble, Victory Gate, Queen Street, Portsmouth for march to rally at Guildhall Square, 12.30pm.

Organised by Unite: www.unitetheunion.org.

Solidarity with Chelsea

Tuesday December 17, 3pm: Rally, Saint Martin in the Fields, Trafalgar Square, London WC2. Free whistleblower Chelsea Manning. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk.

No to Immigration Bill

Wednesday December 18, 12 noon: Demonstration. Assemble bottom of The Moor (near New Market), for march to town hall and UK Border Agency, Vulcan House.

Organised by the South Yorkshire Migration and Asylum Action Group: www.symaag.org.uk.

Free Palestine

Wednesday December 18, 7.15pm: Meeting, William Morris Meeting Rooms, 267 The Broadway, Wimbledon, SW1.

Organised by Merton Palestine Solidarity Campaign: mertonpsc@mail.com.

Socialist Theory Study Group

Thursday December 19, 6pm: Marx and Engels on Understanding 1848 - Address of the central committee to the Communist League, 1850. Social centre, Next to Nowhere, Bold Street, Liverpool 1.

Organised by Socialist Theory Study Group: teachingandlearning4socialism@gmail.com.

No more deaths in police custody

Friday December 20, 5pm: Vigil and protest, High Wycombe police station, Queen Victoria Road, High Wycombe. In memory of Habib 'Paps' Ullah.

Organised by Justice 4 Paps: <http://justice4paps.wordpress.com>.

'To end all wars'

Friday January 17, 7pm: Discussion of World Wars I with author with Adam Hochschild. Friends House, 173-177 Euston Road, London NW1 (opposite Euston station).

Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk.

Remember Gaza

Saturday January 18, 12 noon: Protest vigil, five years after the massacre. Opposite Israeli embassy, Kensington High Street, London W8.

Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.palestinecampaign.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.

MANDELA



Memorial: a man for all classes

Creation of a cult

The ruling class is honouring a man who helped make South Africa safe for capitalist exploitation, writes Peter Manson

How should communists react to the almost universal adulation throughout the bourgeois media for Nelson Mandela, whose death, aged 95, was announced on December 5? After all, even the hard Conservative right is joining in. The day following his death, *The Daily Telegraph's* front cover carried a full-page portrait of the former liberation leader; its inside headlines called him "a beacon of freedom around the world", a "hero of our time" (quoting David Cameron) and referred to his "long walk to freedom".¹

The paper stated that he and US president Barack Obama are "linked in history as the first black leaders of nations with histories scarred by

racism". This comment, by the way, not to mention the reverence shown for this black icon, ought to cause those sections of the left which still believe that the bourgeoisie as a whole is incontrovertibly racist to think again about the dominant ideology.

I am quoting the *Telegraph* only because it is amongst the most rightwing of mainstream newspapers, but, needless to say, similar headlines featured throughout the rest of the press - not only in Britain, but in just about every country around the world. Yet as late as 1987, when Margaret Thatcher said that the African National Congress headed by Mandela was a "typical terrorist organisation", the comment was not regarded as

particularly outrageous at the time. Then the *Telegraph* agreed with her - and might even have gone along with her laughable assessment: "Anyone who thinks [the ANC] is going to run the government in South Africa is living in cloud cuckoo land". In those days, belligerent Young Conservatives were wearing T-shirts and badges demanding "Hang Nelson Mandela".

Thatcher was not the only one to regard apartheid South Africa as a "bulwark against communism". In fact the *Morning Star* is correct to say that the apartheid regime characterised the struggle against it as "an expression of the global conflict between capitalism and socialism".² That was the dominant view of imperialism too

- it was well into the 70s when that began to change and not until the 80s, when the campaign to "Free Nelson Mandela" really took off, that even the mainstream right began to view him in a rather different light.

SACP

So what was the truth? Was the ANC a component of the struggle for socialism and was Mandela on the side of the oppressed in the fight against capitalism? According to Charlie Kimber of the Socialist Workers Party, "Mandela was never a socialist".³ It depends what you mean by 'socialist', of course, but comrade Kimber says no more on the matter in his online article, failing even to

mention Mandela's membership of the South African Communist Party.

Perhaps his article was completed before the publication of the SACP's own statement, which declared: "At his arrest in August 1962, Nelson Mandela was not only a member of the then underground South African Communist Party, but was also a member of our party's central committee ... After his release from prison in 1990, comrade Madiba became a great and close friend of the communists till his last days" (December 6).⁴

In this way, the SACP finally confirms what had been one of the world's worst kept secrets. But the party does not tell us when he had

joined or when he finally left. Why the reticence? The *Morning Star* editorial quoted above states that the previous denial was connected to the regime's claim that the anti-apartheid struggle was "an expression of the global conflict between capitalism and socialism". In other words, the desire to deny the class nature of that conflict and portray it as one simply for 'democracy', not working class power, "partly explains Mandela's denial of his Communist Party membership".

Now that the SACP has begun to come clean, however, why not tell us the whole story? The consensus seems to be that Mandela joined the party some time in the 50s - it is generally agreed that a decade earlier he was among those opposing Communist Party participation in the ANC - in fact he is said to have voted for the expulsion of communists on one occasion.

But by the 50s "he was a fire-breathing revolutionary who would quote Marx and Lenin at the drop of a hat", according to Zakes Mda, the South African novelist, poet and playwright - although Mda adds that "he was also a Xhosa traditionalist with aristocratic tendencies".⁵ It was no doubt his SACP membership that helped ensure that Mandela became the first commander-in-chief of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the ANC's military wing - the truth is that the SACP was the best organised and in fact the dominant force within the ANC, including on its leadership.

Some say that it was in 1962, just before his arrest for inciting strikes and leaving the country without a passport, that he was instructed by the central committee to deny his membership. This was a year before the Rivonia trial, when Mandela was among those accused of sabotage and preparing for revolution, charges that saw him jailed for life in 1964. Nevertheless his speech from the dock at his 1962 trial appeared to link the primitive communism of pre-colonial African tribes with his vision of the future. He described the tribal democracy in the form of a council, "variously called *imbizo*, or *pitso*, or *kgotla*, which governs the affairs of the tribe". According to Mandela:

The council was so completely democratic that all members of the tribe could participate in its deliberations ... It was so weighty and influential a body that no step of any importance could ever be taken by the tribe without reference to it In such a society are contained the seeds of revolutionary democracy, in which none will be held in slavery or servitude, and in which poverty, want and insecurity shall be no more.

Mandela concluded by saying it is this vision which "even today inspires me and my colleagues in our political struggle".

In an article entitled 'Freedom in our lifetime' published in the ANC's *Liberation* newspaper in June 1956, Mandela was given the task of explaining the aims of the ANC's programme, the Freedom Charter, which had been adopted a year earlier. It is impossible to draw any other conclusion from this other than that he was writing as an 'official communist':

Whilst the charter proclaims democratic changes of a far-reaching nature, it is by no means a blueprint for a socialist state, but a programme for the unification of various classes and groupings amongst the people on a democratic basis.

Under socialism the workers hold state power. They and the peasants own the means of production, land, the factories and the mills. All production is for use and not for profit. The charter does

not contemplate such profound economic and political changes. Its declaration, 'The people shall govern!' visualises the transfer of power not to any single social class, but to all the people of the country, be they workers, peasants, professional men or petty bourgeoisie.⁶

In other words, he was describing what the SACP came to dub as the "national democratic revolution" (NDR). But how to reconcile that with the charter's demands for common ownership? Mandela continued:

It is true that, in demanding the nationalisation of the banks, the gold mines and the land, the charter strikes a fatal blow at the financial and gold-mining monopolies and farming interests that have for centuries plundered the country and condemned its people to servitude. But such a step is absolutely imperative and necessary because the realisation of the charter is inconceivable, in fact impossible, unless and until these monopolies are first smashed up and the national wealth of the country turned over to the people.

The breaking up and democratisation of these monopolies will open up fresh fields for the development of a prosperous, non-European bourgeois class. For the first time in the history of the country the non-European bourgeoisie will have the opportunity to own in their own name and right mills and factories, and trade and private enterprise will boom and flourish as never before. To destroy these monopolies means the termination of the exploitation of vast sections of the populace by mining kings and land barons and there will be a general rise in living standards of the people.

It is precisely because the charter offers immense opportunities for an overall movement in the material conditions of all classes and groups that it attracts such wide support.

All this is written in precisely the style of the SACP - and 'official communists' the world over, certainly in the 50s. Using 'Marxist' jargon, the text paints a picture of a fairer, more democratic capitalism, to be achieved through what in Britain was known as a "broad democratic alliance".

Today the SACP continues to justify the NDR in these terms: it is, after all, the "most direct route to socialism", as the party never tires of declaring - even though after almost 20 years of implementation there has been no advance in terms of working class power or even living standards: the bourgeoisie is today more secure than it was under the last years of apartheid.

Compromise

So how come the former oppressors "retained their privileged economic position", as the *Star* editorial quoted above puts it? The answer it comes up with is that "Such a compromise was to a large extent forced on Mandela and the ANC by the collapse of the Soviet Union and its allies, depriving a newly liberated state intent on radical change of its natural support base."

This is highly questionable, to put it mildly. The USSR never regarded South Africa as part of its 'sphere of influence', so it is highly unlikely that its "support" would have somehow aided redistribution in that country. In any case, as we can see from what Mandela wrote in 1956, neither the ANC nor the SACP was for the abolition of the capitalists' "privileged economic position". They were for the creation of "a prosperous, non-European bourgeois class".

According to John Haylett's obituary in the same edition of the *Star*, the "compromise" that

was "forced" on Mandela was one that saw him undertake exactly the *opposite* economic policy to the one laid down in the Freedom Charter. Comrade Haylett writes: "... following discussions with Chinese and Vietnamese representatives at the 1992 World Economic Forum in Geneva, he opposed calls for public ownership of foreign transnationals, backing privatisation of state assets."

Obviously the Chinese and Vietnamese were no substitutes for the good old USSR. But comrade Haylett does not dwell on this U-turn - in fact apart from this one sentence the article invites us to conclude that things are going pretty much to plan, thanks to the route plotted by Nelson Mandela - although Haylett does imply that Madiba ought not to be criticised too harshly, as "Mandela's term as president was largely spent on diplomatic duties" rather than the determination and implementation of policy.

Ironically, comrade Haylett began his article by urging readers to reject the "one-sided picture", whereby no political commentator will "speak ill" of "everyone's grandfather, a loveable old man with a twinkle in his eye and a kind word for everyone". A pity he did not heed his own advice.

