

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



# weekly worker



**Paul Demarty: Technology, terror and the true identity of Dread Pirate Roberts**

- Syriza and power
- Sinn Féin and water
- Germany's Pegida
- Unison left

No 1042 Thursday January 22 2015

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

£1/€1.10

Michael Roberts:  
The spectre  
of deflation



# LETTERS



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

## Charlie contrast

I want to warmly congratulate the *Weekly Worker* for the last edition of the paper - the *Charlie* solidarist edition. It stands in stark contrast to the utterly obnoxious capitulation of most of the left on this issue.

Groups like the Socialist Workers Party and Workers Power scratch the surface, while many others have totally lost the morality we ourselves are supposed to hold - they favour 'defending' and solidarising with medievalist, reactionary, sectarian jihadists: 'Of course we condemn the murder, of course we defend freedom of speech, but ...' They don't exactly say 'Serves you right', but the implication is that *Charlie* had it coming.

Let's be clear what they are defending and what they are surrendering to here: jihadism, which they present as a sort of anti-imperialism! As against atheist, communist, anarchist piss-takers and the principle of free speech and civil liberties. They have become so embroiled in liberal 'anti-racism' that they are scared of their own shadows - ever ready to label anything racist, whether it is actually to do with race or not. Eddie Ford and more particularly Paul Demarty have nailed this firmly to the floor in their articles and shown that none of the cartoons are racist, though they offend rightwing and religious groups and particular ethnic groups on the basis of their religion, though not their race.

The 'right' not to be offended is a gag on freedom of speech and expression, and it has an echo in all that 'safe space' bollocks. It also follows hard on the heels of SWP demands that books like *Mein Kampf* ought not to be on sale to the public. Someone else - some censor - should decide on our behalf what is suitable for us to watch or read because they know what's best for us and society.

It reminds me of my foolish youth when as a revolutionary socialist I was expelled from the Labour Party Young Socialists and was in the process of appeal. The issue came to the LPYS conference with a resolution from my branch calling for an end to bans and proscriptions and for my reinstatement. Peter Doyle, the national LPYS chair and prominent Militant supporter, declared: "Of course we're against bans and proscriptions, but if David Douglass puts his head on the block he can expect to have it chopped off." Thanks, comrade!

The same is evident here: yes, we're for freedom of speech, but if you insist on using it, and you insult especially a non-white body, you can expect something to happen. If this is the left's version of defending our own values of secularism, civil liberty and freedom of expression, I hope to god we never have to rely on it. No gods, no masters!

**David Douglass**  
South Shields

## Keep on writing

First and foremost, congratulations on your article, 'CIA roots of Islamist fundamentalism' (January 15). It is the best I have read on this in more than a year, especially with the content regarding recent events in France.

I would like to share some ideas with you regarding a few points.

1. You wrote: "... in the absence of a revolutionary left, they signed up to the Islamists." Thank you for raising this, but I wish you had expanded on it by giving historical examples. The west has been deposing revolutionary governments: nationalist in Egypt, social democrats in Iran, secularists in Iraq - and they are working on it in Syria.

2. One of the pillars of post-World War II US foreign policy was to surround the

USSR with Islamic states to counter the godless Soviets. This is still a dominant policy in the region, even though the cold war is over.

3. The ahistorical understanding of contemporary events by populist and corporate media is the prevailing attitude, behaviour and thought process in the US and Europe. People in the Middle East and Africa (not to ignore Latin America) know, understand and feel the economic chokehold of the American empire and its European subsets.

4. The last point has to do with France's racist society. France (not the majority of French people) is racist toward Africans, especially Algerians and Muslims. France is more racist than the US.

The question we should ask everybody is, how long will you remain inactive while you are being pushed around, ridiculed and deprived of your rights before you take action to say that you are a (hu)man?

Thanks again for writing a wonderful article. You keep on writing and I'll keep on reading.

**Buzz Edd**  
Los Angeles

## True and deep

Having just completed the task of finishing off my own little contribution to things, I've just managed to read Paul Demarty's 'Qui est Charlie?' (January 15). I'm sure you don't have any real need of my opinions, but nonetheless, I consider your article to be really excellent.

The detailed historical information you include and therefore the true and deep Marxist understanding it allows is, of course, a million kilometres above and beyond the level of most of the nonsense available elsewhere.

**Bruno Kretschmar**  
email

## More questions

A local editorial regarding "the brutal murders of 12 French journalists" wrote: "Poking fun at a religion ... or at power in any form ... is a right all of us share."

My observation is that, unfortunately, we are fed news stories that sympathise with the deaths of Nato soldiers and western citizenry, while demonising or dehumanising the lives of the local Muslim population in the targeted/attacked Middle Eastern region itself. I have been mulling over this topic and have some questions:

1. When our Nato forces have been using Tomahawk missiles, depleted uranium-tipped warheads, helicopter gunships, jet-fighter precision missiles, white phosphorus, cluster bombs and drone strikes, why is it that the devastation to Middle Eastern human life is not called 'Nato terrorism'? I don't see that kind of 'devastating force' being used against us in the west.

2. Is it freedom of speech when the millions of Middle Eastern deaths of Muslim citizens over the last 13 years by Nato/US forces gets minimal 'mainstream' press, radio and television coverage? Yet the mainstream press continually inundates us with the handful of deaths worldwide at the hands of 'fundamentalist radicals' (who often turn out to be just psychotic westerners), whose idea of responding to Nato terror is to use their own forms. Neither Nato leaders nor radicalised fundamentalists are serious about peace.

3. Are Nato forces really bringing 'freedom and democracy' to the Middle East, or are those who take us to war terrorising the entire region to create 'regime change' that favours the private interests of oil cartels, weapons manufacturers, military contractors and international bankers?

4. When these questions are not being asked locally or nationally, through the mainstream media, can we say we have freedom of speech? When 'pro-war' newscasts fuel hatred for Middle Eastern

Muslims and show little empathy for the slaughter of the Middle Eastern citizenry by Nato forces, is that not keeping the topic within parameters which support further military aggression in the region?

Is this what Noam Chomsky called "manufacturing consent", when radio, press and televised newscasts are used to garner support for further warfare? Is this what David Baldacci meant, in his novel *The whole truth*, when he called mainstream media agencies "perception management firms"?

**Bill Woolam**  
Canada

## Incompatible

This letter addresses two points from recent material in the *Weekly Worker*.

Tony Greenstein's review of Shlomo Sand's extended essay *How I stopped being a Jew* (January 8) is arrogant and ignorant. It accuses Sand of misunderstanding Zionism and Jewish identity. But in asserting that there is "no Israeli citizenship" for anyone who is not Jewish, Greenstein shows that he does not understand the basics of what Sand is attacking. This notion must be news to the 20% minority of Palestinian-Israelis, who are citizens, use Israeli passports and vote in elections.

The actual situation is that in internal identity documents, citizens are divided into 'nationalities' by ethnic (and sometimes even arbitrary) criteria. They are designated either as 'Jew' or 'Arab', or in cases that do not fit, sometimes absurd 'nationalities' like 'Buddhist', or even 'unknown'. These exist in order to prevent an 'Israeli' nationality emerging. As is well known, Israel is designated as the state of the Jewish people everywhere, not just Israel. Therefore, a Jewish person born in London or New York, who has not claimed Israeli citizenship under the law of return, has more rights than a non-Jew born in Israel.

That is key to Sand's renouncing of secular Jewish identity. That Greenstein can denounce him, while not understanding basic facts about this, shows Sand is not the ignorant one.

Sand's understanding of the empty and chauvinistic essence of the secular Jewish identity today, and therefore Zionism, is not academic, or based on involvement in the flawed, chauvinistic British left, but from brutal experience. As an Israel Defence Forces conscript in the 1967 war and the conquest of Jerusalem and the West Bank, Sand witnessed fellow soldiers torturing an elderly Palestinian man to death. Such things are the starting point for profound radicalisation, outside of the experience of the western left, including purveyors of identity politics like Greenstein.

Greenstein admits that his original review (on his blog) of Sand's essay smeared him, as earlier with Gilad Atzmon, as 'anti-Semitic'. What kind of arrogant person would attempt to 'review' a publication he had not read on the basis of reports in a liberal Zionist newspaper like *Ha'aretz*?

His point about Sand's supposed duty to renounce his academic tenure is idiotic. Sand's work in terms of demolishing Zionism and "Jewish ideology", in the words of Israel Shahak, is much more valuable to the Palestinian struggle than the popular-front boycott campaigns Greenstein excels in promoting.

The ideological confusion that results from Israeli misuse of the Nazi genocide as a propaganda weapon is the responsibility of the Israeli ruling class and no-one else. Greenstein, in smearing critics of Jewish ideology like Sand and Atzmon, who may or may not (in Sand's case, not!) exhibit such ideological confusion, merely makes this debate more difficult, thereby helping Zionism demonise critics.

Greenstein admits that "Israel and Zionism" have "provided a new ideological basis for Jewish identity", and that "most ... Jews ... define their

Jewishness in relation to Israel". Yet, while declaiming in formally Marxist terms that therefore "there is no longer any objective, material basis to Jewish identity", he contradicts this by smearing those who renounce this identity, even while he admits it is hollow.

The "new" Jewish identity Greenstein admits is subscribed to by "most Jews" is an *imperialist* identity. The Jewish ideology sharply critiqued originally by Israel Shahak is an imperialist ideology. Greenstein's promoting of an 'alternative' Jewish identity, based around the old east European Yiddish version, would be harmless utopianism if he did not devote himself to smearing those who renounce this imperialist identity outright.

Meanwhile, Peter Manson (Letters, January 15) claims incredulity at my claim that the CPGB has an exception to its policy of 'open borders' for the Palestinians who have been violently excluded from their own homeland, and quotes a set of theses of the CPGB from 2011 on the 'right to return': "this is a right of habitation decided upon individually, or by family group" as supposedly refuting my contention.

What is the meaning of the phrase "decided upon"? Does this mean by the individuals or family groups concerned? If so, the phrase is superfluous: those involved in migration obviously should decide this for themselves. Obviously this phrase has another meaning.

If this is "decided upon" by some third party, who 'decides' whether the return of specific "individuals" or "family groups" is compatible with "the right of the Israeli-Jewish nation to self-determination", that is another matter. This implication is borne out by this sentence, which the ellipsis in Peter's quote hides: "It is not a demand for a folk movement of the entire diaspora - which now inhabits not just Jordan, Kuwait, the Gulf States, Saudi Arabia, etc, but the US and many countries in western Europe too."

So the right to return is qualified: subordinated to Israeli-Jewish 'national rights'. The Palestinians were not expelled as individuals or families, but collectively as a people. Logically, this has to be the CPGB position, as the full right to return would mean that there would be a Palestinian Arab majority in Israel with the borders of 1948, making a Jewish state impossible. For any democrat, the right to return must be a *collective* right.

**Ian Donovan**  
Communist Explorations

## Left who?

I increasingly wonder how seriously the leadership of Left Unity are taking their own political project. On January 19, Kate Hudson, our national secretary, was one of the two speakers at a packed meeting of about 200 people at Goldsmiths in Lewisham, organised by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Stop the War and the Green Party. The other speaker was Natalie Bennett, the leader of the Green Party.

The meeting was primarily about campaigning against Trident replacement and nuclear weapons in general, and obviously comrade Hudson was there as general secretary of CND. I realise there can be a conflict of interest between a single-issue campaign, which seeks to build broad, cross-party alliances, and a political party, but the evening suggests that this will be unsustainable in the long run.