The reality is that Mandela and the ANC had already accepted, back in the 1980s, that they would have to comply with the conditions laid down by the International Monetary Fund to ensure that the new, post-apartheid, capitalist South Africa would be accepted into the 'international community' - it had all been agreed between the USA and - yes - the USSR.

Of course, the ANC could hardly ditch the entire socioeconomic section of the Freedom Charter immediately after it was elected into government in 1994. Its 'reconstruction and development programme' (RDP) contained elements of the charter, and a state-driven house-building and public works programme was indeed introduced. But within two years the RDP had been replaced by the equally progressive-sounding, but totally Thatcherite 'growth, employment and redistribution' programme (Gear), introduced in 1996.

Perhaps surprisingly, approximately 50% of fixed capital assets had been in state hands in apartheid South Africa, so there was plenty to sell off. Water, telecommunications, transport, broadcasting and leisure, plus a range of manufacturing that had been partly state-owned - all were transferred into private hands. Of course, the word 'privatisation' was not used - what was going on was "restructuring" in the interest of efficiency and popular need. What is more, privatisation was an important component of the policy known as "black economic empowerment" (BEE) - a whole army of black capitalists was created through selling off such assets at bargain-basement prices, and in a way that left the ANC open to charges of blatant corruption. Recently an attempt has been made to deflect criticism that BEE was just a means of enriching a tiny minority by prefacing the name of the policy with "broad-based". So now we have BBBEE.

Under this policy the large, privately owned companies that were supposed to have been targeted under the charter agreed to undergo a 'makeover' and cut their links with the former Afrikaner establishment. Now many of their top managers and spokespersons are black.

What of the masses? Well, yes, hundreds of thousands of tiny, square-box homes have been built, but millions still live in shacks. Yes, there has been widespread electrification, and running water has been brought to most 'informal settlements', as the sprawling shack towns are known, but water and electricity prices are beyond the reach of many - an estimated two

million people are unable to pay. There are also new "user fees" for schools, healthcare and so on.

While some workers are better off, for many there has been no real improvement. And it goes without saying that those with any kind of job are considered lucky - unemployment stands at a massive 24.7%, according to the latest official figures (but at least the figure has now fallen below 25%). Those fortunate enough to have pensions have seen their value decrease in real terms, while for millions there are no state benefits whatsoever.

Recently the private firms charged with extracting payments for services such as water and electricity supply have stepped up their use of coercive measures. Thousands have been disconnected and properties repossessed at gunpoint. People in the Khayelitsha township near Cape Town - 400,000 of them living either in RDP homes or shacks - have recently seen a campaign to collect unpaid bills for basic amenities: there are stories of families having their water disconnected for having run up debts as low as 200 rand (£12).

Anger

Over recent months the South African media has been full of reports of ruthless squabbling between members of the Mandela family. There is much to gain from exploiting the new Nelson Mandela cult. For example, his grandson, Mandla, aware that Madiba had stipulated in his will that he be buried alongside his children, had ordered the exhumation of three of those children, who had predeceased their father. Mandla had the bodies reburied near his own home, where there just happens to be a new tourist complex.

And, of course, Mandela was not exactly poor. He owned lavish homes in Johannesburg and Qunu, and his trust fund is said to be worth an estimated 175 million rand (£10 million). But, as his grandson is demonstrating, the biggest fight is over the cash that his name could pull in over the coming period. But Mandla Mandela did not get it all his own way: after a court battle the three bodies were returned to their graves on their father's property.

All this is recounted by socialist journalist Terry Bell on his blog, in a piece published the day before the announcement of Mandela's death and entitled 'Mandela: already dead - or slowly dying?'. In this comrade Bell reminds us of the recurring stories of the icon being in a "permanent vegetative state", and kept alive only thanks to a life support machine.⁷

Mandela's condition had been constantly described as "critical, but stable", with only slight variations in the phrasing, in official bulletins and announcements since June, when he was taken into hospital. There have been no new photographs of him since that time, not even when he was discharged in order to receive care at home.

This whole sordid affair says a lot about the elevation to sainthood of Nelson Mandela. Which brings me back to the question with which I started: How should communists react to the almost universal adulation? Personally, my own reaction to the blanket coverage of his death, the various memorial services, tributes and all the rest has been different from when other establishment icons have departed. Like most readers of this paper, I am sure, when Margaret Thatcher or the queen mother died, for instance, I rapidly switched TV channels, turned off the sound or walked out of the room in irritated contempt.

But the coverage of Mandela aroused a different emotion: it was often that of pure anger. Despite all I have written above, yes, it was true that he "fought for liberation", as we are constantly informed. Yes, he endured 27 years of hard labour and deprivation

on Robben Island, before finally being released in February 1990, never doubting that his side was destined for victory. Yes, he was a hero of the anti-apartheid struggle. My anger results from his *incorporation* by the ruling class. Now he is *their* hero, with reminders of his 'official communist' past buried away in the small print.

My anger is also directed towards the so-called 'communists' of the SACP, with its seven government ministers, who bear a large part of the responsibility for the current state of affairs. It is the SACP, with its talk of the "national democratic revolution" and the eventual victory of socialism, which has ensured that militant protests and acts of rebellion against the ANC exploiters and oppressors have been desperate, fleeting and largely ineffective.

Unsurprisingly, the December 10 memorial service in Johannesburg saw a substantial section of the crowd showing their vocal displeasure against the ANC government and president Jacob Zuma in particular. That is a reflection of the recent more concerted opposition, including strike waves, the desertion of pro-ANC trade unions and mass fury at obscenities such as last year's Marikana massacre.

But the SACP reacted as you might expect. First off the mark was the Western Cape region, which condemned "the booning of the state president during the most august occasion in the calendar of our history, a send-off in celebrating the life of the most disciplined and tolerant leader of our time". This booning was described as "thuggery and a well coordinated attack by some handful traitors" (sic), which at the same time was "organised by those who never accepted the democratic process ... in advancing our national democratic revolution". The booning was "an act of hooliganism" led by Julius Malema's Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) or - take your pick - a previous breakaway from the ANC, the now virtually defunct Congress of the People.

Within hours, however, party headquarters put out a slightly more measured condemnation. Yes, the booning was "well-premeditated and orchestrated". However, "It is clear to us that some of those causing the disruption came from within the ranks of our own movement. Their behaviour was not only disgusting, but it was treacherous, counterrevolutionary and an insult to the dignity, sacrifices and the memory of comrade Nelson Mandela."

This is a significant admission. It is not just the likes of the EFF who want to see the back of Zuma, but sections of "our movement" - in particular members and some leaders of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu), who want to see the ANC adopt pro-worker policies. The federation is, of course, part of the ANC-SACP-Cosatu tripartite alliance, but Cosatu unions have been hit by defections, as workers disgusted by the attacks on them have either joined one of the recent breakaways or dropped out of union membership altogether.

It is clear that South African workers are increasingly disenchanted with the ANC and are beginning to search for the politics of *class* liberation ... something that neither Nelson Mandela nor the misleaders of the SACP would countenance ●

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Notes

1. *The Daily Telegraph* December 6.
2. *Morning Star* December 7-8.
3. <http://socialistworker.co.uk/art/37027/Nelson+Mandela+1918-2013>
4. www.sacp.org.za/main.php?ID=4154.
5. www.nytimes.com/2013/12/06/opinion/the-contradictions-of-mandela.html?hp&ref=opinion&_r=0.
6. The ANC has republished this piece on its website: www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=2603.
7. <http://terrybellwrites.com/2013/12/04/mandala-already-dead-or-slowly-dying>.

INTERVIEW

He was a bourgeois hero

South African Marxist Hillel Ticktin discusses the role of Nelson Mandela with Peter Manson

How would you assess Mandela in terms of the balance between positive and negative?

Well, it's hard to go along with his status as hero. I would say that, given how things have turned out, there isn't much of a positive legacy. In political terms Mandela was a liberal and in the context of capitalism a market liberal. The fact is that as from 1994 onwards the policy has been one of market fundamentalism - involving, for instance, the privatisation of nationalised assets, the relaxation of protection and allowing large firms to move their headquarters to London and have a large part of their operations outside the country.

There has effectively been deindustrialisation, continuing high levels of unemployment and a desperately low standard of living for the majority. It's not at all surprising that there have been waves of strikes. That is his legacy - one cannot get away from it. The basis of all this was actually agreed in the negotiations leading up to 1994 and what the African National Congress government under the presidency of Mandela himself was involved in implementing.

Of course, Mandela is revered for the abolition of forms of discrimination under the ANC, but it's not as though he was the only one, and, of course, many of the discriminatory laws had been repealed before 1994. There were a series of parties and mass movements involved in that fight. So it is difficult to go along with the adulation.

One can say that Mandela devoted his life to the anti-apartheid cause. One can admire him for that, and as far as it goes that is true. But the ANC was led *de facto* by the South African Communist Party, to which he belonged at a certain point. But it was really a series of other people who led both the ANC and its military wing, so it's hard to say that Mandela's role was the crucial question. One would have to say in any case that the system of racial discrimination had run its course; it was a system that big capital did not like, so it is not quite so simple as putting it all down to one man.

The very fact that there is so much adulation, so much reverence all over the world is an indication of what he stands for. Because, of course, that was not the case before the mid-80s or a bit later. So one can only say that he was supported precisely because he was for the kind of democracy that capital would be happy with, precisely because he did go along with a rightwing government trajectory.

In one respect it is even worse, because in his period as president he did not do much about Aids. If in that period there had been a campaign, of the sort that took place in Britain in an earlier period, there might not have been the epidemic that hit South Africa. You could say that perhaps Mandela did not understand Aids and what it represented, but the ANC as a whole is certainly to blame because of its role in government.

Just going back to the policy of privatisations, and so on, the SACP blames Mandela's successor as president, Thabo Mbeki, for what they call the '1996 class project'. Of course, during the time that Mbeki was actually president the SACP did not criticise him, but it did exonerate Mandela after the event.

That is true, but it doesn't make sense. The fact is Mandela was president of South Africa from 1994-99 and



Winnie and Nelson Mandela with former SACP leader Joe Slovo

head of the ANC on the ground, once he was released in February 1990. Ronnie Kasrils in a recent article blamed Mandela for the rightwing line adopted by the first ANC government.¹

Kasrils served in the South African government as defence minister at one point, and was part of the leadership of the SACP, and therefore of the ANC, at the time. Mandela was involved in the negotiations that he nominally led from 1990 to 1994. He accepted the conditions for the International Monetary Fund loan - privatisations and so on - so they didn't come out of the blue. The whole package had already been agreed before the ANC took over - there had been negotiations between the Soviet Union and the United States (for example, in Geneva in 1985). The *de facto* economic tsar of South Africa, Harry Oppenheimer, head of Anglo-American, had also been in discussions with the ANC. Clearly he was interested in stopping the nationalisation of the mines and that was agreed, as well as the preservation of the Afrikaner bureaucracy.