Whilst I would not question the Green Party's genuine commitment to the cause of nuclear disarmament, it was quite obvious that Ms Bennett was there, in part at least, to build the Green Party and often referred to matters on which the Greens had policies with no direct connection to nuclear power or the arms industry. A Goldsmiths student union activist opened the question session by asking about both Brighton council and

Ms Bennett's view of socialism. Ms Bennett expressed her pride in the record of Brighton council and explained that, whilst she shared the views of socialists on a number of issues, she would not describe herself as a socialist.

Comrade Hudson was not only very friendly towards and supportive of Ms Bennett, but had a few favourable things to say about the Scottish National Party and Plaid Cymru. As far as I can remember, she not only endorsed their claims to be parties that opposed nuclear weapons, but also accepted their claim to be part of some sort of anti-austerity alliance - which is a rather more debatable, to say the least.

What she was absolutely silent about, for the entire hour and a half for which she was present, was the party she herself leads - Left Unity.

While it now seems unlikely we in LU will field more than half a dozen candidates, one might have expected a party leader addressing a large London audience to make at least a passing reference to our candidates in Hackney South and Lambeth Vauxhall, in whose constituencies it is perfectly conceivable that some of the audience live.

**Toby Abse**  
email

## New bond

Simon Wells accuses the Public and Commercial Services national executive committee of patronising the membership in the decisions they say they need to make due to the union's dire financial circumstances ('Building the union is no lottery', January 15).

To describe a 12-month suspension of NEC and departmental group elections (in order to save £600,000-£700,000) and which delegates at PCS conference in May can overturn as "disastrous" is rather over the top. PCS is one of only two unions that holds annual NEC elections (not every two years, as with most unions). So annual NEC elections are hardly the norm then across the movement? Less than 10% of PCS members (any better in other unions?) bother to vote. The 10% that do largely follow the recommendations of trusted local reps.

I have previously expressed my disagreement with the practice of PCS Left Unity (dominated by the Socialist Party in England and Wales) year on year forming an electoral pact with the PCS Democrats. The first time this was pursued, the reasoning given was it was necessary to keep the right from regaining control of the NEC, but in recent years the right wing have fallen apart, while the (ultra?) left - the breakaway faction from Left Unity, Independent Left, poll even fewer votes than the rightwing faction, '4themembers'. The 'Democracy Alliance' pact have swept the board every year and there was no evidence that any challengers have a hope of displacing them. So the allegation the NEC are suspending elections for 12 months to keep themselves in power seemed a nonsense - until very recently.

I attended a 40-plus meeting (advertised in the Alliance for Workers' Liberty's *Solidarity*) of Manchester activists on January 17 to discuss a campaign against the decision to suspend elections. It seems a number of activists have left Left Unity and wish to pact with IL. Past voting figures then would suggest the most realistic and serious challenge to the Democracy Alliance could be from those to their left. At the meeting, I was the only one to present the NEC arguments and support giving them the benefit of the doubt on the grounds it was better to suspend elections than end up with a bankrupt union!

What would those intent on challenging the current NEC do any differently that would engender more membership support? That question wasn't answered. Those blaming general secretary Mark Serwotka for the NEC decisions had a chance to

oppose him in his recent re-election. No-one did. I heard that was actually debated by IL, but rejected. Some now wonder if that was the correct decision. There is some resentment against Mark for not keeping to his first election pledge to reduce his wages closer to that of members and donating some of his salary to the PCS fighting fund. He made an initial start, but gradually reduced his payments to nothing.

At the meeting most felt the NEC hadn't provided financial evidence to branches (true) to support their contentions. It is also the case that at the May 2014 conference we were told PCS was in the black and that financial difficulties were absolutely not the driver for the proposed merger talks with Unite. The meeting also aired the view that PCS can save money using other methods - such as paying full-time officers less. The point was also made that if the NEC can suspend elections once, they can do so again.

The direct debit campaign, after enormous effort by activists and full-time officials, has achieved a sign-up rate of 70% in the home office. The overall average across PCS is, as Simon Wells stated, 30%. It is a big task, but the work continues and it is the number-one priority of PCS. Simon says having a prize of £1,200 to entice members to sign up is patronising, whereas the struggle should be politicised. Simon, it has been! PCS is making clear why check-off is being removed department by department.

It was a masterstroke of the Tories to withdraw check-off and then have reps (in their own time) and full-time officials running around chasing up every single member in their workplace. The government thinks we will not be able to do this and PCS, the most militant, political, fighting union, will be broken. Rather like the miners in 1984-85, with the rest of the unions watching from the sidelines. If we can defeat this attack, the prize will be a new bond between members and their union, a new layer of activists. There is some evidence previous non-members are joining during the sign-up campaign.

For many reps like myself we have branch AGMs coming up. We know there will be a huge debate at conference about the suspension of elections and have to decide who we believe. Are we really in such dire straits that spending £600,000 on elections will bankrupt us? Or is this a cynical excuse used to preserve an NEC facing a serious challenge from their left?

I think the credibility of those arguing the elections should go ahead will be proved by having a high sign-up rate in their branches. The more we reduce the financial crisis by May, the more it can be argued the elections should go ahead following conference.

**Dave Vincent**  
Manchester

## Concrete issues

Mike Macnair's January 15 letter comes closer than his December 18 article ('Fantasy history, fantasy Marx') to the concrete issues with which I have been concerned in my writings on democratic revolution, the contradiction of capital and the issue of a political party for the left. It's evidently possible that I have written on these issues poorly or at least unclearly. But that does not mean that I should be saddled with conventional misreadings of the Frankfurt School or Lukács.

If Adorno had a critique of Lukács, it was not against Lukács's own (Marxist) critique of Weber, with which Adorno agreed. So no 'Weberian Marxism' there. Lukács and Adorno disagreed with Weber that capitalism was a wrong turn and dead end, beginning with the Protestant reformation and its 'work ethic', but followed Marx in considering capitalism as constrained revolution become self-contradictory, which is

different. For Lukács and Adorno, Weber was counterrevolutionary. Was Weber a 'bourgeois liberal'? Certainly not in the sense of Benjamin Franklin. For Weber, capitalism would continue "until the last ton of fossil fuel is burned up". Not so for Lukács and Adorno, who continued to regard capitalism as 'dialectical' and subject to change and not one-dimensional.

Regarding my use of categories in the "Marxist" rather than "colloquial" sense, this doesn't mean that Marx *et al* never used terms colloquially. But they did use them in specific and, to those unfamiliar, peculiar ways. One such category is 'the state', which Lenin, following Marx, defined strictly as "special bodies of armed men". This does not mean the legislature, judiciary or even the government bureaucracy. In the *Communist manifesto*, Marx had characterised the state as the "committee for managing the affairs of the whole bourgeoisie". But after 1848 the essence of the state was revealed to be rather "special bodies of armed men".

Trotsky called the USSR under the Stalinised Communist Party a "police state", and a "criminal" one at that - criminal against the revolution. Trotsky wrote that where there is a line for bread there must be police to maintain order. The "police" in question was the party's own central control commission under Stalin. However, if the USSR is not regarded as a "police state", then perhaps a gulag - a prison? The police state and its prisons are "Bonapartist" in Marx's sense: counterrevolutionary, undemocratic and illiberal - *politically* repressive. It is a nihilistic travesty of bourgeois society.

To return to my primary thesis, to which Macnair has not yet responded, the question of revolutionary politics and capitalism, Rosa Luxemburg, in *Reform or revolution* (1900), pointed out that the state in the bourgeois epoch was the product of revolution, and continued to be informed in its action by the energy of that revolutionary origin. This was true in capitalism as well, and so affected politics.

If the Hegelian dialectic had become for Marx "ideological" by the mid-19th century, then this was due to capitalism, and not a 'thought error' by Hegel. What was once a bourgeois dialectic of freedom had become falsified in capitalism as a result of the industrial revolution. Marx indicated as early as the 1844 *Economic and philosophic manuscripts* that he was concerned with how the original bourgeois-revolutionary categories had been betrayed in capitalism - that is, since the industrial revolution - and that he was proceeding to critique such bourgeois categories "immanently".

The problem with retrospective and hence anachronistic critiques of Hegel *et al* is that they neglect precisely this concrete, historical change in capitalism. So what was once a productive dialectic of freedom between the individual and the collective in society, or between liberty and equality or justice, became instead a destructive antinomy of unfreedom and crisis in 19th century capitalism. Such self-contradiction indicated for Marx and his followers a potential change originating from within bourgeois society, not outside it: still the bourgeois revolution's struggle for liberal democracy, but in self-contradiction. This contradiction was for Marx expressed not only by communism, but in capitalist politics as well.

**Chris Cutrone**  
email

## Fabrications

During the past 10 days I've 'been through the mill' a bit. I'm fully aware other people's health problems can be a bit of a bore, but there are aspects of my experience that need to be shared.

For several days before Christmas, I'd become increasingly very short of breath, to a frightening extent. I was gasping for breath at the slightest exertion - like getting out of a chair and crossing the room.

The doctor I saw promptly sent me for blood tests and an X-ray and within 24 hours an "urgent cardiac referral" was promptly faxed to the county hospital. In fact, the following morning, a duty GP visited me at home and within the hour I was admitted to the Royal Sussex County Hospital via the accident and emergency department. The oedema from which I was suffering was cleared and, after a week, I'm back home - although not quite as fit as I'd hoped I'd be.

Now to the really worrying aspect of my experience. The first doctor at my medical centre had referred me on December 18, but hospital records claim the referral was made five days later (December 23) and that it was not received by the cardiac unit (within the hospital) until six days after that (December 29). There are many attempts to fabricate the records to make it appear targets are (almost) being met. It's not the first time I've seen evidence suggesting the local hospital appears to be cooking the records to show prompter performance. It is my understanding that the organising of appointments is the responsibility of a 'non-medical' department and is in fact privatised.

More important, had I really been seen when I should have been, I'd not have arrived through A&E. It's the system, not the service. Once in hospital, my care was really great.

**Bob Potter**  
Hove

## Sounds absurd?

Phil Kent has accused me of holding positions I never held in relation to Stalin, the issue of peak oil and reptilians (Letters, January 15). He also claims I am an elitist, because I believe in leadership.

Firstly, I never argued that Stalin's victims "deserved to die" - I challenge Kent to prove otherwise. In passing, it's interesting to note that following the demise of the Soviet Union, when Boris Yeltsin released the figures for individuals in Soviet prisons, these were lower than the USA. The capitalist media went silent.

Secondly, I never argued that rising oil prices would "soon" mean the end of capitalism. What I argued is that rising oil prices in the period of declining oil production, following the global peak, would lead to the collapse of capitalism, if no viable substitute for cheap oil was found. World oil production goes through three stages: rising production, peak and decline. We are still at the peak stage, when oil supply is at its maximum.

Thirdly, I never claimed that the future of humanity "may rest on the beneficence of extra-terrestrial reptiles". I replied to Andrew Northall's letter of December 18 and referred to the reptilian control theory, which argues that for thousands of years humanity has been controlled by a reptilian race, using their mixed reptile-human genetic bloodlines, who have oppressed and exploited humans, while claiming descent from the 'gods' and the divine right to rule by bloodline. Ancient and modern society is obsessed with reptilian, serpent and dragon themes, possibly due to this heritage. Even the flag of Wales has a dragon on it.

Most people have closed minds, depending on the issues. Mention the possibility of aliens secretly manipulating humanity behind the scenes and the shutters come down. Perhaps Kent should contemplate Einstein's words: "If at first an idea does not sound absurd, there is no hope for it."

**Tony Clark**  
email

# 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 January 25, 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, appendix: 'Results of the immediate process of production' (continued). Organised by CPGB: [www.cpgb.org.uk](http://www.cpgb.org.uk).

## Radical Anthropology Group

Introduction to anthropology  
**Tuesday January 27, 6.30pm:** 'Human origins: why menstruation matters'. Speaker: Chris Knight. Cock Tavern, 23 Phoenix Road, London NW1. Talks are free, but small donations are welcome. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: <http://radicalanthropologygroup.org>

## Russian avant-garde

**Ends Sunday January 25:** Exhibition, Victoria and Albert Museum, Cromwell Road, London SW7. 'Russian avant-garde theatre: war, revolution and design 1913-1933'. Free entry. Organised by Victoria and Albert Museum: [www.vam.ac.uk](http://www.vam.ac.uk).

## The sensory war 1914-2014

**Ends Sunday February 22:** Exhibition, Manchester Art Gallery, Mosley Street, Manchester M2. The impact of military conflict on the body, mind, environment and human senses between 1914 and 2014. Organised by Manchester Art Gallery: [www.manchestergalleries.org](http://www.manchestergalleries.org).

## Another education is possible

**Friday January 23, 7pm:** Public meeting, The Epicentre, 41 West Street, London E11. Speakers: Richard Hatcher (Putting Kids First), Simone Aspis (Alliance for Inclusive Education), Pippa Dowswell (Waltham Forest NUT). Organised by Waltham Forest Left Unity: [walthamforest@leftunity.org](mailto:walthamforest@leftunity.org).

## Wrap up Trident

**Saturday January 24, 12noon:** Demonstration. Assemble ministry of defence, Horse Guards Avenue, London SW1 Westminster, for march to rally at Parliament Square, London SW1. Organised by Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament: [www.cnduk.org](http://www.cnduk.org).

## Palestine solidarity

**Saturday January 24, 9.30am to 5pm:** Annual general meeting of Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: [www.palestinecampaign.org](http://www.palestinecampaign.org).

## Tusc and the 2015 elections

**Saturday January 24, 11am to 4.30pm:** Pre-election conference, Student Central (formerly ULU), Malet Street, London WC1. £10 waged, £2 unwaged/low-waged. Registration form: [www.tusc.org.uk/txt/318.doc](http://www.tusc.org.uk/txt/318.doc). Organised by Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition: [www.tusc.org.uk](http://www.tusc.org.uk).

## No to Iraq III

**Monday January 26, 7.30pm:** Meeting, Friends Meeting House, 12 Jesus Lane, Cambridge CB5. Speakers include: Andrew Murray, Julian Huppert (Lib Dem MP), Dr Sanaa Al Khayat (Iraqi author and activist). Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk](http://www.stopwar.org.uk).

## From SAS to Veterans for Peace

**Tuesday January 27, 8pm:** Meeting, Cheese and Grain Market Yard, Frome. Speaker: former SAS soldier Ben Griffin. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk](http://www.stopwar.org.uk).

## How to stop the spread of war

**Wednesday January 28, 6pm:** Student activist meeting, King's College London, The Strand, London WC2. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk](http://www.stopwar.org.uk).

## Tackling the housing crisis

**Wednesday January 28, 6.30pm:** Public meeting, Hilldrop Community Centre, Community Lane, Hilldrop Road, London N7. Discussing anti-austerity alternatives to the housing crisis. Speakers include Jeremy Corbyn MP. Organised by North London People's Assembly: [www.facebook.com/northlondonpeoplesassembly](http://www.facebook.com/northlondonpeoplesassembly).

## Syriza: putting hope into practice

**Wednesday January 28, 6.30pm:** Post-election report-back, Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1. Organised by Greece Solidarity Campaign: <http://greesolidarity.org>.

## Student question time

**Thursday January 29, 6pm:** Debate, lecture theatre OL7, Teesside University, Middlesbrough TS1. Focusing on student issues, including the free education campaign. Organised by Student Assembly against Austerity: [www.thestudentassembly.org.uk](http://www.thestudentassembly.org.uk).

## CPGB wills

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

**GREECE**

# Avoid the temptation of power

Eddie Ford looks at the situation in Greece in light of the classic Marxist position - it is often necessary to hold back the spontaneous movement

**W**ith the January 25 Greek general election only days away, the polls indicate that Syriza is still ahead by between 3% and 7% over its nearest rival, New Democracy, led by Antonis Samaras and currently in coalition with Pasok. Of course, given the peculiarities of the so-called 'reinforced proportionality' electoral system, no matter how slender the size of your victory - even if only by 0.1% or a few hundred votes nationally - you still get the 50-seat top-up or 'premium'. A clear anti-democratic travesty, as Syriza is projected to get between 33% and 35% of the total vote, making it a *minority* party in terms of a genuinely popular democratic mandate.

Therefore it seems almost certain that the party led by Alexis Tsipras will win on January 25 and it appears even more certain that he will then have to start negotiating with various parties to his right - seeing how the 'official communist' KKE, on about 5% in the polls, has stated it will not do any deals with Syriza (or anybody else). Having said that, it is not entirely clear who there will be to haggle with. Certainly Pasok faces a potential wipe-out. Since the 1970s it has been a dominant force in Greek politics. Opinion polls now show it will be lucky to get over the 3% threshold required to enter parliament.

Pasok's situation has been made even more perilous by the sudden and unexpected formation of the Movement of Democratic Socialists (Kinima) by George Papandreou, the former Pasok leader and prime minister - as indeed were his father and grandfather before him, making it seem at times like an inherited position. Kinima will obviously take far more votes from Pasok than Syriza and presently stands at nearly 3% of the vote. Meanwhile, the Democratic Left faces annihilation and has next to no chance of passing the threshold.

That only leaves as potential partners the extremely centre-centre Potami (The River), currently averaging at about 7% in the polls, or the Independent Greeks - a *rightwing* split from ND. Yet it is hard to imagine Tsipras doing a deal with a xenophobic organisation that is virulently anti-migrant, wants the development of a "Christian Orthodox-oriented" education system and calls for the setting up of a committee "standing above" party politics that is endowed with "emergency powers" to resolve the economic crisis.

Syriza has received, however, an endorsement from an unlikely source - the Front National in France. Explaining the FN's decision to *Le Monde*, Marine Le Pen said backing Tsipras's party does not make her a "far-left activist", as the FN does not agree with Syriza's "entire programme", especially their policies on immigration.<sup>2</sup> But in countries like Spain and Greece, where there is no "equivalent" of the FN, she remarked, "it is the far left that gets our support".

## Promises

Regardless of the exact post-January 25 political configuration, Syriza will be the main party to emerge from the elections - it *wants* to 'take the power', as laid out in its programme or manifesto. No longer calling for the repudiation of the debt, Tsipras wants to convene an international conference modelled on the 1953 summit in which West Germany's debts were cut by half. In this way he hopes to renegotiate the terms of Greece's debt, which stands at a relatively staggering €252 billion - product of the largest financial bailout in modern history.



Paris 1871: Marx advised caution

However, the bailout was a classic case of the medicine that kills the patient. Most of the money handed out by the hated European Commission-European Central Bank-International Monetary Fund troika just poured straight out of the country in various debt/interest repayments to its creditors, many of them banks and hedge funds in the core euro zone countries - including, of course, Germany and France. Greece has just swapped one paymaster for another: the troika instead of the banks and the hedge funds. The country's overall debt burden has actually *increased* in the almost five years since it was first 'rescued', now standing at €320 billion and taking the level of indebtedness from 113% to 175% of the overall economy. Gross domestic product has been slashed by over a third, yet the troika demands more austerity - more pain and suffering.

Syriza has promised to repeal the labour market 'reforms'; raise the minimum wage; create 300,000 new jobs; restore electricity to families who have had the supply cut off after being unable to pay their bills; provide food stamps to children; give healthcare to the uninsured; provide a roof for the homeless; and introduce a moratorium on private debt repayments to banks above 30% of disposable income. The party also seeks to abolish the economic privileges enjoyed by the Greek Orthodox church and shipping industry, reduce military spending, raise taxes on big companies and set a 75% tax on incomes over €500,000.

But Christine Lagarde, the head of the IMF, is less than impressed by Syriza's platform. On January 19 she warned in *The Irish Times* that "defaulting", "restructuring" or "changing the terms" of the conditions attached to the bailout would have "consequences" for Greece's international credibility. "A debt is a debt and it is a contract," she declared. Similarly, Wolfgang Schäuble, Germany's finance minister, has insisted that "there is no alternative" to the current programme. As for Evangelos Venizelos, the deputy prime minister and current Pasok leader, he has compared Tsipras to Harry Potter - conjuring up promises in a "magical way" that he will never be able to keep.<sup>3</sup> Then again, Venizelos has said that the debt is "technically" sustainable - suggesting that his own grasp on reality is less than solid.

However, the more intelligent sections of the bourgeoisie argue that a 'radical' Syriza government led by Alexis Tsipras need not necessarily be a disaster - in fact, it might even be a

good thing. Thus Tony Barber in the *Financial Times* presents the coming general election as a "duel between reason and unreason" within Syriza and by extension the left as a whole in Greece (January 20). If Syriza wins the election, but gains fewer than 150 seats, he writes, that would enable Tsipras to keep the "radicals at arm's length and toe a moderate line" - Barber reminds us that Syriza is "not a harmonious party that sings from one song sheet, but a dissonant collection of dogmatic Marxists, diehard Che Guevara fans, defectors from Greece's Pasok socialist party and such like" (January 20). Without an overall majority, continues Barber, Tsipras would have to rely on one of several 'moderate' centre-left parties (ie, Potami) to join him in a coalition or to provide parliamentary support for a minority government.

Under such circumstances, Barber calculates, Tsipras "would not be free to implement certain core policies on which he had just won the election" and hence, in a more "reasoning" frame of mind, he would "quickly" reopen talks with Greece's creditors - securing a precautionary credit line and ECB help, including the purchase of Greek government bonds in return for an "unbreakable commitment" to the "fiscal discipline" and "structural economic reform" pursued by Greek governments since 2010. In conclusion, Barber takes comfort from the latest opinion polls that give Syriza a "healthy" lead over ND - just enough to win power, but not enough to be certain of an outright majority. The almost ideal result.

Unsurprisingly, Potami has already laid out its pitch. The three conditions it places on joining a coalition with Syriza are: firstly that it is allocated control of *whole* ministries (ie, is not reduced to some junior ministerial position); secondly, that no-one *from the left* of Syriza is allowed to have any ministerial position at all; and lastly that the incoming government declares it will never leave the euro.

## Permanent revolution

Quite naturally, a lot of the left are getting excited. Hence the January 17 edition of *Morning Star* contains an article by comrade Kevin Ovenden strangely entitled: "Athens stands on the verge of its liberation" (why just Athens?). Thankfully, the actual article is not as stupid as the headline. We discover that the comrade, who split from the Socialist Workers Party and

went native inside George Galloway's Respect mini-party, is being funded to cover the Greek general election by Philosophy Football - an outfit set up by the Eurocommunist, Mark Perryman.<sup>4</sup>

Anyway, comrade Ovenden informs us that Greece is about to elect a "government of the left" - noting that the labour and social movements in that country offer an "internationalist rejection of all the elites" that have previously governed the country. True, the comrade poses a few tricky rhetorical questions - "Will Syriza buckle under pressure or open a new chapter of hope?" "Can life for the mass of people become tolerable under the intolerable structures of the euro and EU?" And so on. But in the "spirit of radical, plebeian democracy", the comrade urges that the British and international left "throws itself into those debates" - the European working class should set "all eyes to Athens", demanding: "Don't let them fight alone".