It is clear that the right liked Mandela because he did concede to them, but the argument up till now used on the left - that he prevented a possible civil war - is itself doubtful. He did play a part, but the main role was played by capital itself. Oppenheimer persuaded Mangosuthu Buthelezi, the Zulu chief, to back down and accept ANC rule. After all, it looked like capital and the government were using a possible Zulu revolt as a threat, and they had the influence to stop such a revolt.

The Communist Party line wasn't that militant, however, and it is not clear that the SACP, and earlier the USSR, would not have made the same concessions anyway. Mandela might in fact simply have repeated the line already agreed. The CP abandoned its own programme, encapsulated in the Freedom Charter, officially the programme of the ANC, which included the nationalisation of the mines. I gather that there had been a long argument about whether nationalisation should be included in the Freedom Charter in the 50s. The CP had moved to the right in that period, when it was reconstructed underground following its banning under the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950, and the nationalisation sections were easily dropped in the later period. In reality, it is in the nature of Stalinism that it would argue for a series of stages to get to socialism and then concede almost completely to the right in what it might call the first few stages.

In a certain sense, Mandela isn't to blame at all, because he was really a front man, who understood little of what was going on, or perhaps didn't care. The issue was largely decided by the end of 80s. The Soviet Union did not regard South Africa as part of its

sphere of influence and so did not want the SACP to take control. After the USSR ceased to exist, the Communist Party lost its *raison d'être* and moved deeper into the view that socialism was a multi-stage process to be completed many years hence.

The fact that the SACP today blames Thabo Mbeki has no credibility. There is no evidence that they fought for nationalisations, whether of the mines or of housing or of anything else, still less for global socialism. It is clear that Mandela either did not understand what he was doing or else allied himself with the right, as implied by Kasrils.

While he's revered now by the bourgeoisie, that wasn't the case back in the 1970s and 1980s, was it? So surely that tells us that there was a positive side to the struggle?

Well, yes. The actual struggle against racial discrimination was obviously positive, but that was conducted by a number of organisations and the majority of the population as a whole, among whom were people and groups who stood for socialism. The real history of that period has yet to be written. It has to be remembered that the stupid tactic of throwing bombs at pylons, which ultimately led Mandela to be arrested, was a desperate attempt by the Communist Party to outflank the nationalist pan-Africanists.

What was Mandela's relationship with the Communist Party back from the beginning of the struggle?

I don't know exactly when he was accepted into the Communist Party. In the earlier period when he was young he was involved in the ANC youth movement and I don't think he had anything to do with them at that time, in the 40s. That was the period when the CP took a more leftwing line and supported the general strike of the African mineworkers, leading to the trial of Jack Simons and other leading communists. Contrary to the general legend put about by the bourgeois newspapers, Mandela joined the CP in his middle age, not his youth. The CP opened its doors to African nationalists in the 60s and I presume that he entered in that period, but I do not know.

That's the case for so many of the leading ANC figures, who just haven't admitted it.

Yes. Exactly what that means is not clear. Mandela's real role was within them or around them. Well, he clearly isn't a Marxist.

I've heard him described as "that rare species, a bourgeois revolutionary". What do you think about that?

Well, I suppose you could call him that, although under the conditions of today I don't know how many ordinary black workers in the mines would wish to call him a revolutionary.

I would have thought that, actually, a lot of them might say something along the lines of 'If only Mandela was still president'.

That's possible, but it wouldn't make much sense. They are saying that not much has changed since 1994 - the implication is that he didn't do anything.

But, yes, you could be right: there could be a half-consciousness about it. It is very hard to take a view that is critical, given the propagandist histories and adulatory media. And, of course, if one simply tries to look at him within the context of a man within a particular society then there is no question that one could admire him for not giving in, as it were, and for spending 27 years in prison and not cracking; and not conceding to those who tried to break him and get him to speak for them in one way or another. That would be the context if you want to call him a bourgeois revolutionary.

Nonetheless, if one wants to look at the question from the point of view of a revolution, starting from the Marxist argument of what constitutes a revolution, which is a change in class, there was no such change in class. The bourgeoisie did not support apartheid, or racial discrimination. They wanted cheap labour and they got relatively expensive labour. That was a result of the very high salaries for white workers and the inefficiency consequent on the protection of white labour and the superexploitation of black labour, and the settlement suited them. We can see that clearly today, now that the working class has begun to break with the ANC. Mandela did not stand for a change in class - that is clear. If anything he was a bourgeois hero.

I suppose the phrase might be used in the narrower sense of a revolution against the current order - against the apartheid regime specifically.

In that sense a non-socialist can admire him, but in a more general context he didn't stand for the working class or the overthrow of the capitalist system and towards the end he was controlled by the big companies.

How would you describe the attitude of the international bourgeoisie towards apartheid in the early period? After all, for a while it seemed to be keeping capital in control.

Yes, it was ambiguous. A rational explanation is that it made the economy less effective from their point of view, less efficient, as I have said. Although it was the mineowners who introduced the pass laws in South Africa, after all, and lower wages for blacks in the 1890s, nonetheless they did try to replace white workers with black workers in the aftermath of World War I and the Russian Revolution in the early 1920s. However, they conceded to racial discrimination for the sake of stability, thereafter - although from the 1920s onwards it would have made a difference to their profits.

Internationally, however, it wasn't hard to see that it stabilised the system in South Africa, stabilised capitalism in South Africa, so they generally supported it until the mid-1980s, when David Rockefeller announced that banks would no longer lend to South Africa. That was the point when it was clear that apartheid was finished.

So there was a growing attitude amongst the international bourgeoisie that apartheid had to go. No doubt

they thought, here is a man who can be entrusted to carry out the transformation.

That's very true. The deal had already been struck, both during the negotiations between the Soviet Union and the United States in Geneva, and, of course, in the period 1990-1994. So basically they knew what they were getting and Mandela was very much involved after 1990. From their point of view it was great, because he's this wonderful icon, isn't he?

But you also have to say that in the eyes of the South African masses he is regarded as an icon too. The defeat of the old system has to be celebrated, even though it brought with it that transformation to a more stable system for capitalist exploitation. But the masses up until now seem to have only acknowledged the first part of that equation - although perhaps that has started to change over the last year or so.

Well, it has definitely started to change in the sense that there have been unofficial grievances that have not been supported by the CP and all over South Africa there has been a series of strikes and occupations, from mining to farming. But it's hard to believe that all those people have only now suddenly become aware of their disappointment. For many it is clear that their standard of living has not risen since Mandela came in. A lot of them must be angry and bitter.

One of the major promises was that there was to be a massive house-building programme for all, yet, of course, we still have millions living in shacks. But today's written history of South Africa, and its vocal recital, particularly the last 50 years, makes an understanding of what happened very difficult. It is hard to grasp that the working class the world over suffered an immense defeat thanks to Stalinism, and that the local Stalinist party played its part in diverting the population from trying to overthrow the whole system of exploitation.

One might say that a fictional account of the life and works of Mandela might make a people who were oppressed and exploited on the grounds of colour feel better, but that should not be the attitude of a Marxist. **What really sickens me is the role of the SACP, which seems to have a considerable influence over the working class.**

Well, yes. It isn't as if they ever changed their minds. Once they had decided on a programme, when the right wing took it over in the mid-1950s, and they actually set up the new underground party, the path to a nationalist programme was clear. They were consistent and undeviating, and loyal to Moscow to the end - they even supported the invasion of Czechoslovakia before the event. If Moscow didn't want them to take power then they wouldn't. Loyalty has its place, but the problem was that Stalinism is not Marxism.

However, we can hope that the South African working class will continue the present process of breaking with what amounts to an institutionalised Stalinism. We now hear that the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa has declared its opposition to Stalinism ●

Notes

1. R Kasrils, 'How the ANC's Faustian pact sold out South Africa's poorest' *The Guardian* June 24. See also www.enca.com/south-africa/kasrils-takes-mandelas-leadership.

THE LEFT

Aiming for the mixed economy

Even in science fiction the left's horizons have shrunk, says **Eddie Ford**

As this paper has consistently argued, the present-day left is completely lacking in self-belief - suffering from a collective identity crisis. The 'vision thing' has gone. Who are we and what do we stand for? From reading the left's often boring publications or attending its meetings, you get almost no sense that Marxism is powerful because it is true or that the working class is the agency for revolutionary change - more like a permanent slave class, grateful for every small crumb it gets from the master's table. Not that the working class gets many of those these days.

In fact, the situation is worse than that. Large sections of the left deride the very idea of putting forward an unambiguously revolutionary perspective or programme, convinced that no-one will listen if we start talking about "dead Russians" or socialism, let alone something as mad as communism - doesn't everyone associate that with *Stalinism* and *tyranny*, right?

This morbid fear of revolutionary politics is a dreary feature of all the 'unity' projects: Socialist Labour Party, Socialist Alliance, Respect, Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, etc. Now, of course, we have Left Unity, which regrettably has adopted the hopelessly eclectic Left Party Platform as the official aims of the new party. Instead of boldly describing the society of the future that we want to usher in, our *maximum* programme, LU is committed to a woolly wish-list or "alternative set of values" that many a clause four socialist or bog-standard left Keynesian could sign up to - "equality and justice", "feminist", "environmentalist", "against all forms of discrimination", etc. Against all things that are bad and for all things that are good.

Comrade Tom Walker perhaps summed up the lowest-common-denominator approach at LU's founding conference with his disingenuous comments that he does not want to be in a party which requires a "socialist entrance exam" (who apart from the Socialist Party of Great Britain has ever argued that?), but rather one where he can rub shoulders with "anarchists and autonomists."¹ A very "broad" party.

Why the timidity? The lack of clarity? The desire to blur programmatic differences? It is clear that the left no longer believes it can win. That what it needs to aim for is not the rule of the working class and human liberation, but something much, much more modest. Given the domination of one particular story in current news reporting, it is worthwhile contrasting this lack of self-belief with Nelson Mandela and the leadership of the African National Congress. They *always* knew that their struggle against apartheid would be successful. That is what imbued courage, spurred them in action and enabled them to endure years of exile or harsh prison sentences.

Not surprisingly, the left's low horizons are reflected in the field of literature, not least in science fiction. For example, we have Richard Morgan's *Market forces* (London 2004), dedicated to all those globally whose "lives has been wrecked or snuffed out by the great neoliberal dream and slash-and-burn globalisation".² Career advancement in 2049 is not based on meritocracy, political wheeling and dealing or any soft-soap crap like that - rather executives can issue Mad Max-style challenges to each other, which are usually fought to the death on empty



Kim Stanley Robinson: social democracy on a terraformed Mars

highways. It is an unrelentingly bleak story of mega-capitalism, where monstrous corporations are unfettered by any sort of democratic control or accountability, constantly battling to rule entire countries and use humans being as disposable pawns. Resistance is futile.

However, one particularly interesting - and instructive - example is the novel, *2312*, by the much lauded Kim Stanley Robinson.³ Robinson specialises in highly speculative stories or 'thought experiments' that explore often utopian alternatives to modern capitalism - one of his primary themes being ecological sustainability. His best known work is undoubtedly the Mars trilogy written between 1993 and 1996 (*Red Mars*, *Green Mars* and *Blue Mars*). In this series capitalism is presented as an *outgrowth* of feudalism, which needs to be replaced by a more democratic economic system. Then there is *Pacific edge*, which looks at, and attacks, the legal framework behind corporate domination and explores more socially egalitarian alternatives. Therefore it is not entirely for nothing that Robinson's fiction has been described as "probably the most successful attempt to reach a mass audience with an anti-capitalist utopian vision since Ursula K Le Guin's 1974 novel, *The Dispossessed*"⁴ - and in that sense you can place him with other socialist science fiction writers like Ken MacLeod and the late Iain Banks.

However, with *2312* things are different - this is clearly a dystopian and *pessimistic* work, for all the shiny, whizz-bang technology and epic scope. More to the point, the political agenda underpinning the book is totally muddled and ultimately backward-looking.

Anyhow, 300 years from now

there has been a revolution - that is the good news. But the bad news is that it did not happen on Earth, but rather on a fully terraformed Mars, and this revolution has spread to Mercury, Venus, the moons of Saturn and beyond - humans now have a presence on all the habitable surfaces within the solar system, and almost all of the solar system's asteroids have been hollowed out to form 'terrariums' - complete with an artificial environment designed to mimic various biomes⁵ found on Earth. In this solar-wide system, known as the Mondragon, capitalism has been relegated to the margins and replaced by a planned economy based on that old SF McGuffin - yes, super-advanced quantum computers possessing staggering levels of artificial intelligence ('quibes') that have been miniaturised enough to be painlessly implanted into people's heads or retinas. Thanks to this miraculous technology, humanity in the Mondragon is able to flourish. One particular development is that gender and sexuality is highly fluid. Many people, handily, have both penises and vaginas.

Earth, on the other hand, itself suffers under the cruel heel of capitalist oppression and ecological devastation. As Robinson explains, "And there were still powerful nation-states that were also corporate conglomerates, the two overlapping in Keynesian disarray, with the residual but powerful capitalist system ruling much of the planet and containing within it its own residual feudalism, there to fight forever against the serfs, meaning also against the horizontalised economy emerging within the Mondragon. No, Earth was a mess, a sad place" (p90). As for workers, they were "not only the cheapest robots around", but for

many tasks "the only robots that could do the job" - just "give them three thousand calories a day", a "little time off" occasionally and "you could work them at almost anything"; indeed, give them "some ameliorative drugs and you had a working class, reified and cog-like" (p307).

The main thrust of the story involves a cadre of individuals ('spacers') spread across the solar system intent on sparking resistance to the hated ruling class on Earth, the main dilemma being how to jump-start the revolution and save the Earth's biosphere without using the "immensely powerful terraforming techniques" - no "slamming comets" into Earth, for instance (p90). We discover that the origins of humanity's great leap into off-planet space settlements is precisely a consequence of the very failure to transform the social order in time to stave off ecological apocalypse. Hence we read that with the "success of the Martian revolution" and the "emergence of its single planet-wide social-democratic system", the gates were opened for the rest of the solar system to follow - and, though many space settlements remained colonies of Terran nations and combines, the "ultimate result was a patchwork of systems somewhat resembling anarchy" (my emphasis, p127).

Entertaining though it is, the problem with Robinson's schema is fairly obvious. The downtrodden workers on Earth are a crushed slave class not too dissimilar to Morgan's 2049 workers. Their 'revolution' depends entirely on *outside intervention* from the more advanced 'spacers' - saviours on horseback, or should we say spacecraft? Self-activity and revolution is ruled out, though I suppose you could argue that socialism on one planet is impossible anyway. The Mondragon 'empire', as we have seen, is a benevolent form of social democracy - quibes and all. It is surely meant to represent some form of progressive advance or model.

Yet it is fundamentally fallacious to present social democracy in such a timeless, ahistorical fashion - even with science fictional escape clauses. The *real* social democratic settlement came into being under the concrete circumstances arising after World War II. As the war came to a close, the bourgeoisie was faced with a powerful

working class movement, plus the threat (real or imaginary) from the Soviet bureaucracy. In order to prevent revolution and keep itself in power, the ruling class had to make substantial concessions - anything else would have been suicidal. They did not do it out of generosity or the invention of some super-gizmo, that is for sure. One consequence of this deal was that the power of the organised working class grew - though in contradictory ways - until the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the bourgeoisie finally pulled the plug and went for financialisation as a form of class revenge. All features of capitalist decline.

This being the case, any project which aims to go back to 1945 and *recreate* social democracy would require a world war and replacing US imperialism with ... what, China? Thus the very idea of a new, benign social democracy is nonsense.

In the hands of an imaginative SF writer it is *harmless* nonsense - and, hey, who would not want to be a walking quantum computer with both a penis and a vagina on an off-world space settlement? But in the hands of today's left it is *dangerous* nonsense, given that many of them *do* want to recreate another Labour Party - albeit a slightly more leftwing and 'right on' version of it. But sowing illusions in the busted flush of Labourism/social democracy is the road to disaster. The only rational and viable alternative to capitalism is communism - a world system predicated on production for human need and not private profit or gain. If we want to serve the working class, and not mislead them, we need to say this loudly and clearly - and *honestly* ●

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Notes

1. Would they be the same "anarchists and autonomists" who are burning copies of *Socialist Worker* on Sussex University campus? See <http://sussexasn.tumblr.com/post/69499029324/swp-off-campus>.
2. www.amazon.com/Market-Forces-Richard-K-Morgan/dp/0345457749.
3. London 2012.
4. www.raintaxi.com/online/2001summer/robinson.shtml.
5. Biomes are climatically and geographically defined as contiguous areas with similar climatic conditions on the Earth, such as communities of plants, animals, and soil organisms - and are often referred to as 'ecosystems'.

Hands Off the People of Iran

Saturday January 25, central London

The uneasy agreement between the 5+1 powers and Iran over the country's nuclear programme has provoked controversy and an almost hysterical response from Israel. However, there are some clear facts:

- Sanctions have destroyed Iran's economy, creating intense hardship for the majority of Iranians. Sanctions have done little or nothing to dent their declared targets. The private wealth of senior clerics remains intact.
- The aim of the west was to impoverish ordinary people in order to facilitate regime change from above.

Therefore, the nuclear deal has been a partial but important success for imperialism. It poses new tasks for the anti-war and solidarity movement. The situation in the

Middle East is still full of dangers. That is why Hands Off the People of Iran is organising a conference to discuss and debate the issues.

Draft agenda

- Mike Macnair: *Imperialism, nuclear negotiations and US-Iran relations*
- Moshé Machover: *Israel and the need for war*
- Anahita Hoesseini: *Repression - Iran's political prisoners*
- Yasmine Mather: *Sanctions, job losses and workers' struggles*
- Torab Saleth: *Workers' struggles before and after 1979*
- Rahe Kargar speaker: *Iran's national minorities*

<http://hopoi.org>

PALESTINE

Belling the cat

Does the demise of apartheid provide a model for the ending of Zionism? Moshé Machover exposes this notion for the fallacy it is

Long ago, the mice had a general council to consider what measures they could take to outwit their common enemy, the Cat.

Some said this, and some said that; but at last a young mouse got up and said he had a proposal to make, which he thought would meet the case: "You will all agree," said he, "that our chief danger consists in the sly and treacherous manner in which the enemy approaches us. Now, if we could receive some signal of her approach, we could easily escape from her. I venture, therefore, to propose that a small bell be procured, and attached by a ribbon round the neck of the Cat. By this means we should always know when she was about, and could easily retire while she was in the neighbourhood."

This proposal met with general applause, until an old mouse got up and said: "That is all very well, but who is to bell the Cat?" The mice looked at one another and nobody spoke. Then the old mouse said: "It is easy to propose impossible remedies."

This fable, attributed to Aesop,¹ has a political moral: a political project is purely utopian unless it can indicate a likely *agent* - a socio-political force able to realise it and whose long-term interests it would serve.

In the present article I propose to apply this precept to the project of the 'one-state solution' for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: the vision of a single democratic (or secular-democratic) state in the whole of so-called 'historical Palestine' - the territory of Palestine as it existed under the British mandate from 1923 to 1948.

I do not intend to criticise here any particular version of that vision, or any particular aspect of it. I grant at the outset - not merely for the sake of argument, but because I believe it to be true - that *some* version of the one democratic state would be a very great improvement, morally speaking, on the current situation. Severe national oppression of the Palestinian Arab people, theft and colonisation of their land, and denial of their individual human rights would be replaced by equal legal status and democratic rights for all.

Rather, I propose to subject this vision to the test of *agency*: what socio-political force can be counted on to implement such a vision, and in what circumstances would this be likely to come about? I address this issue from a socialist viewpoint; so my aim is to contribute to elaborating a socialist, working class-based position on the one-state project and, more generally, on resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The one-state project

An early version of the one-state project was put forward by Fatah, the leading party in the Palestine Liberation Organisation, in late 1969. A detailed English-language exposition is in a programmatic article published in early 1970.²

From 1974 the PLO began to shift its position, and by the 1980s accepted a 'two-state solution': an

independent Palestinian state in the West Bank (including the eastern part of Jerusalem) and the Gaza Strip, which would exist alongside Israel. Thus the PLO was resigned to giving up - at least for the foreseeable future - the Palestinian claim over 78% of the territory of pre-1948 Palestine, and making do with the remaining rump of 22%. Support for this project peaked with the Oslo accords of 1993, although these accords made no mention of an independent Palestinian state.