Similar sentiments are expressed by comrade Sandy McBurney in a letter to the *Weekly Worker* ('Austerity', January 15). He scoffs at the CPGB view that Syriza should *not* take power or enter into coalition, a stance that is "hard to credit". Indeed, it is "unbelievably defeatist stuff" from an organisation that claims to be Marxist - he finds it "hard to fathom" how you can "successfully" build solidarity with the Greek working class, whilst "stating that their struggle is doomed to defeat if they try to take power". On the contrary, believes the comrade, if the Greek workers - or Syriza - do not try to take power, then they really are doomed.

Though he might not like us saying this, comrade McBurney's argument is distinctly reminiscent of the rightwing Labourites - winning elections is everything: bugged principle or programme. Say or do anything to get elected. Unless we form a government or control a council, take power in some way, then what can we do? We leave ourselves powerless. Shouting from the sidelines.

But comrade McBurney's stance is in flat contradiction to the classical, orthodox, Marxist viewpoint. Adapting a phrase already in use, what Marx termed 'permanent revolution' is a drawn-out process, where the proletarian party will refuse to take power, while fighting to push the revolution forward: constituting itself as a party of extreme opposition. Marx consistently said working class parties should not be prematurely tempted by power in an individual state, even when circumstances clearly make that a viable possibility. Instead, build up your strength, develop your international contacts, deepen your roots in society, etc. That has *always* been the programme of Marxism.

Or, to put it another way, the classical Marxist approach has historically been more about *holding back the spontaneous* working class movement. There are reams of letters from Marx and Engels approving and promoting this position. The Second International was opposed to coalitions with bourgeois and petty bourgeois parties as a matter of principle.

That is precisely why for some people the Bolsheviks raised programmatic eyebrows, because they actually advocated 'taking the power'. But they did so on the basis of their *minimum* programme in alliance with the revolutionary peasantry. This was not the standard Marxist approach at the time, which essentially was to wait for working class numbers to grow (ie,

the Mensheviks). But, as Lenin and just about everybody else knew, Russia was obviously *ripe* for revolution - ie, the overthrow of the tsarist regime. Even more to the point, Karl Kautsky had been writing for some years that the coming Russian Revolution would act as a trigger to *inspire the socialist revolution in Europe* - a key factor.

Then take a look at Marx's view in 1871 of the Paris Commune, which was quite simple - *do not take power*. Trying to take power in Paris alone was a hopeless position: you would inevitably be crushed by the forces of counterrevolution. Even taking power in the country *as a whole* would have been a hopelessly reckless move. But, of course, once the working class did take power in Paris, then the entire movement was obliged to defend the Communards - anything else would have been treachery deserving contempt, if not a bullet. Yet the straightforward reality was that, as a result of 'taking the power' in Paris, the First International collapsed. Tens of thousands of the most dedicated and self-sacrificing working class revolutionaries and radicals were killed or sent into exile - setting the working class movement back at least a generation, just as Marx had warned.

Furthermore, see how the Bolsheviks behaved during 1917 in Petrograd and Moscow - they had a majority in the soviets and everyone knew the working class could take power whenever it wanted. But what did the Bolsheviks say? Hold back, wait for the peasantry to catch up - encourage it to move, to become revolutionary. Do not take power *prematurely*, that would invite disaster. And, when the Bolsheviks - and their allies - did finally take power, it was, as Lenin repeatedly emphasised, a *gamble* on the outbreak of European revolution in particular in Germany, where there was a strong and militant anti-war movement led by the Independent Social Democratic Party - a party that united Bernstein, Kautsky, Zetkin, Liebknecht and Luxemburg. Economically advanced Germany would come to the rescue of economically backward Russia.

Can anyone seriously tell us today that Italy, let alone France or Germany - or Britain - is going to come to the rescue of Greece? Demonstrations, yes, but taking power? A complete fantasy. In other words, the CPGB is right to stand full-square on the classic Marxist tradition. But, of course, if Syriza forms a government we, along with others on the left, will defend it against the IMF, ECB, Nato, etc.

Finally, it is a complete fallacy to say that you cannot do anything if you do not take power. For example, the left in Greece could campaign against the 50-seat top-up - making the point that our class needs to win *majority* support for its programme, as part of an *internationalist* movement for superseding capitalism. The left should also fight to disband the standing army, withdraw from Nato, defend and extend democratic rights, organise the unemployed, build more effective trade unions, etc. Most importantly, the left in Greece needs to be a leading force for principled unity of the working class across Europe ●

eddie.ford@weeklyworker.co.uk

## Notes

1. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_River\\_%28Greece%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_River_%28Greece%29).
2. [www.france24.com/en/20150120-france-far-right-syriza-greece-poll](http://www.france24.com/en/20150120-france-far-right-syriza-greece-poll).
3. *The Daily Telegraph* January 19.
4. See [www.philosophyfootball.com](http://www.philosophyfootball.com).

IRELAND

# Desire to take power triumphs

Anne McShane describes how Sinn Féin has gone about trying to wreck the Right to Water campaign

The determination of Sinn Féin to divert the current struggle against water charges into a movement to support its own electoral ambitions has resulted in demoralisation, confusion and divisions within the working class. Its influence within the official national campaign, Right to Water (RtW), has profoundly undermined the mass movement that had come together in opposition to the government's austerity agenda.

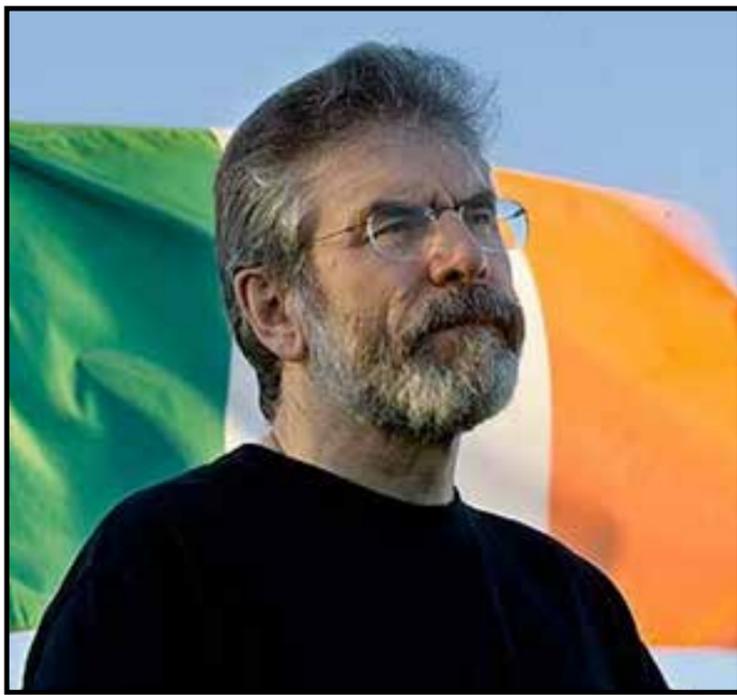
RtW was launched in April of last year by the leaderships of the Unite and Mandate trade unions, along with Sinn Féin. A number of left groups and individuals, including the Socialist Workers Party, the Communist Party of Ireland and the Workers Party, also joined. Some local groups were formed, but there was never any national organisation on the ground and certainly no transparency or accountability. Instead RtW mobilised through a series of three national demonstrations, which all the local groups built for. It provided a national focus, but no involvement in terms of decision-making.

However, as 2014 drew to a close, it became clear that there was a sharp disjuncture between the aims of the movement and the leadership. Militant protests against the installation of water meters resulted in arrests, but the RtW leadership refused to come out in support of the protestors. Calls from local groups for the leadership to adopt a non-payment strategy went unheeded. Then on December 31, on the eve of the signing into law of the latest water charge legislation, the RtW leadership announced a retreat from holding demonstrations. There would be a switch instead to campaigning for the election of a party to repeal the legislation. We now needed to elect politicians who "enact laws that are wanted and needed by the people they are elected to represent".<sup>1</sup>

The message was clear. RtW would not call for or lead a boycott of the water charge. It was also evident that it wanted no competition for its continued hold over the movement. In a thinly veiled attack on the Socialist Party, which had set up a separate non-payment campaign, it accused the SP of sectarian adherence to a particular tactic (the boycott) - this "narrowness of focus has killed many protests, such as the household charge protests, and created deep distrust of all politicians".

A further announcement, on January 6, adopted a more cautious approach, while still refusing to call for a boycott (after a rebellion by the SWP and a number of individuals who attend RtW meetings). It was now stated that RtW "does not advocate any specific tactics" and that the "three pillars" of the campaign - political, trade union and community - along with all groups and individuals, could pursue whatever they thought best. The unions could not be expected to call for a boycott, as they "can only advocate non-payment if their members put a motion to their annual or biennial conference and it is passed by a majority of their delegates (shop stewards)". Also "some political parties, who have their own democratic structures, have not taken positions of advocating non-payment". The only political party involved in RtW which does not advocate non-payment is, of course, Sinn Féin.

The most recent report from the RtW steering group (January 9) stated that the "consensus from the meeting [on January 8] is that the Right2Water organisers will take a number of weeks to prepare a comprehensive campaign strategy for 2015, including a timetable of events and a sustainable funding model".<sup>2</sup> With the Irish media and government in full swing to push,



Gerry Adams: gone respectable

intimidate and cajole the population into payment, there could not have been a worse time to take a break if you really want to win this battle. And there is no reason why unions could not call special conferences to ballot their members.

## Respectable

Sinn Féin itself had the opportunity to adopt a boycott tactic at its recent conference.

But in reality Gerry Adams and the party leadership would not want a militant non-payment campaign, which might damage their prospects of forming the next government. Adams' success in making it a respectable mainstream party in the south of Ireland would be undercut if he called for defiance of the law or supported the continuation of a movement that would challenge its claim to be the anti-austerity party. His election as TD for Louth and the trebling of the number of seats won by Sinn Féin in 2011 was on the basis of posing as exactly that. It pledged to "use its enhanced position, which affords it new speaking and debating opportunities, to ensure that the government is held to account and will aim to prevent any attacks by the government on the most vulnerable sectors of our society".<sup>3</sup>

Under the all-Ireland leadership of Adams, who resigned his Westminster seat to stand in the Dáil election, the party has propelled itself into a good position to benefit electorally from the numerous mass revolts against the government since 2011. Adams claims that his party represents the interests of the ordinary people - a voice of genuine, plebian republicanism, as opposed to Fianna Fáil, the establishment republican party. With the centenary celebrations due next year, the Sinn Féin leadership wants to be seen as the natural heir to the radical nationalism of the Easter Rising. The 1916 Proclamation of the Irish Republic committed itself to the creation of a nation based on "religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens" and "the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts". This popular image of a nation of equals is again being urged on the Irish working class by the Sinn Féin propaganda machine in its call for the membership to "help us to finish the revolution for a new republic".<sup>4</sup>

Sinn Féin describes itself as an intrinsic part of a European-wide anti-austerity opposition, including Syriza in Greece. MEP Matt McCarthy

recently claimed that in "Ireland it is Sinn Féin who is positioned to bring about the new policies and politics that are required. Our vision of unity, equality and fairness is resonating with more and more people every day."<sup>5</sup> Its commitment to "prosperity and fairness" would rescue the Irish people from the ravages of recession and the collapse of the Celtic Tiger. In its 2015 'alternative budget' Sinn Féin states that its mission is "to undo the damage done to the economy and to wider society by bad political choices made by Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Labour. The deficit could have been reduced in a fair and sustainable manner."<sup>6</sup> Instead Sinn Féin states that it will assist economic recovery in a more equitable way, through an increase in taxes on higher incomes and capital transactions, a hike in stamp and excise duties, and the introduction of a 48% tax band for incomes over €100,000. Irish capitalism can be made to work for the entire people.