However, during the two decades following the Oslo accords it has become clear that Israel has no intention of allowing the creation of an independent Palestinian state, and is in fact acting consistently and ruthlessly to forestall it. Rapid Israeli colonisation of Palestinian lands is but the most obvious evidence for Israel's real policy.³

This has led to a revival of the one-state idea among radical/progressive Palestinian nationalists, as well as among solidarity activists and supporters in various countries, including Israel.

As examples of recent advocacy of the one-state project I will cite from the following three texts. First, an article by the progressive nationalist Palestinian activist, Omar Barghouti.⁴ Second, a pamphlet authored by Ann Alexander and John Rose and issued by the British radical left organisation, the Socialist Workers Party.⁵ Third, a polemical article by Tikva Honig-Parnass, a veteran Israeli socialist and recent convert to the one-state project.⁶

In progressive and leftwing discourse, the one-state and two-state projects are often counterposed, as though they are the only options for a benign resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I have argued elsewhere that this is a fallacy, and that both projects are based on an erroneous conception, which is too narrow geographically and too confined in its historical and social vision.⁷ However, leaving this aside for the moment, I would like to point out two obvious features of the one-state project, one of which - but not the other - it shares with the two-state project.

First, like the two-state project, the one-state project is *bourgeois* in the sense that it does not go beyond capitalism. Clearly, the one democratic or secular-democratic state it envisions will be capitalist. Indeed, it says or implies nothing to the contrary: it does not call for a *socialist* Palestine; nor can it do so, as it is advocated by an alliance (albeit mostly informal) led by Palestinian nationalists, who may be radical or progressive, but are not socialists. Besides, a socialist Palestine outwith the context of socialism in the entire region of the Arab east (at the very least) is obviously nonsensical.

Some socialists may believe that a bourgeois-democratic Palestine may be a stepping-stone to socialism or that the mere struggle for it may somehow be a transitional phase to socialism. But this is quite another matter: the aim that is actually being put forward - whether as an end in itself or as a staging post to a more distant goal - is a democratic capitalist Palestine. *So the social forces that may be mobilised for the one-state project must be persuaded that it is in their interest, that they have something to gain from it.*



Yasser Arafat: abandoned one-state solution

Second, quite unlike the two-state project, the one-state project is *revolutionary*. The former is perfectly consistent with the continued existence of Israel as a Zionist state. Indeed, the version of that project accepted by the PLO would replace direct Israeli military occupation by political and economic domination of a Zionist Israel over a defenceless and subservient Palestinian statelet. No revolution would be needed. But the one-state project self-evidently requires the deZionisation of Israel: overthrow of its Zionist regime, and complete termination of the Zionist project. Indeed, the Israeli state itself would have to be superseded by a very different polity. *So the one-state project can only be implemented by social forces that must not only be persuaded that this is in their interest, but must also be able to overthrow Zionism and the Israeli state structure.*

External and internal forces

There are two principal ways in which a regime may be overthrown: either *externally*, by conquest and invasion; or *internally*, by coup d'état or revolution. There are numerous historical and recent examples of each of these modes.

Of course, neither external nor internal agents act in isolation. An external conqueror wishing to replace the former regime of the invaded country will seek - and usually find - local, internal collaborators to administer and police the vanquished under licence. Conversely, internal upheavals are affected and conditioned by external circumstances; and domestic conspirators or revolutionaries may be aided by outsiders.

What about Israel's Zionist regime? Can we expect some external force or combination of forces to overthrow this regime by arms and dissolve the state of Israel into a new capitalist, democratic state in the whole of pre-1948 Palestine? The authors of the January 1970 Fatah programmatic article seemed to believe in this

scenario. They were writing at the high tide of the Palestinian guerrilla struggle, launched from bases located not just outside Israel, but also outside the 1967 occupied Palestinian territories (OPTs), mostly in Jordan. Its forces were recruited predominantly from Palestinian refugee camps in Arab countries. Eventually, it was hoped, some Israelis would join the armed struggle; but evidently it was mainly to be a matter of destroying the Israeli state from the outside:

A popular war of liberation aimed at the destruction of the racist-imperialist state will create new conditions that make a new Palestine possible. In its process, the alternatives presented to the Jews of Palestine are drastically changed. Instead of the security of Israel vs being thrown in the sea, the revolution offers a new set of alternatives: the insecurity of an exclusive-racist Israel vs an open, safe and tolerant Palestine for all of its patriots. The Palestinian revolution thus aims - in the long run - to recruit Jewish Palestinians as well as non-Jews in its liberation forces as an important step towards its final goal.⁸

In the romantic atmosphere of the time, electrified by the Vietnamese liberation struggle, this may not have sounded totally offbeat. But in fact it was utter fantasy. The Palestinian armed struggle never came close to endangering the Zionist regime or the existence of Israel, and had no real prospect of doing so: the balance of forces was loaded too heavily against it. And it ended in bloody tragedy. In the Black September of 1970, the Jordanian army killed thousands of Palestinians, and eventually the guerrillas were ousted from Jordan and decamped to the south of Lebanon. In 1982 Israel invaded Lebanon and its forces reached Beirut. Under the watchful eyes of Israel's army, its Lebanese allies perpetrated a massacre in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps. The besieged Palestinian leadership

was allowed to leave Beirut for far-away Tunisia. The Palestinian guerrilla struggle had come to an end, apart from sporadic, isolated and ineffectual episodes of armed resistance.

There is also no real prospect of the regular armies of any state or coalition of states being able - or even trying - to vanquish Israel, overthrow the Zionist regime and install the one democratic state in the whole of Palestine. And in the highly unlikely event that such an attempt will be made, it will most probably not end up in a benign, liberal democracy between the river Jordan and the Mediterranean, but in calamity.

The South-African paradigm

Neither popular guerrilla war nor defeat by regular state armies are credible scenarios for the overthrow of the Zionist regime and the dissolution of the Israeli settler state. Indeed, the recent advocates of the one-state project appeal to another paradigm: the ending of South African apartheid, in which armed struggle did not play a major part, but relied mainly on mass civil resistance. Thus, Omar Barghouti writes:

Ethical decolonisation anchored in international law and universal human rights is a profound process of transformation that requires, above everything else, a sophisticated, principled and popular Palestinian resistance movement with a clear vision for justice and a democratic, inclusive society, with equal rights for all, Palestinian refugees included. This resistance must include the growing ranks of anti-colonial Jewish Israelis, just as the South African struggle against apartheid included anti-racist and principled whites. It is also premised on two other pillars: a democratised and free Arab region, which now looks considerably less imaginary; and an international solidarity movement supporting Palestinian rights and struggling to end all forms of Zionist apartheid and

settler-colonial rule.

The SWP comrades, like Barghouti, point at a regional transformation as providing the enabling external conditions for Palestinian liberation. Writing in 2008, they presciently predict something like what a few years later came to be called the 'Arab spring', but warn that it could be hijacked by "Islamist movements". Remarkably, they predict: "It is highly likely that the Muslim Brotherhood could take power in Egypt following the collapse of the Mubarak regime."

However, being Marxist socialists, they do not merely look forward to Barghouti's "democratised and free Arab region", but point out that "The working class is the only force in society that can escape the limits of national liberation, because it also challenges the rule of imperialism's internal allies - the powerful local elites in countries like Egypt and Saudi Arabia".⁹ Nevertheless, as a paradigm for resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict they too cite South Africa, where the "limits of national liberation" were not escaped, and which remained a capitalist country whose working class is severely exploited and oppressed. Under a heading calling for "One Palestine, a free and single democratic state", the very last paragraph in their pamphlet is:

How revealing it is that after waves of mass-based struggle in apartheid South Africa, 'one person, one vote' finally forced the apartheid regime to crumble. It is a simple truth [sic!] that one person one vote for all Palestinians and Israelis would similarly end the Zionist regime in Israel, opening the way for a genuinely democratic future for all the peoples of the land.

The comrades' somewhat awkward ellipsis makes this read as a bizarre circular claim that the *implementation* of 'one person, one vote' brought down apartheid and would bring down Zionism. But what they probably mean is that it is the *struggle under this slogan* that did it in South Africa and would do it in Palestine.

As for comrade Honig-Parnass, a major part of her article is devoted to direct polemic against the analysis of the Israeli socialist group, Matzpen, advocated by me on many occasions. This highlights the decisive differences between the South African and Zionist models of colonisation and their respective political economies, and leads to the conclusion that the ending of South African apartheid is not a valid paradigm for overthrowing the Zionist regime¹⁰ - a point to which I shall return below. Here is what she says:

The contention that the [Israeli-Palestinian] "conflict" cannot have a bourgeois nationalist resolution is based on an argument about the differences in the colonial models of Israel and South Africa. Machover emphasises that this difference is central to his analysis of the conflict and his conclusion regarding its resolution. I aim to show that this assumed connection between the colonial model and the resolution is faulty.

The comrade is aware that the bourgeois nationalist resolution of the "conflict" (her inverted commas!) will not complete the democratic tasks:

Indeed, democratic tasks can never be completed under capitalism. Hence the uprisings of the exploited classes and oppressed nationalities will continue to break out time and again. Their failed experiences make the masses realise that their issues cannot be solved in the framework of the current regimes and that capitalism

is the source of their oppression. Then, under the leadership of the organised working class, we begin the struggle for socialism. This process is the essence of the permanent revolution theory which has stood the test of time.

I am at a loss to find any evidence that this theory, as she summarises it, has "stood the test of time" on planet Earth. Perhaps this occurred in a parallel, purely ideological universe. Be that as it may, she clearly regards realisation of the one-state project - a bourgeois nationalist resolution of the Israel-Palestinian conflict - to be necessary before "we begin the struggle for socialism".

According to this logic, the Zionist regime can only be overthrown by social forces that can be mobilised for achieving a single, bourgeois democratic state in the whole of pre-1948 Palestine. So let us see where such social agents can be found and who they may be.

In Israel

First, let us look inside Israel. As we have seen, Barghouti mentions in this connection the "growing ranks of anti-colonial Jewish Israelis" - he rightly compares them to the "anti-racist and principled whites" who participated in the South-African struggle against apartheid. But these idealistically motivated Hebrew ("Jewish Israeli") anti-Zionists, while being a significant moral force, and while some of them - though by no means all! - do support the one-state project, are a tiny minority in Israel, and do not constitute a *mass social* force that can play a major role in overthrowing the Zionist regime from the inside with the aim of dissolving Israel into the proposed single capitalist, democratic state.

A far more significant *social* force can be found in the underprivileged Palestinian-Arab minority, constituting about 20% of Israel's citizens: the Palestinian-Arab section of Israel's working class and social strata allied to it. This section of Israel's working class has an objective interest in the one-state project. A single bourgeois democratic Palestine may not *radically* change its socio-economic position as an exploited class, but can give its members something they have never enjoyed in Israel: full legal political rights with equal citizenship. Right now the Palestinian-Arab masses in Israel are engaged in a struggle to transform the Jewish state into "a state of all its citizens" rather than dissolving it altogether. But potentially they may be mobilised for the one-state project.