The Sinn Féin budget proposals are hardly radical. Many of the worst of the recent attacks will not be abolished, including the universal social charge. Also the body set up to administer the charges, Irish Water, seems unlikely to be disbanded. In a recent radio interview Adams said he thought it was too late to transfer the responsibility back to local councils. It was clear that, as far as he is concerned, the charges have now become a *fait accompli* until such time as his party gets into government. Then and only then will there be any change (or so he says).

Of course, if Sinn Féin does go into government, it will not do so as a junior partner of one of the other republican parties. Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin are currently locked in battle over which party most deserves the mantle of Easter 1916. Fianna Fáil's constitution also reflects the Easter proclamation, with a commitment to "guarantee religious and civil liberty, and equal rights, equal treatment and equal opportunities for all the people of Ireland". It also pledges to "develop the resources and wealth of Ireland to their full potential, while making them subservient to the needs and welfare of all the people of Ireland".<sup>7</sup>

All these lofty ideals mean little when it comes to actually running capitalism. Fianna Fáil, in power for 61 out of the last 79 years, has earned a deserved reputation for arrogance and greed. Its former leaders, from arch-conservative Éamon De Valera to Charles Haughey, Bertie Ahern and Brian Cowan, have

presided over deeply reactionary and corrupt administrations. There has been little that the Irish governing class has been unwilling to do in pursuit of profit and personal wealth. People know today that Fianna Fáil's commitment to liberty and equal rights is a complete fallacy. The only ones who have benefited from its successive spells in government have been those looking for opportunities to make a corrupt fortune. The Celtic Tiger, its collapse, the bank bailouts and the austerity programme - all these are the results of a republican party in government.

Equality and fairness were not major factors in De Valera's mind when he drafted the 1937 constitution, which enshrined the role of the Catholic church and the subservience of Irish women. Neither was it much of an issue for successive Fianna Fáil governments, which campaigned fiercely against any abortion rights for Irish women and which had the constitution amended in 1983 to give the 'unborn' equal rights with women. Nor was it much in the minds of Sinn Féin TDs, who more recently voted against Clare Daly's private members bill to introduce limited abortion rights and, along with all the other mainstream parties, refused the holding of a referendum on this part of the constitution.

Why should Sinn Féin's brand of new republicanism be any different from what has been before?

## Like the north?

Sinn Féin is in government in the north of Ireland. Recently, in talks with the British government, it agreed to sign up to major cuts in state funding for services - 20,000 jobs go in the public sector. It also signed up to changes in social welfare. The party had objected to making the cuts, but nevertheless went ahead and agreed when put under pressure. Sinn Féin objects that it had played a positive role in all this, in that people had been shielded from far worse Tory cuts by its presence in the Stormont administration.

But that is exactly the same plea made by the Labour Party here in the south. It claims that the Fine

Gael administration would have been even tougher if it had not been for its presence in cabinet. It assures us that we were lucky things were not worse. The truth, of course, is that capitalism is inherently incapable of providing what the working class needs. The interests of the two main classes are antithetical and no fiery Sinn Féin speeches will change that fact. Irish history has shown that nationalism is a cul de sac. The present-day problems within the anti-water charges movement, caused by the influence of Sinn Féin, are an important lesson.

Instead we need to create our own party. A party of the working class based on Marxism, armed with a programme for what the working class needs to become a ruling class. We need a party that is democratic, open and accountable. We have seen glimpses of how democracy and transparency can work to build trust and leadership among local campaigns. Hopefully we will also experience it in the national boycott campaign, to be launched on January 24 - a campaign which is delegate-based and accountable, with open and free discussion and debate. Those same principles need to be applied, on a higher level, to the formation of a party. The discussion on this question cannot be put off. Whether this struggle is successful or not, there are bigger challenges to face. A single-issue campaign or an electoral bloc based on minimal demands cannot fulfil the urgent need for leadership.

The history of our movement and the demands of the time show that the realisation of a new society can only come about through the self-activity of our class, organised and ready for power ●

anne.mcshane@weeklyworker.co.uk

## Notes

1. www.right2water.ie/blog/2015-year-we-change-ireland.
2. www.right2water.ie/blog/right2water-steering-group-report.
3. www.sinnfein.ie/dail-members.
4. www.sinnfein.ie/get-involved.
5. www.sinnfein.ie/contents/32844.
6. www.sinnfein.ie/budget-2015.
7. www.fiannafail.ie/content/pages/5097.

## Fighting fund

### Can you help?

That old communist stalwart, comrade TM, has finally accepted that he has to adapt to the 21st century, even at his age in life. TM handed over £80 in cash as his contribution to our January fighting fund earlier this week, but, now that he finds the trip to the *Weekly Worker* office a little taxing, he has finally accepted that letting the bank do the work might be a good idea. So he's promised to set up a standing order.

Nice one, comrade! And what a good idea it would also be if other comrades followed his example. You see, the problem is not that our supporters are ungenerous: it's that too many of them aren't sufficiently organised in their generosity. So they'll send us a cheque - when they remember - which, of course, is always welcome. But how much better it would be if they ensured that their financial support was regular.

That's why we've decided to launch a campaign to increase the number and size of the standing orders that come in to our fighting

fund, to ensure we actually reach our £1,750 monthly target. Since we raised the target to that amount late last year, we've been struggling to get there. This month, for example, the total received stands at £1,076, with just over a week to go - so we need to pull in almost £100 a day by January 31.

Over the last week £330 was donated via existing standing orders - thanks to SK, MM, SEP, PM and SP. Then there were two cheques from LP (£30) and DR (£20), plus a lone PayPal donation for £12 from JS. The £472 that came in is actually pretty impressive for one week - if we always managed that, we'd be home and dry every month. But unfortunately we don't - which is why we really could do - with a big response to our forthcoming standing order campaign.

Can you help? ●

Robbie Rix

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

**ECONOMY**

# The spectre of deflation

Will falling prices help stimulate the economy? Michael Roberts argues that, on the contrary, profits will be squeezed

The huge fall in energy and other commodity prices towards the end of 2014 has driven the overall rate of inflation in prices of all commodities down. It increasingly looks likely that this is not just a temporary phenomenon caused by a competitive battle to gain market share in the sale of oil and other energy products. Low inflation - and deflation - is here to stay.

In December, the euro zone fell into deflation for the first time in more than five years. Japan is nearly back there, while US and UK annual inflation rates are well under central bank targets of 2% a year.

**Good news or bad?**

Is this good news? Will low price inflation or even falling prices mean more money in the pockets and bank accounts of working class households in the major economies, allowing them to spend more and so boost demand for goods and services in the economy? Or do deflating prices mean a squeeze on the profits of capitalist combines, reducing their ability and willingness to invest in more technology and jobs?

The answer is both. But the question at debate is, which factor will dominate? If it is the former, then low and falling prices could support an acceleration in the economic recovery that has been so sadly lacking since the end of the great recession in 2009. Combined with faster growth in gross domestic product and employment in the US, this suggests a more optimistic scenario for capitalism in 2015. Lower gasoline prices means that American and other households can spend more money on other goods and so boost demand.

This is the argument of the optimists among the mainstream. This argument was recently well presented by Gavyn Davies, former chief economist of Goldman Sachs and now a columnist for the *Financial Times*. As he put it,

After several years in which inadequate demand has seriously constrained activity in the global economy, causing repeated downgrades to growth forecasts, 2015 should see an improvement. Lower oil prices and a more demand-friendly fiscal/monetary policy mix should result in faster growth in aggregate demand ... This will be a year in which excess capacity in the global economy will start to be absorbed.<sup>1</sup>

Davies pins this forecast on the apparent pick-up in demand and employment in the US. With 'potential' long-term growth in the US fixed at about 1.7%, Davies expects the US economy to grow some way above that in 2015. He recognises that the euro zone and Japan are struggling to avoid a new recession, but hopes the European Central Bank (ECB) will introduce quantitative easing, although "It is very doubtful whether this will be enough to restore inflation expectations fully to the ECB's target, considering that headline inflation will dip to zero, as oil price effects feed through the system." Nevertheless, real GDP growth should improve in 2015. As for the emerging economies, China may be slowing down, but will still manage 6%-7% a year, so that overall global growth would reach 3%, up from 2014.

When we consider the evidence from economic data from the end of 2014 and into 2015, it is not encouraging for Davies's assessment. Take Germany, the only powerhouse



**Currency goes up ... and so does debt**

of growth in the euro zone. Factory orders there fell 2.4% in November, much more than expected. Germany factory output was also much weaker than economists had forecast in November, falling by 0.1% from the previous month. It is now falling by 0.5% year on year.

UK industrial production and construction output also unexpectedly contracted in November, falling 2% month on month - a bad miss from expectations for a rebound after October's shrinkage. Construction output is up 3.6% this year, well short of hopes for a 6.7% reading. That is a sign that the driver of UK growth in 2014 - the property boom - is coming to an end. French industrial production also fell last November by 0.3% after a monthly fall of 0.8% in October.

The US economy is now regarded as the main global growth driver for 2015. But will US growth be enough to stimulate the rest of the world? The latest figures of factory goods orders were not promising. In November, they fell 0.7%, so that the year-on-year figure was down 1% compared to a rise of 2.1% in October. In contrast, US employment has been picking up. In 2014, the number of jobs rose more than in any year since 1999. The unemployment rate ended the year at 5.6%, the lowest since the great recession.

But, when compared to those of working age, the share of Americans with jobs or actively seeking employment fell back to a three-decade low of 62.7% in December. And the level of long-term unemployed remains well above that before the great recession. Most important, average hourly earnings rose only 2.3% in 2014. So more jobs have not produced higher real incomes from work. Indeed, in November, hourly earnings for private-sector employees fell by five cents to \$24.57 - marking the largest monthly decrease since at least 2006. What seems to be happening is that those getting jobs are doing so in low-paid sectors like retailing and in part-time holiday work. These 'entry-level' workers get paid less. This story is repeated in the UK

and Japan.

Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe, who has just won another term of office, claimed that his so-called 'Abenomics' would raise wages and employment to revive the economy and defeat deflation or price falls. Yet earnings (adjusted for inflation) dropped 4.3% from a year earlier in November. It is the steepest decline since the 2009 global crisis and marks the 17th month of falls. Inflation has clocked in at a 14-month low. The slowdown in China threatens to push the economy into deflation there too.

Worldwide, the latest economic activity indexes suggest a slowdown, not an acceleration, in growth. I have constructed a composite index of national business activity indexes (PMIs). I find that developed capitalist economies (DE) are still expanding (above 50), but at a much slower rate than last summer, while emerging economies (including China) are not accelerating. So the world economy is in a lower gear than a year ago.