However, being a minority in Israel, this social force cannot overthrow the Zionist regime from the inside without the support - let alone against the opposition - of the Hebrew majority.

But in contrast with the Palestinian Arab masses, the Hebrew masses - predominantly the majority Hebrew section of the working class, including white-collar workers who were at the forefront of the massive protests in 2011 against neoliberalism - have nothing to gain from the one-state project. For this class it would mean exchanging its present position as an exploited and dominated class of a privileged, oppressing nation for the position of an exploited and dominated class *without* national privileges.

In fact, what is being offered to it by the current versions of the one-state project is a *less* than equal national status. The versions cited above all envisage equality of *individual* rights for all, but not equality of national rights. The old Fatah version, as well as Barghouti's and Honig-Parnass's, do not even accept the existence of a Hebrew nation - which is currently a privileged settler nation, but will lose its national privilege with the overthrow of Zionism - as distinct from the worldwide Jewish 'nation' of Zionist myth. Comrade Honig-Parnass

even goes so far as to claim that the Hebrew nation is my own invention!¹¹

As far as the Hebrew majority of the Israeli working class is concerned, as part of the privileged national majority it is already living in a capitalist country with a bourgeois democratic regime; and the prospect of a capitalist democracy implied by the one-state project does not provide it with an incentive to overthrow the Zionist regime. On the contrary, it is much more likely to be mobilised by the regime to actively oppose this project and fight against it.

But - like all working classes in capitalist countries, including imperialist ones - the Israeli working class as a whole has an objective interest in socialism. The Hebrew majority of the Israeli working class will therefore have not only the ability, but also an incentive to overthrow the capitalist Zionist regime, if that would mean becoming part of a dominant working class in a socialist context. The context would have to be regional, encompassing at the very least the entire Arab east, because socialism in a single country is a non-starter.

So potentially the Hebrew working class can be mobilised for the revolutionary overthrow of the Zionist regime, and for exchanging its position as an exploited and dominated class with national privileges for the position of partnership in a dominant class with *no more* (and, of course, no less) than equal national rights. But this is not what the one-state project is offering, nor is this project a plausible stepping-stone to regional socialism.

Palestinians outside Israel

The Palestinian masses in the OPTs, as well as the Palestinian refugee diaspora, have clearly much to gain from the one-state project. Their expected gain from it would even be considerably greater than that of the Palestinian-Arab minority in Israel, who at least enjoy partial citizenship rights and limited democratic liberties.

The question is whether these masses are able to overthrow the Zionist regime. Here we come to the crucial difference between the colonial models of Israel and South Africa, which comrade Honig-Parnass is at pains to minimise against all Marxian logic and empirical evidence.

I have argued on numerous occasions that Israel and apartheid South Africa are instances of two different types of settler state, with fundamentally different political economies. Analogies between them are extremely misleading. Still, for the sake of comparison *and contrast*, it will be instructive to consider how the apartheid regime was ended.

It is quite clear that what brought the apartheid regime down was mainly *internal* struggle within that country. External political and economic pressure made some contribution, but played no more than a secondary role. Moreover, in the internal struggle armed resistance did not play a major role. It too was secondary. In fact, the internal struggle that led to the demise of the apartheid regime was essentially a *class* struggle. Not a *pure* form - there are hardly any pure forms in reality - but a *form* of class struggle.

By the early 1990s, the leaders of the settler ruling class realised that they would be unable to maintain the apartheid regime for much longer against the growing opposition of the vast majority of the population, which largely consisted of the African working class. On the other hand, the economy depended on exploiting the labour-power of the predominantly African workforce. The option of expelling the indigenous people or shutting them off from the South African economy did not exist.

At that point the leaders of the ruling class accepted an offer they

could hardly refuse. They made a deal, which was the best one they could *realistically* expect. They gave up exclusive political power, while maintaining their wealth and economic power virtually intact. The African majority achieved *political* gains: formal legal equality and civil rights, but hardly any socio-economic gains. In other words, it was a bourgeois deal, not a socialist overthrow of apartheid.

A socialist overthrow of apartheid was not possible in a single country. Arguably, the indigenous working class was betrayed by not getting a better bourgeois deal. But it is clear that the actual bourgeois deal that was made was feasible because it gave both sides some advantages, although by no means all that they could ideally wish for.

Instead of just repeating myself, let me quote the South African academic sociologist, Ran Greenstein, who is equally familiar with both countries, as he grew up in Israel. His articles contrasting the two systems are worth close reading.¹² Here is his summary of the decisive difference between their political economies:

... apartheid of a special type in Israel is different from historical apartheid in South Africa in three major respects:

- At its foundation are consolidated and relatively impermeable ethno-national identities, with few cross-cutting affiliations across the principal ethnic divide in society.

- It is relatively free of economic imperatives that run counter to its overall exclusionary thrust, because it is not dependent on the exploitation of indigenous labour [my emphasis].

- Its main quest is for demographic majority as the basis for legal, military and political domination.¹³

As a result of the crucial difference in political economy, the Palestinian masses outside Israel simply do not have the economic leverage that the South African, mostly indigenous, working class had, which enabled it to force the ending of apartheid there:

Demography [in South Africa] was never an overriding concern. As long as security of person, property and investment could be guaranteed, there was no need for numerical dominance. When repression proved increasingly counterproductive, a deal exchanging political power for ongoing prosperity became an option acceptable to the majority of whites. Can such a deal be offered to - and adopted by - Israeli Jews, for whom a demographic majority is the key to domination and the guarantee of political survival on their own terms? Most likely, no.¹⁴

Repression "proved increasingly counterproductive" precisely because the South African settler ruling class was totally dependent, economically speaking, on exploiting indigenous labour. Ironically, Israeli-style apartheid is more *apart* than its South African prototype, which imposed social and political, but not economic separation. The apartheid wall and segregated roads are an Israeli innovation, which could not exist in South Africa because they would have undermined its *non-apart* economy.

Comrade Honig-Parnass notes, quite correctly, that the economy of the OPTs is integrated with that of Israel. But this is a very asymmetric kind of integration: the OPTs are economically dependent on Israel much more than Israel's economy depends on them. For Israel, the OPTs are mainly a lucrative market and a testing ground for its military and 'crowd control' hardware and expertise, which are an important

part of its exports. Widespread labour and civil unrest, which could gravely cripple the South African economy, would not have such a serious effect on Israel's. At best, it may perhaps force Israel to withdraw physically from some of the West Bank, as it did from the Gaza Strip. But this would not lead to the ending of the Zionist regime and the dissolution of the Zionist state.

Convergence

So we must conclude that the Israeli working class, which is an *internal* force, is capable of overthrowing the Zionist regime, but will not do so for the sake of the one-state project, because its Hebrew majority has no class interest in this bourgeois goal. Contrariwise, the Palestinian-Arab working class and its close allies, who do have much to gain from it, are for the most part (except for the minority inside Israel) an *external* force, and are unable to overthrow Zionism. We are left with no social agent *both* willing *and* able to bell this particular cat.

This is not a happy conclusion, because, morally speaking, some version of the bourgeois one-state project would be a definite improvement, compared to current reality. But indulging in utopian pipe dreams is not helpful, and may be a harmful opiate.

The only goal at which the interests and forces of the Palestinian-Arab and Hebrew masses can converge and forge an alliance is that of socialism, which is necessarily a regional project, not confined to the Palestinian box. There are no short cuts for overthrowing Zionism. Nor is a bourgeois one-state project a staging post for socialism. A theory of permanent revolution that posits such staging posts - even if it were valid in other colonial situations, which I seriously doubt - is quite inapplicable to this particular case.

Socialism in the entire region offers the only prospect for a benign resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The analysis presented here needs to be supplemented by addressing subsidiary strategic issues: primarily the national identities of the Palestinian-Arabs and Hebrew communities. I plan to do this in a sequel to this article ●

Notes

1. This attribution has been disputed: see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belling_the_cat.
2. 'Toward the democratic Palestine' in *Fatah Lebanon* (January 1970). I have criticised this programme on several occasions: see my book *Israelis and Palestinians: conflict and resolution* Chicago 2012, chapter 17 and *passim*.
3. For a realistic assessment of Israel's real plans, see A Hanieh *Lineages of revolt: issues of contemporary capitalism in the Middle East* Chicago 2013, chapter 5.
4. O Barghouti, 'What comes next: a secular, democratic state in historic Palestine - a promising land': <http://mondoweiss.net/2013/10/democratic-palestine-promising.html> (October 21 2013).
5. A Alexander and J Rose, *The Nakba: why Israel's birth was Palestine's catastrophe and what's the solution?* London 2008.
6. T Honig-Parnass, 'One democratic state in historic Palestine - a socialist viewpoint' *International Socialist Review* No90, October 2013: <http://isreview.org/issue/90/one-democratic-state-historic-palestine>.
7. See the last three chapters of *Israelis and Palestinians*.
8. 'Toward the democratic Palestine' *op cit*.
9. Alexander and Rose *op cit* p.36f.
10. See chapters 33-35 of *Israelis and Palestinians*. Also available separately online: www.israeli-occupation.org/2006-11-30/moshe-machover-israelis-and-palestinians-conflict-and-resolution; www.israeli-occupation.org/2009-02-19/moshe-machover-resolution-of-the-israeli-palestinian-conflict-a-socialist-viewpoint; www.israeli-occupation.org/2010-03-07/moshe-machover-israeli-socialism-and-anti-zionism.
11. For the true facts, which refute her ridiculous claim, see my article, 'Zionist myths: Hebrew versus Jewish identity' *Weekly Worker* May 16 2013: www.cpgb.org.uk/home/weekly-worker/962/zionist-myths-hebrew-versus-jewish-identity; or www.israeli-occupation.org/2013-05-17/moshe-machover-zionist-myths-hebrew-versus-jewish-identity.
12. R Greenstein, 'Israel/Palestine and the apartheid analogy: critics, apologists and strategic lessons' *Monthly Review* August 2010, part 1: <http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2010/greenstein2010.html>; part 2: <http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2010/greenstein2010.html>.
13. *Op cit* part 1.
14. *Ibid*.

STUDENTS



Police brutality: strategic thinking required

Cops, lefts and anarchists on campus

Last week saw an outbreak of student protest. Daniel Harvey reports

The sudden re-ignition of student protest on campuses began on December 5, when students from the University of London began an occupation of Senate House Library in Bloomsbury. A set of demands blasted the “undemocratic and unaccountable” university management, and announced the solidarity of the students with outsourced cleaners. These cleaners and other workers have formed the Tres Cosas Campaign, whose successful rank-and-file action has in the last month delivered pay and pension improvements, bringing them closer in line with those of in-house staff.

To extend this earlier success, the students demanded that *all* staff at the university receive a pension, that there is a halt to further outsourcing, that pay limits be introduced capping the highest salaries at 10 times those of the lowest paid, as well as publishing financial records currently kept secret. On top of this there were demands related to students specifically: that vice-chancellor Adrian Smith publicly oppose the sell-off of the student loan book proposed by the government recently, and that the rent for student accommodation be tied to the maximum ‘maintenance loan’, which is currently set at £4,988 a year.¹

Elsewhere, students at the University of Sussex also went back into occupation making similar demands - a continuation of the struggle for student-worker solidarity on that campus last year. An occupation followed at the University of Birmingham, which hosted the National Coalition Against Fees and Cuts national meeting a fortnight ago.

The response of university managements has been uncompromising. On all three campuses police were immediately called in to ‘neutralise’ the protests. In Sussex, five students were immediately suspended. In London police evicted the occupation in an angry clash with students on December 6, during which acts of police brutality took place.

TV news coverage shows riot police clearly punching students in the face, and a female student being violently thrown to the ground and slammed against a police van. There have been witness reports of students losing teeth after being hit in the face by police freely using fists and batons.²

There were 41 arrests in London - although only one student was charged (with common assault), while all the rest were released “pending further investigations”. But this came with draconian bail conditions attached, banning any further involvement in protests or “gathering in groups of more than four people” under any circumstances. Michael Chessum, the current president of the University of London Union, was arrested in an earlier protest - for organising a demonstration without informing the police. His bail conditions banned involvement in any protest within half a mile of any university campus anywhere in the country. This was rescinded after he complained publicly about the adverse repercussions that would have for the head of a major student union.³

Privatisation

That particular union is, however, on the verge of being abolished as part of a number of ‘reforms’ being pushed through by management. In this case the democratic structure of ULU is to be replaced by a student liaison service - something like a corporate customer service. Combined with the move to dramatically increase tuition fees in 2010, when they were tripled to £9,000 a year for almost every major institution, there is a marked corporatisation of higher education, transforming it more and more into a private business.

It is widely felt that it will not be long before the current caps on tuition fees will be lifted. There have been calls for an increase from senior figures, particularly at Russell Group Universities. At Oxford, the

vice-chancellor, Andrew Hamilton, has suggested £16,000 a year.⁴ As universities have been pushed further towards market competition, they are clearly looking to outspend rivals and attract increasing proportions of wealthier foreign students.

Within the existing university management too, there has been a dramatic increase in salaries, as vice-chancellors like Adrian Smith have become CEOs, along the lines of any other boss in private industry. A good part of the increase in tuition fees is going towards enlarging management bureaucracy. As part of the growing business ethos there are steps being taken to thoroughly depoliticise campuses. It emerged last month that at Edinburgh University a gagging clause is to be made a condition for student union funding: student representatives would have to give university management 48 hours’ notice before criticising the running of the university. Eventually this was withdrawn, but only after fierce public opposition.⁵

The closure of ULU, despite its typical bureaucratic problems and remoteness from its student base in some respects, must be seen as part of this process of depoliticisation. It was, of course, ULU under the leadership of Clare Solomon that began the student mobilisation against the hike in tuition fees in 2010. ULU took the lead where the National Union of Students held back - Aaron Porter, NUS president, failed to offer anything but token resistance. He later went on to form a consultancy for private firms wishing to enter the higher education market.⁶

University authorities have clearly decided that the immediate crushing of student protests is the most effective way to end the opposition to privatisation. It was the December 2010 Parliament Square demonstration that marked the high water mark of that earlier period of resistance: students, including in fact this writer, were attacked by riot police, several of us

receiving bad injuries such as broken bones. All were kettled for hours on Westminster Bridge.

It was then that Jodie McIntyre was thrown out of his wheelchair and Alfie Meadows was nearly killed, having been when struck on the head in an unprovoked assault. Meadows was later charged with violent disorder, but acquitted after a protracted legal battle. Police presence at student demonstrations became heavier and heavier, even as student mobilisations grew smaller and smaller.

For myself, certainly, the experience of being within a foot of being splattered at Millbank Tower by a fire extinguisher thrown off the roof was defining in some ways. Being part of a generation of students who were angry but directionless forced me start to thinking seriously.

Lessons learnt?

At this point, you can sense a certain haze of nostalgia creeping in, and this is exactly the problem with student politics today. Young people are fighting against the privatisation of education, debt bondage and all the other indignities associated with the removal of grants and the prospect of unemployment and workfare. The problem is that the organisational framework is so weak that there is hardly anything that can be called collective memory. In short, the generation of 2013 has not been able to learn the lessons of 2010, let alone 1968.

Yet something has changed quite markedly in the last few years. The process of forcing through changes in higher education has accelerated substantially, whilst the new alliance between a business-oriented management and the police apparatus make universities look and feel much more authoritarian places. It also seems that the police strategy has self-consciously evolved to one of cracking down on student movements early, before they can take root and expand. The ‘Cops off campus’ slogan itself testifies to this

newly oppressive climate.

Can students develop the political toughness necessary to fight these battles? At the moment individualist, libertarian sentiments seem to hold sway. For instance, Aaron Bastani and James Butler rail against the movement’s lack of durability and the continued grip of dogmatism.⁷ However, what they propose is creating ‘spaces’ based on an idealised view of education. Butler admits the need for collective memory, but, of course, rejects any kind of “party!”. Meanwhile Bastani insists: “We don’t need leaders”.

An approach which not only lacks self-knowledge, the pair are *acting* as leaders, they are *taking* a lead, but can easily tip over into intolerance. There is already a certain hostility to left groups. In Sussex this was taken to the extreme when students from the Autonomist Student Network trashed a Socialist Workers Party stall and ritualistically burnt all the copies of *Socialist Worker*. The whole stunt was accompanied by chants of “SWP off campus”.⁸ This is not *just* a response to the ‘comrade Delta’ cover-up. It is an authoritarian reaction to the authoritarian politics of much of today’s left. The SWP, Counterfire, the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty, etc, are seen as manipulative and dishonest. True, but the best way to fight manipulation and dishonesty is through debate, openness and democratic organisation ●

Notes

1. <http://novaramedia.tumblr.com/post/68991350047/statement-from-occupation-of-senate-house>.
2. www.channel4.com/news/university-of-london-student-protest-ban-senate-house-occupy.
3. www.opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom/adam-ramsay/if-security-at-universities-isnt-for-students-who-is-it-for.
4. *The Independent* October 9.
5. See www.theguardian.com/commentis-free/2013/nov/18/police-students-threat-law-and-order-politics.
6. www.arconsultancy.co.uk.
7. <http://novaramedia.com/2013/11/unions-without-a-cosa>.
8. <http://sussexasn.tumblr.com/post/69499029324/swp-off-campus>.

BITCOIN

Exchange without value

Anthony Rose looks at the growth of non-governmental virtual money

Bitcoin is an experimental, decentralised, peer-to-peer digital currency that has grown rapidly in visibility over the past few months. Created in 2008 by the pseudonymous individual (or group) known as 'Satoshi Nakamoto', it is quickly gaining in both legitimacy and utility.

Bitcoin is built on a system of public-key cryptography, in which a pair of encryption keys are generated: one public and one private; bitcoins are stored in an encrypted virtual 'wallet'. For Alice to send bitcoin (BTC) to Bob all that is required is Alice to cryptographically 'sign' the transfer with her private key and then to use one of Bob's public keys as the address (similar to an account number). Bob is able to use the bitcoin software to create anonymous public keys whenever required, independent of any central financial authority, and convention is to create a new public key for each transaction. The details of every new transaction are appended to the 'block chain', which acts as a cryptographically verified public accounting ledger for the bitcoin network and is jointly maintained by users. It is possible for anyone on the network to use Alice's public key to verify that the transfer originated from her. An individual's balance simply represents what fraction of the block chain is associated to their private key.

New bitcoins are generated through a process known as 'mining'. This involves nodes on the network crunching numbers in an attempt to solve a mathematical problem. Each new solution results in the creation of a new block and bitcoins are awarded to those nodes involved in this process. The difficulty of each solution is automatically readjusted by the network, so that approximately every four years the number of bitcoins mined will be halved, and there will eventually be a total of 21 million BTC in the system. A single bitcoin can be divided down to eight decimal places, meaning that 0.00000001 BTC is the smallest amount that can be handled in a transaction.

Bitcoin is not simply PayPal without fees - many adopters believe that it could become a global alternative for cash. It offers a number of attractive advantages over conventional money: bitcoin allows for instant, pseudo-anonymous payments to anyone, wherever they are in the world. International transaction fees are simply non-existent, as are processing fees that are common for debit or credit card transactions. As I am currently based in the US and frequently forced to pay \$35 to transfer money to the UK, this is definitely appealing. Bitcoin offers the potential to remove central financial institutions from the flow of money by exploiting the ability to move data online and protect it via strong cryptography. This is why so many of the bitcoin community believe this could be a revolutionary development in finance. Sending money anywhere in the world becomes as simple as sending an email.

As an example, Wikileaks was able to bypass the financial blockade placed upon it by Bank of America, Visa, MasterCard, PayPal and Western Union by accepting bitcoins, and its donation 'wallet' has received just over 3,796 bitcoins as of the time of writing (this information is available via the block chain and public key), and a further 145 in the fund to defend Edward Snowden. With the price hovering at around \$1,000 per BTC, this has clearly been an important source of revenue. A growing number of charities, political parties and online projects are accept-



An electronic bubble waiting to burst

ing bitcoin donations.

The price per bitcoin has grown rapidly over the past year or so, as awareness and adoption has spread. In August 2012 the price was around \$10/BTC. Earlier this month bitcoin hit an exchange rate high of over \$1,200/BTC, and more businesses are accepting payment in bitcoin every day (both online and offline). This is helped in no small part by the vastly increased awareness of the currency, and deliberate efforts such as 'Bitcoin Black Friday', an online parallel to the US consumer bender that takes place after Thanksgiving.