While Gavyn Davies may be optimistic about global economic growth in 2015 because of 'higher demand', Tim Adam, the president of the Institute of International Finance - a group that represents the world's largest banks, pension funds and insurance companies - is much less so:

The question is, can a wealth effect in a liquidity-juiced US economy provide the engine of growth for the global economy? ... One could have a fairly pessimistic outlook on global growth if you take all these things into consideration.<sup>2</sup>

The International Monetary Fund is also doubtful that lower oil prices will lead to a consumer boom. In its latest economic forecast, Olivier Blanchard, the IMF chief economist, commented that there were

new factors supporting growth: lower oil prices, but also depreciation of euro and yen. But they are more than offset by persistent negative forces,

including the lingering legacies of the crisis and lower potential growth in many countries.<sup>3</sup>

It seems much more likely that low inflation and deflation of overall prices is not just the result of an oil glut from extra US fracking production and extra Saudi pumping of reserves, but due more to a general slowdown in global demand.

*The Economist* agrees. As the magazine explains,

The drop in oil prices is in part due to higher supply, but it is also the product of slowing growth around the world. China's slackened appetite for raw materials has hit emerging-market commodity suppliers particularly hard. And an energy-induced drop in prices, though good for consumer purchasing power, risks reinforcing expectations of lower inflation overall; it is part of the threat's pernicious nature that such expectations easily become self-fulfilling.<sup>4</sup>

While lower prices may benefit average households in reducing their energy bills, so that they can spend more on other things, it puts downward pressure on the profitability of capitalist production. This might inspire the introduction of new technology to lower costs. But there is little sign of that at present in the major capitalist economies. The energy producers are cutting back on investment globally (some 40% of total capital investment), and other sectors are not compensating.

**Two sorts of deflation**

In a way, there are two sorts of deflation. The first arises from the decline in the value of each unit of production, as investment in technology replaces labour and/or increases its productivity. *Ceteris paribus*, the cost of production will fall and, with it, the price of the commodity. This is a tendency

inherent in the capitalist mode of production that is at the essence of Marx's law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall in capitalist production. It can be counteracted by a number of factors, including monopoly pricing and a credit-fuelled boost to the demand for goods, services and financial assets (quantitative easing, for example). But the downward pressure on profitability through a fall in the price per unit of production is always there.

However, the current deflationary pressures come from the crisis in capitalist production. A capitalist slump takes the form of a sharp reduction in capital values: in other words, a fall in the value of existing capital (both technology and the labour force). As the labour force is turned into a reserve army of labour and weaker firms go bust or are taken over and 'restructured', labour incomes fall and so does demand for goods and services. This 'realisation crisis' (for sales) is expressed in a fall in prices. And it is this that is being exhibited now.

The global economic slowdown has led to a reduction in global demand growth for energy and other commodities (alongside 'overproduction' of oil, etc), as well as in investment demand. Inflation has slowed and in the very depressed parts of the global economy there is outright deflation.

Most capitalist firms are continuing to try and boost profitability through raising profit margins by holding down wages. A recent staff paper by the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco argued that "wage stickiness" had hampered American firms' ability to adjust costs during the great recession.<sup>5</sup> The paper argues that wage rates stayed up "too much", so firms would rather not raise wages now in the recovery. Now, if sales demand and price rises should slow again, there could be a "pent-up" demand to cut more jobs. So the improvement in the US jobs market could grind to a halt.

World inflation has been very low since the great recession - another indicator of the long depression that the world economy has been locked into. What inflation of prices there has been was mainly due to the sharp rise in energy prices since 2009. Non-energy price rises have been minimal. But now, with the sharp fall in energy and other commodity prices (metals, food, etc), deflation is beginning to submerge economies.

Oxford Economics finds that if oil prices were to fall to as low as \$40 a barrel, then 41 out of the 45 countries would experience deflation. Some argue that this is good news. This is the line of some mainstream economists. For them, falling prices, particularly in energy and food, will raise consumer purchasing power, and help boost consumer demand and thus economic growth. But for profitability it is bad news. Inflation of corporate producer prices has been a 'counteracting tendency' to the tendency of capital accumulation to experience falling profitability. If prices stop rising, then the downward pressure on profitability from any new technology investment will be greater, as falling prices squeeze profit margins.

**Profitability and deflation**

Profit margins are currently at record levels in the US. But the tendency for profitability to fall is still there. A

recent paper by Barclays Bank on US corporate profitability explained:

... higher profit margins are not leading to higher rates of return on capital. Indeed, profit margins have climbed steadily higher for nearly three decades. But return on capital measures, such as return on invested capital (ROIC) and return on equity (ROE), have not.

Barclays' economists offer an answer to this conundrum:

We believe the answer is less asset turnover, defined as the ratio of revenues to assets. If a company generates fewer revenues per unit of assets, then it must earn higher margins on those sales to maintain the same return on capital.<sup>6</sup>

In other words, higher profit margins have not been enough to compensate for the cost of investing in assets and make them work fast enough to generate more profit. This is what Marx would have called a rising organic composition of capital (the cost of machinery outstripping the cost of employing labour) rising faster than any increase in the rate of exploitation of labour (margins). This is Marx's law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall - and it continues to operate in the US economy.

Why does the cost of accumulated investment in machinery, plant and technology outstrip the gain of record high profit margins? One of the reasons is that the vast majority of the value of the existing capital stock is in structures - houses, apartments and offices - rather than equipment or 'intellectual property' (software, etc). Advanced technology accounts for only a small fraction of the capital stock, and this fraction has been roughly stable over the last several decades.

Structures continue to comprise the vast majority of the private capital stock in the US - 175% of GDP at current prices. The other components of private capital - equipment, intellectual property and consumer durables - are much smaller, and within them the share of capital related to automation and the information revolution is smaller still. Within equipment, for instance, 'information processing equipment' (computers, communication, medical, etc) is only 8% of GDP, as compared to 27% of GDP for all other equipment. Software is 4% of GDP, versus 11% for other intellectual property. And technology-intensive consumer durables (computers, TVs, phones, etc) stand at 3% of GDP, as opposed to 27% for other durables.

So the productivity-enhancing effect of investment in new technology and the holding down of wages and employment may boost the rate of surplus value and profit margins. But this has not been enough to drive profitability back up to pre-crisis levels, especially when many businesses face higher debt levels and a slow growth economy.

Indeed, the huge cash hoards that the largest companies in the G7 economies built up in recent years by squeezing wages and jobs and not investing are now beginning to decline, as companies buy back their own shares and pay out dividends to their shareholders.

## Debt and deflation

In a slump or depression, the second sort of deflation is at work. And it is reinforcing. The mainstream economist of the 1930s depression, Irving Fisher, dubbed it a debt-deflation spiral.<sup>7</sup> If prices fall, debt becomes larger in real terms to pay back. So more companies and households default on their loans, bonds or mortgages. Those defaults reduce incomes and demand in the

economy further and the slump deepens. Deflation is worsened.

Debt in most mature capitalist economies remains high. As the EU Commission in its latest report put it,

... recoveries following deep financial crises are more subdued than recoveries following normal recessions ... recent estimates suggest that it would take about 6½ years (median) or eight years (mean) to return to the pre-crisis income level in the wake of a deep economic and financial crisis ... the recovery from the recession in 2008-09 has been slower than any other recovery in the post-World War II period on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>8</sup>

So the global financial crash is the biggest factor in making the recovery slower than normal. The crash and the subsequent bailout by governments across the major economies, by incurring more debt, left a heavy burden of debt financing, despite near zero interest rates. As the OECD shows, overall debt levels in the main economies are higher now than they were in 2007. And China too has built up debt that is close to many advanced economies.

The EU Commission makes the point that a possible reason why the US economy has recovered better is that "US corporations have cut debt more than those in the euro area. This has been supported by positive profitability trends, providing companies in the US with the internal funds necessary for adjustment of balance sheets." The Commission argues that "delayed deleveraging in Europe can be expected to weigh on investment

households rises and, if the Fed goes ahead with its plan to raise interest rates later this year, then the cost of servicing that debt will rise, hitting the ability of companies to invest and households to spend.

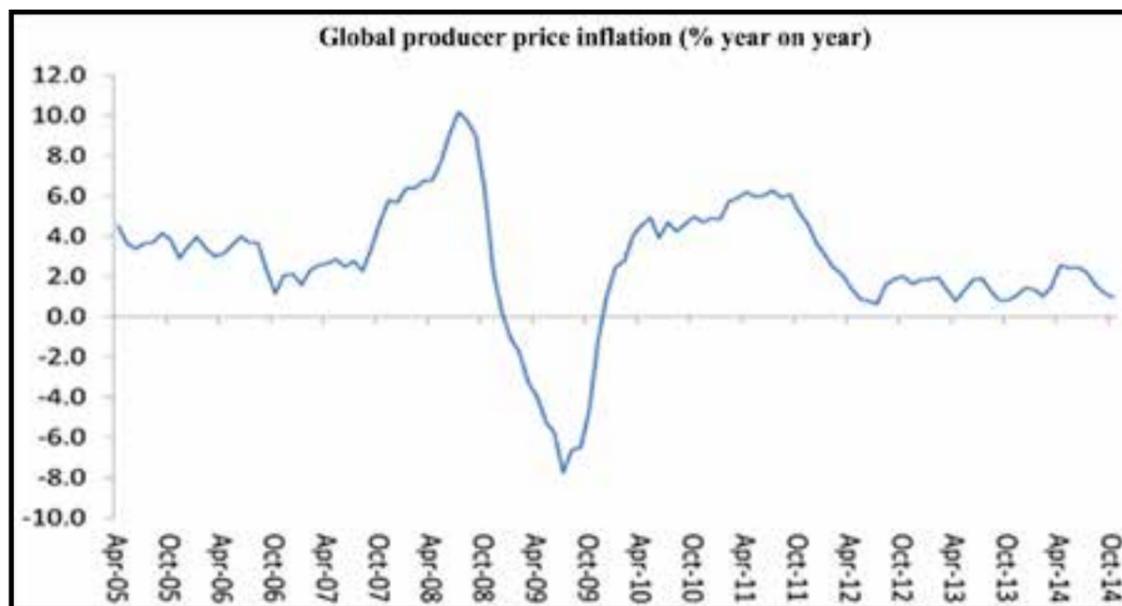
Take Greece. Prices have been falling for nearly two years. Indeed, in December, deflation deepened to a 2.5% annual rate. Back in 2012, the EU leaders finally recognised that the huge public-sector debt that the Greeks had incurred in bailing out their banks and in funding the repayment of debt and interest to foreign lenders (mainly German and French banks) was just too great. They agreed with the conservative government in Athens that more funds would be made available, but that private creditors would take a 'haircut' in what was owed them. So French and German creditors swapped their Greek government bonds for new ones worth a little less, but guaranteed by the euro stability funds.

This 'haircut' (along with savage austerity measures) was designed to reduce Greek government debt from 165% to 120% of GDP by the end of this decade. But the problem is that, if the Greek economy does not grow and drops into a deflationary spiral, then, even if the euro value of Greek debt is reduced, the euro value of Greek GDP will fall even more, so that the debt burden rises, not falls. And that is what is happening. In 2012, after the restructuring, the public-sector debt ratio stood at 165%. Three years later, it now stands at just under 175%. No wonder the first issue on the agenda of negotiations between an impending Syriza government and the euro leaders is precisely the debt.

faster than the 2.5% rate in 2014 or 3.2% in 2015. But it made the point that supposedly stronger US economic growth this year would be unable to compensate for slowing growth and deflation elsewhere: in the euro zone, Japan and the major emerging economies of Russia, Brazil, China, South Africa and Turkey (only India might grow faster this year). World trade growth continues to fall well behind trend before the great recession. The so-called emerging economies are running well below their full potential, according to the World Bank.

Now the IMF has joined the World Bank in cutting its forecasts - yet again. Global growth is now projected at 3.5 percent for 2015 and 3.7 percent for 2016, lowering its forecast by 0.3 percentage points for both years.

So this is not a normal 'recovery'; it is not 'a return to normal'. The great recession has morphed into what I call a long depression, with real GDP growth in the major economies well below the historic trend average, led by really weak business investment. The global economy is stuck in 'low gear'. As OECD puts it in its latest report, the world economy "is expected to accelerate gradually if countries implement growth-supportive policies".<sup>12</sup> Note the caveat: *if* the G20 leaders adopt more "growth-supportive" measures. OECD reckons that global real GDP growth was just 3.3% in 2014, but will "accelerate" to 3.7% in 2015 and 3.9% in 2016. But even that will be "modest compared with the pre-crisis period and somewhat below the long-term average".



activity and thus to explain partly the gap between the contributions to GDP growth in the euro area and in the US."

Financial debt has shrunk as a result of the global financial crash, but it has been replaced by a large rise in government debt used to bail out the banks. Since the financial crisis struck in 2008, the world has become more leveraged; total public and private debt reached 272% of developed-world GDP in 2013, according to a report put out under the aegis of the Geneva Reports on the World Economy.<sup>9</sup>

Debt is high and economies are growing more slowly than before the crisis, so they are not generating the incomes to service the debt as rapidly as they were. Household incomes, company revenues and government tax receipts can rise or fall, but debt payments are often fixed. Low inflation, especially if it is lower than borrowers expected when they took their loan, weakens that process and leaves debt burdens heavier than they would have been. Outright deflation would be even more burdensome.

The problem with low inflation and/or deflation is that the real value of existing debt owed by firms and

The IMF reckons that this debt ratio can fall by 40 percentage points by 2019 - *if* austerity continues, as agreed by the conservative government, real GDP grows by over 3% a year and inflation returns at a rate of over 1% a year. Instead the Greek economy is deflating. The debt ratio is likely to rise even more.

## The long depression

It is now seven years since the great recession started across the major economies. As IMF director general Christine Lagarde puts it, global growth is "still too low, too brittle and too lopsided". There was a risk, she added, of the euro zone and Japan getting stuck "in a world of low growth and low inflation for a prolonged period".<sup>10</sup>

The World Bank has cut its forecast for global real GDP growth - yet again.<sup>11</sup> The bank forecast the world economy will grow 3.0% this year and 3.3% in 2016 - down from its earlier forecast of 3.4% and 3.5% respectively. Indeed, this lower forecast relies on the US growing

This mild acceleration - assuming it is achieved, and that is open to serious doubt - will be led by the US economy, says the OECD. OECD recognises that Europe and Japan will be lucky to grow more than 1% over the same period. The stagnation in Europe, particularly the euro zone, was also confirmed by the latest forecasts from the EU commission. The commission cut its forecasts yet again, saying the euro zone would expand by only 0.8% in 2014, 1.1% in 2015 and by 1.7% in 2016 - the 2016 level it said six months ago would be achieved in 2015. So once again, the commission has cut its more optimistic forecasts: it is always jam tomorrow.

OECD commented in its report that "we have yet to achieve a broad-based, sustained global expansion, as investment, credit and international trade remain hesitant". And the EU's economics commissioner, Pierre Moscovici, repeated much the same thing: "There is no single and simple answer. The economic recovery is clearly struggling to gather momentum."

Higher profits have enabled US corporations to hoard cash, buy back

their own shares to boost the market value of the company, and thus executive bonuses and share options, but it has also allowed a relatively faster rise in productive investment, albeit still poor compared with before the great recession. Investment in productive assets per head of population still has not reached the peak levels of 2007 in any of the major advanced capitalist economies, but at least the US has done better.

Total investment relative to GDP in the G7 economies stood at 19.3% in 2013 - a decline of 2.6 percentage points relative to 2007. Business investment (ie, investment in machinery, equipment, transport, structures and intangible assets) has been especially weak. In the second quarter of 2014, G7 private, non-residential investment amounted to 12.4% of GDP, compared to the peak of 13.3% in 2008.

The whole situation reminds me of 1937 during the great depression. Then it appeared to the US authorities that the slump was over and it was time to 'normalise' interest rates. On doing so, however, the US economy promptly dropped back into a new recession that was only overcome when the US entered the world war in 1941. The reality was that the profitability of capital and investment had not really recovered and raising the cost of borrowing on still high debt tipped the economy back.

The key indicator is business investment. Where investment goes, so will growth. But investment follows profits. Profits call the tune. And in the US, where the economic recovery has been greatest relatively, corporate profit growth has now virtually ceased. If total corporate profits stop growing from here, investment will soon follow.

The European Central Bank will shortly announce a new round of credit injections or quantitative easing designed to provide the banks and big corporations with virtually free money to invest or spend. So far, QE in Japan, Europe and even the US has failed to convince as a weapon to avoid slow or deflating economies.

The spectre of deflation remains ●

**Michael Roberts blogs at [thenextrecession.wordpress.com](http://thenextrecession.wordpress.com). He has also just published a set of essays on the issue of *Inequality in modern economies*.**

**The print version is available at [www.createspace.com/5078983](http://www.createspace.com/5078983); and the Kindle version at [www.amazon.co.uk/s/?field-keywords=Essays%20on%20inequality%2028Essays%20on%20modern%20economies%20Book%201%29&node=341677031](http://www.amazon.co.uk/s/?field-keywords=Essays%20on%20inequality%2028Essays%20on%20modern%20economies%20Book%201%29&node=341677031).**

## Notes

- <http://blogs.ft.com/gavyndavies/2015/01/04/demand-side-gains-for-the-global-economy-in-2015>
- [www.iif.com/press/iif-bifurcated-global-economy](http://www.iif.com/press/iif-bifurcated-global-economy)
- Olivier Blanchard: [www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/survey/so/2015/NEW012015A.htm](http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/survey/so/2015/NEW012015A.htm)
- [www.economist.com/news/briefing/21627625-politicians-and-central-bankers-are-not-providing-world-inflation-it-needs-some](http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21627625-politicians-and-central-bankers-are-not-providing-world-inflation-it-needs-some)
- [www.frbsf.org/economic-research/publications/economic-letter/2015/january/unemployment-wages-labor-market-recession](http://www.frbsf.org/economic-research/publications/economic-letter/2015/january/unemployment-wages-labor-market-recession)
- 'Profit margins: a key debate for 2015', Barclays Bank US equity strategy, December 11 2014.
- <https://fraser.stlouisfed.org/docs/meltzer/fis-deb33.pdf>
- [www.slideshare.net/RuslanSivoplyas/european-commissions-autumn-forecast-2014](http://www.slideshare.net/RuslanSivoplyas/european-commissions-autumn-forecast-2014)
- <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2014/09/30/debt-deleveraging-and-depression>
- [www.imf.org/external/np/speeches/2015/011515.htm](http://www.imf.org/external/np/speeches/2015/011515.htm)
- [www.worldbank.org/en/publication/global-economic-prospects/infographic-global-growth-january-2015](http://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/global-economic-prospects/infographic-global-growth-january-2015)
- [www.oecd.org/economy/outlook/economic-outlook.htm](http://www.oecd.org/economy/outlook/economic-outlook.htm)

## GERMANY

# Nationalism and role of Pegida

Tina Becker examines the impact of Germany's new rightwing force

I must admit that the first time I heard of the *Patriotischen Europäer Gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes* (Pegida - Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the Occident) I couldn't help laughing. A country of 80 million like Germany is hardly on the verge of being taken over by its 4.5 million Muslims (about five percent of the population).

But then the so-called *Abendspaziergänge* (evening walks) of Pegida in Dresden grew in size, from a couple of hundred in October 2014 to a whopping 25,000 people on its January 12 demonstration, though this was no doubt bolstered by the terror attacks in Paris a few days before. The German media is going crazy over Pegida - it has been a top item on news bulletins for many weeks now. Chancellor Angela Merkel has given interview after interview to warn against "those preaching hate and division" and on January 10 more than 100,000 people came out all across Germany to protest against the new formation.

As I write, news is coming through of the resignation of Lutz Bachmann, Pegida's founder, after the publication of photos that appear to show him posing as Adolf Hitler.

So what exactly is Pegida? Why has it attracted so many people? What impact has it had on German politics? And how should the left deal with this phenomenon?

## Origins

Pegida started life as a closed Facebook group in October last year. Bachmann said he took the initiative to set it up after witnessing a demonstration of PKK supporters in Dresden, who demanded weapons for the banned organisation. He was disgusted by such "foreign wars" being fought on German soil. The fact that the PKK is currently fighting Islamic State in Syria seemed to have passed him by.

Nevertheless, he gathered a group of 11 co-thinkers around him, who together have been running the demonstrations. Amongst them are, as you would expect, some rather dubious people with connections to Hooligans Gegen Salafisten (Hooligans Against Salafis), the Islamophobic blog *Politically Incorrect*, the French nationalist Bloc Identitaire and the beautifully misnamed German Defence League, which cooperates with the English Defence League and really does use an English name to defend everything that is good and true about, well, Germany.<sup>1</sup>

If you look at the "six key demands" that the Pegida leadership put out at the beginning of January, you could be forgiven for thinking you are reading an excerpt from the programme of the UK Independence Party (and, like Ukip, Pegida is being targeted by the mainstream media: every day, a new spokesperson is outed for having said this or that ridiculous thing 10 years ago).

The six demands are:

1. Introduce new immigration legislation to stop "uncontrolled immigration" and instead promote "quality immigration" along the lines of Switzerland and Canada (ie, only the well-qualified or rich can enter).
2. Amend the *Grundgesetz* (basic law) to feature integration as "a right and a duty".
3. Implement a "consistent extradition policy" and re-entry ban for Islamists and religious fanatics.
4. Introduce 'direct democracy' through more national referenda.
5. End warmongering against Russia in favour of a "peaceful togetherness of Europeans" without "dictate from Brussels".
6. Provide more money for internal security and particularly the police.

The threat of the "Islamisation" of Germany itself no longer features in



Lutz Bachmann: resigned

Pegida's official demands (though it was part of the two longer previous versions). This is mainly because the media had a very easy time demonstrating the absurdity of the idea. Pegida supporters also looked like fools when trying to explain what they mean by it. Instead, the organisers have recently been trying to portray Pegida mainly as a "protest movement" that fights for more "people power".

In the process, they have been moving closer and closer to the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), a relatively new political party that caused shockwaves at the 2013 general elections, when it just missed the five percent threshold needed to enter parliament. At the European elections in May 2014 it polled seven percent. Similarly to Ukip, the AfD aims to attract disgruntled conservatives and the petty bourgeoisie; its main aim is to ditch the euro. The former president of the Federation of German Industries (BDI), Hans-Olaf Henkel, is co-chair of the AfD and leads its most pro-business wing.