The huge recent increase in price is largely driven by speculation and the volatility of the price reflects this: fluctuations as high as 30% of the value have happened several times this year due to people dumping or buying bitcoins based on the perception of a 'bubble' bursting. Another factor in the price rise is the surging market for bitcoins in China, whose government recently stated that bitcoins would be treated as a 'commodity' rather than a currency, thus remaining free from banking and currency control regulations. A further nod toward legitimacy in China came from the state-owned China Telecom, which recently announced that it would accept bitcoin as a payment for certain smartphone orders. Many such small pieces of news can be seen as steps in the 'right direction' by bitcoin users and supporters.

There is still a level of inconvenience that acts as a barrier to more widespread bitcoin adoption. Individuals who wish to buy bitcoins currently have to go through one of the online exchanges, which can require a reasonable amount of effort in terms of initially verifying one's identity and transferring money with which to make a purchase. An alternative is to use a service such as localbitcoins.com and purchase bitcoins from an individual. This system is far from perfect, but with the rise in value and adoption of bitcoins will come innovation in terms of improved architecture and online support.

The block chain architecture itself has potential beyond just transferring money. Sensitive, patented or copyrighted material could be 'hashed'

and the resulting cryptographic string stored in this encrypted public ledger - it would have an indisputable time stamp, proving its existence at a certain time. Many more such applications are likely to be thought of, as the technology matures.

It almost goes without saying that bitcoin, and cryptocurrencies in general, are still very much in their infancy and are essentially their own prototype. What does the future hold? It is, of course, impossible to be precise, other than to say that the fate will be strongly correlated with both the adoption rate and any attempt from governments to regulate against their use. Governments will have a problem taxing something that is very difficult for them to track.

Having said that, there are already London pubs taking payment in bitcoin, and at the other end of the scale

Virgin Galactic will also accept bitcoins for a ticket to space (already there has been one taker). Alternative cryptocurrencies exist and perhaps some other digital currency will appear and replace bitcoin, although with a 'first-mover advantage' maybe what we are seeing is the beginning of the future standard for digital currency transactions.

Personally, I believe that anything that allows for us to democratise currency in this way is one that should be taken seriously. The internet has revolutionised a wide range of our day-to-day activities - perhaps most notably in terms of communication. These new digital currencies offer a path to a very different way in which we handle finance.

If you're interested in reading about the protocol in more detail you can find Satoshi Nakamoto's original paper at bitcoin.org/bitcoin.pdf ●

Fighting fund

2014 trend

Special thanks this week go to KP for his £100 cheque towards our December fighting fund. KP writes: "Keep up the good work in 2014." With supporters like you, comrade, I'm sure we will be able to do just that. There were also cheques from JT (£25) and SL (£10).

An extra £226 came in since last week, taking our running total to £492. But we are quite a bit behind where we ought to be, with not much more than half the month left to make our £1,500 target. Next week will see the final issue of 2013 (December 19), so I would really like us to be two-thirds of the way there by then - especially as I know that the donations will dry up over Christmas and the new year, as the postal service shudders to a halt.

But there is no shutdown of the internet, of course, so you can still

use PayPal to support your paper. That was what comrade DS did last week, donating the unusual sum of £11. I reckon DS really wanted to donate a tenner, but decided to throw in an extra pound to cover PayPal's commission. There again, if you have an online bank account, you can make your contribution without any charge either to you or the *Weekly Worker* (account number 00744310; sort code 30-99-64).

Comrade DS was, by the way, one of 12,057 online readers last week. That figure has been rising steadily over recent weeks, so here's hoping that's another trend that continues into 2014.

Robbie Rix

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

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

**Unity
produces
yet more
splits**

End of the road

The Anti-Capitalist Initiative is about to fold. Meanwhile the International Socialist Network looks set to splinter. **Harley Filben** explores the politics of the marsh

The Anti-Capitalist Initiative has never exactly inspired much enthusiasm in the CPGB, nor any particular optimism as to its long-term prospects. Around the time of the foundation of the ACI last spring, many a comrade in our ranks was to be heard muttering things like "I give it a year". In the event, it wildly exceeded all expectations by loping on for over 18 months.

Alas, it has - for all intents and purposes - now reached the end of the line. A national meeting of the organisation resolved to dissolve the ACI into the International Socialist Network - well, sort of. There is no mechanism for making any binding decisions in the ACI, its refusal to adopt any such mechanism being one of the many indicators of its short shelf life. Where branches are functioning - principally Manchester and Birmingham - they will continue their independent existence. The group has never taken hold in London, however, so the core comrades - composed principally of the ex-Workers Power members who set up the now-defunct Permanent Revolution group, and a number of younger ex-WP comrades around Simon Hardy and Luke Cooper - will simply transfer their standing orders to the ISN.

It makes a certain sense. Having been through a very different factional struggle in the Socialist Workers Party, the founders of the ISN have arrived at more or less the same conclusions, albeit with a more SWPish flavour. The ISN has functioned primarily to attract various individuals who have found themselves outside the SWP over the years, for one reason or another. Some of the older heads from the PR half of the ACI, indeed, were once members of the SWP or its predecessor, the International Socialists. In practical terms, ACI comrades have dedicated themselves to building Left Unity (with some exceptions, of course, and no coherence, given the ACI's utterly individualistic and atomised character).

Enthusiasm for LU is more mixed in the ISN; but certainly its more rightwing members (the Richard Seymour-Tom Walker faction) are heavily involved. (What we might broadly call the left in the ISN tends to look back to the IS/SWP's rank-and-file heyday, rather than to the left in LU.)

On closer inspection, however, the prospects are perhaps not so rosy. We note a piece on the ISN's website, signed by various figures on the group's right, but quite obviously penned by Richard Seymour: "The politics of anathema in the IS Network".¹ It is a pretty gnomish bit of shadowboxing against persons unnamed, whose style of argument is deemed too Manichean and aggressive by the signatories. "We think this is necessarily and intrinsically linked to the danger of becoming a small sect," they argue. Not necessarily, in fact: the Gerry Healy organisation became the largest Trotskyist organisation in the country, in spite of its Comrade



Such diversity, such choice

Bala-esque paranoia.

What follows is a cod-sociological analysis of in-group dynamics in small leftwing organisations, and an appeal to unnamed individuals to play the ball, not the man; refrain from calling people 'bureaucrats' simply because they hold a minor union post; and so on. Who is the target? We can only guess that it is these comrades' factional opponents in the ISN. Seymour and co, after all, were defeated on most major points at the ISN's national politics conference, where much of this 'uncomradeliness' is supposed to have taken place.

(There is a somewhat amusing footnote: "We note, for example, the peculiar way in which forms of anti-oppression politics have been mobilised in this cause. One of us was publicly denounced for 'alienating' women comrades by 'shouting' during a speech; the use of the word 'trauma' in a pre-conference document was deemed 'ableist'. Such tactics seem not only to vulgarise important arguments, but actually diminish the anti-oppression politics being invoked." Given how enthusiastic these people are to cosy up to the 'intersectionality' crazies, how surprised can they

actually be by this tactic, which has substituted for reasoned argument among such people for decades?)

It is hardly a coincidence that the ex-Workers Power flotsam should wash up on the same shore as the ISN jetsam; but it is in fact the same political dynamic that ensures first the ACI and then the ISN should run so rapidly into difficulties. That dynamic is liquidationism. Let I be accused of political 'anathematisation' by comrade Seymour and his allies, I should stress that this hardly means the comrades are not sincere. Hardy, Cooper and the PR people come from a political tradition that suppressed public criticism of some pretty absurd political perspectives over the last two decades; most ISN comrades were treated in much the same way, before their departure from the SWP, as the 'Trotsky-Bukharin gang' was by 1930s Stalinists, although without the final recourse to mass murder.

The comrades draw the lesson that left sects are not the answer to all our problems; indeed, they are a serious obstacle to effective left politics of any kind. Very good. Liquidationism is a family of non-sequiturs spuriously

derived from that proposition: that the answer lies in the spontaneous movement, that it is the job of revolutionaries to throw ourselves into those movements, abandoning thereby the idea that we have 'all the answers'. We are to be, after the fashion of the Occupy movement's general assemblies, facilitators.

The trouble with this approach is, firstly, that it is ultimately depoliticising. This was almost laughably obvious during the history of the ACI. At its founding meeting, it decided not to decide on even the most elementary political line. At that point, it was already a failure of nerve. When, at its next meeting, it decided once again to defer any such decision, Workers Power walked out (as is WP's habit - comrade Hardy learned from the best). Those of us who had 'given it a year' wondered if we might have to start thinking in weeks. The long preparation and build-up for its 'Up the Anti' day school (at which it was more or less completely anonymous)² and subsequent conference kept the machine ticking over; faced again, however, with a series of competing sets of political aims, the ACI chickened out once more. In the last year, 'unity' discussions with the ISN and Socialist Resistance have kept the brand alive, but the idea that the ACI represents anything more than a jumbled heap of cliques, local affinity groups and atomised individuals has been patently indefensible since Up the Anti. Three strikes, comrades, and you're out.

Their excuse on each occasion was that 'more time' was needed to 'discuss' the way forward - the implication being that greater unity would be reached, as it were, by osmosis. This process has actually had the opposite effect - the best part of 100 comrades, initially at least, had in their overwhelming majority been until very recently

members of the same centralised Trotskyist "fighting propaganda group". Now they are scattered among 57 varieties of no-doubt worthy activism; some, like comrades Hardy and Cooper themselves, are gearing up to be minor-league public intellectuals (I remain unconvinced³); others have collapsed into irrationalist feminism. They are not all in Left Unity, and within it they are scattered across the different platforms.

Such are the dilemmas facing the ISN. Seymour and co note in passing, rather candidly, that "we are a very small organisation, and becoming smaller". The immediate issue, of comrades unknown being unduly rude, is put down in the first instance to the fact that "we bring with us certain habits taken over from the SWP, where a hierarchical culture was underpinned in part toward personal spite towards those perceived as deviating from the line, and personal favour toward those perceived as capably upholding it".

The comrades are right, but in the wrong way. What they have taken over from the SWP is its apolitical spontaneism. The bureaucratic regime held them together, first as loyal activists and then as oppositionists. In its absence, the centrifugal forces have taken hold; as operative political methods drift apart, it is inevitable that debates should become more fractious.

There are individuals and small groups in both the ACI and ISN that have shrunk from fully adopting the liquidationist conclusions outlined above, or have learned the lesson that the method leads only to oblivion ●

Notes

1. <http://internationalsocialistnetwork.org/index.php/ideas-and-arguments/organisation/293-the-politics-of-anathema-in-the-is-network>.
2. See M Fischer, 'Up the Swanny' *Weekly Worker* December 6 2012.
3. See 'Beyond "anti-capitalism"' *Weekly Worker* January 24.

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