This wing is not too keen on a fusion with Pegida, mainly because of its wackiness and support from outright neo-Nazis. Which is one reason why the group's leaders are continually asking demonstrators not to speak to the press. In the only survey conducted so far - at the Dresden demonstration - the 'typical' Pegida participant emerged as a middle-aged and "middle class" male, whose earnings are slightly above the average wage. Despite the pollsters admitting that "two out of three" people on the demo refused to participate in the survey, the German media were quick to paint this as the "rebellion of middle class Germany", something the organisers (and the AfD) would have been very happy with.<sup>2</sup>

Photographs and video footage from the demonstrations, however, paint a rather different picture: rows of short-haired neo-Nazis waving German flags are on full display. The reality is probably somewhere in between. Most of those who have set up Pegida have a proven record of links with the neo-Nazi scene and can no doubt be described as racist. But most of the participants have probably more in common with a typical Ukip voter than a goose-stepping Nazi.

Pegida has now apparently established chapters in Bulgaria, Austria, Italy, Norway, Denmark and the Netherlands, reports *Al-Jazeera*.<sup>3</sup> And the *Daily Record* says that there is now even a Scottish group.<sup>4</sup> Though it looks very much like they are doing about as well as Pegida does outside Dresden - not very well at all. Groups

have been set up all over Germany, but those demonstrations have not managed to attract more than a few hundred people each, most of them from the local neo-Nazi scene. The counterdemonstrations have been far bigger than the anti-Islam marches.

## Big in the east

So what is it about Dresden? The fact that Pegida can get 20,000 people out to march has much to do with politics in eastern Germany. Dresden is the capital of the federal state of Saxony, which has been governed by the conservative CDU for 24 years and, although the left party, Die Linke, does consistently well there, polling regularly around 20%, it is a thoroughly conservative state.

In the federal elections last year, 4.9% voted for the far-right National Democratic Party (just missing the threshold for election), while the AfD got 9.7%. Pegida organisers also consciously link their marches to the so-called *Montagsdemonstrationen* that marked the last days of the German Democratic Republic. Just like in 1989, the protestors now chant "*Wir sind das Volk*" (We are the people). Although the unemployment rate has fallen over the years and now stands at around 10% (the average in Germany is just over 6%), many undoubtedly still feel they lost out following reunification.

The recession has further increased this feeling. Since the last general election in 2013, Merkel has been heading a coalition of Conservatives (CDU) and Social Democrats (SPD), which has been attacking workers' rights, collective bargaining and wage levels. On paper, the German economy is doing well compared to many others in Europe, but at the expense of a real decrease in living standards for many workers.

No doubt there is also a growing wariness of Islam in the population. This is not so much based on actual, concrete experiences of most people: outside Berlin you do not come across many women in headscarves or see stalls run by Muslim organisations trying to make new recruits. But the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the 'war on terror' and the Islamophobia going hand in hand with it have predictably led to an increase in mistrust in Islam and its followers. The subsequent rise of al Qa'eda and IS has further increased this wariness. A recent survey found that 57% of people in Germany find Islam "threatening" or "very threatening", while 61% thought that Islam "does not belong in the western world".<sup>5</sup>

Of course, as with all surveys, it all depends on how the question is

phrased and what happened in the news that particular week. A British poll conducted just after the beheading of Lee Rigby showed that "nearly two-thirds of people believe that there will be a 'clash of civilisations' between British Muslims and white Britons" (a rise of 9%) and 34% said they believe "British Muslims pose a serious threat to democracy".<sup>6</sup>

Still, it must be said that Germany is particularly bad at integrating non-Germans - a factor which has clearly played a role in the current situation. Until 2000, Germany adhered fully to the philosophy of *Recht des Blutes* - you are German if you can prove that good German blood is flowing through your veins. There are apparently still whole settlements of 'Germans' in Russia, for example, even though nobody there speaks a word of German.

But many so-called 'guest workers' who arrived in Germany from the mid-1950s were never granted citizenship - and neither were their German-born children. More than 14 million *Gastarbeiter* came to Germany during the post-World War II boom, many bringing their families. But no attempt was made to integrate them into society. Quite the opposite. For example, a conscious decision was made *not* to offer them language courses. They were only supposed to be exploited for a few short years and then return to their home country.

But only 11 million did so. Of the 9.4% of foreigners living in Germany today, the biggest group, at over three million are those of Turkish origin. This first generation of immigrants in the main spoke no German at all, neither at home nor at work. Their children were sent to school with only rudimentary knowledge of German. There, they would sit at the back of the class, doing their best to catch up, but most left school without any qualifications: the next generation of cheap labour. There were four Turkish children in my class at primary school and none of them made it to the equivalent of GCSEs.

Even if their father or mother had qualified to take the extremely difficult naturalisation test, the children would then have to choose at the age of 23 whether they wanted to remain Turkish or become German. Only in the last few months has the law been changed, allowing everybody born after 1990 to hold dual nationality.

A few years back, I encountered a young Turkish man who told me he had lived in Germany for over 10 years before returning to Istanbul. I started to speak German to him, but he quickly stopped me, admitting that he could not understand what I was saying. He had socialised exclusively with Turkish people, lived in a Turkish neighbourhood and, despite going to school for a few years, had picked up hardly any German.

Rediscovering their religion is part of this generation's struggle for identity. So Islam has certainly become more visible in Germany in recent years. And of course, in the wake of the atrocities committed in Iraq and Guantanamo Bay, a certain radicalisation has taken place amongst German Muslims, just like those elsewhere.

But there is one last element that helps to explain the rise of Pegida and this cannot be found in Britain, at least not to the same degree: the overwhelming, all-encompassing pro-Israel propaganda of the entire German establishment. Of course, there is a pretty good reason for it. Starting from an early age, German 'collective guilt' about the holocaust is drummed into everybody. Any criticism of Israel is condemned as anti-Semitic. Even Die Linke has come out in favour of the right of Israel to "defend itself". It

cannot be overestimated how strong this feeling still is in Germany.

## Impact

Merkel and other mainstream politicians have quickly jumped onto the anti-Pegida bandwagon. "This is a shame for Germany," said home secretary Heiko Maas (SPD). Merkel herself has given interview after interview criticising the demonstrations where Pegida supporters exhibit "prejudices, coldness and even hate in their hearts".

On January 10, the mayor of Dresden and the first minister of Saxony (both from the CDU) jointly organised a demonstration for "open-mindedness and tolerance", where 35,000 people turned up. Most of the left, as far as I can tell, participated *uncritically*, effectively lining up with the bourgeoisie. There were certainly plenty of Die Linke flags on display and the German sister organisations of the Socialist Workers Party (Marx 21) and the Socialist Party in England and Wales (Sozialistische Alternative) reported it approvingly. But nowhere on their websites can I find any critical appraisal of the leadership of this and other demonstrations.

*Socialist Worker* reports that in "at least 12 cities, a broad spectrum, ranging from the radical left to more liberal groups, marched under the slogan, 'This city stays colourful'. The centre-left Social Democratic Party, the more radical Die Linke (Left Party), the Green Party and the Confederation of German Trade Unions protested alongside migrant organisations and many radical left and anti-fascist groups."<sup>7</sup> Not to mention the conservative CDU and CSU, the churches and other such wonderful participants that *Socialist Worker* must have forgotten.

While Merkel and co present themselves as tolerant, caring politicians who defend Muslims and foreigners, they have been chipping away at the right to asylum for many years. The Bavarian sister party of the CDU, the CSU, demands even stricter enforcement. The conservative mayor of Dresden, Helma Orosz (the one leading the anti-Pegida demonstration), has initiated a "citizens advice line", where "concerned citizens" can report problems with refugee hostels or asylum in general. Merkel, having attended a "vigil" called by German Muslim organisations in the wake of the Paris atrocities, now thinks that a "review of the current rules on immigration is appropriate".<sup>8</sup>

The problem is not Pegida. The current government is already implementing or could easily implement many of its "key demands" (the clear exception being the scrapping of the euro). The real problem is, as so often, the lack of a clear alternative on the left, which has allowed the bourgeoisie to claim to be leading opposition to prejudice and hatred, while stridently upholding German nationalism ●

tina.becker@weeklyworker.co.uk

## Notes

1. [http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patriotische\\_Europ%C3%A4er\\_gegen\\_die\\_Islamisierung\\_des\\_Abendlandes](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patriotische_Europ%C3%A4er_gegen_die_Islamisierung_des_Abendlandes).
2. [www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/pegida-studie-in-dresden-marschiert-die-mittelschicht-a-1012913.html](http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/pegida-studie-in-dresden-marschiert-die-mittelschicht-a-1012913.html).
3. [america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/1/14/anti-islam-pegidamovementspreadsacrosseurope.html](http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/1/14/anti-islam-pegidamovementspreadsacrosseurope.html).
4. [www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/hateful-heres-german-anti-islam-extremists-4998372](http://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/hateful-heres-german-anti-islam-extremists-4998372).
5. [www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/zeitgeschehen/2015-01/islam-pegida-islamfeindlichkeit-religionsmonitor](http://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/zeitgeschehen/2015-01/islam-pegida-islamfeindlichkeit-religionsmonitor).
6. [www.theguardian.com/uk/2013/may/25/woolwich-attack-islam](http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2013/may/25/woolwich-attack-islam).
7. *Socialist Worker* January 12.
8. [www.mz-web.de/politik/35-000-menschen-zeitgen-flags-fuer-weltoffenes-dresden,20642162,29527602,view,asTicker.html](http://www.mz-web.de/politik/35-000-menschen-zeitgen-flags-fuer-weltoffenes-dresden,20642162,29527602,view,asTicker.html).

INTERNET

# Technology and terror

State antsiness about the 'dark web' reveals profound contradictions, argues Paul Demarty

**O**n January 13, a trial began in Manhattan federal court, of some interest to followers of the technology industry's wilder fringes. The defendant is one Ross Ulbricht - the American state alleges that he was the fiendish kingpin behind the website *Silk Road*. A kind of eBay for illicit substances, *Silk Road* was seized by the US authorities in the autumn of 2013, and Ulbricht arrested shortly after.

Tech cognoscenti on this side of the Atlantic, however, had bigger things to worry about - the day before Ulbricht's trial began, prime minister David Cameron announced his latest wizard wheeze to fight international terrorism, which had, of course, forced itself back onto the immediate agenda with the Paris shootings. In his infinite wisdom, Cameron wishes to ban secure encryption altogether, to prevent terrorists from eluding the attention of spies.

Speaking of earlier stages in the history of surveillance, he told a Tory campaign event in Nottingham: "In extremis, it has been possible to read someone's letter, to listen to someone's call, to mobile communications ... The question remains: are we going to allow a means of communications where it simply is not possible to do that? My answer to that question is: no, we must not."

Between them, Ulbricht and Cameron paint an interesting picture of the problems modern communications technologies pose state regimes - and illustrate neatly how such problems are very often at least partially self-inflicted.

## Dumb pipes

It is probably fair to say that, on hearing of Cameron's proposals, the whole of the civilian tech community groaned in despair. There is good reason for that: it is, *prima facie*, technologically and economically illiterate.

Cameron's government has made much of the great prospects for web technology. Nobody likes a fresh-faced entrepreneur like a Tory chancellor; and nobody is more likely to be titillated by the capitalist-utopian rhetoric which emerges from the consumer technology industry. Tax incentives aplenty have come from the treasury in my profession's general direction, in the vain hopes of pretending that all that stuff about "the march of the makers" was more than opportunistic hogwash.

The trouble with the internet is that it is basically indifferent to what it transmits. It is, as the jargon goes, a bunch of 'dumb pipes': these pipes can, of course, be tapped, quite as easily as the landlines of

yore (and, if Edward Snowden has taught us anything, it is that they certainly are tapped), but if all you get is an encrypted message (that is, a bunch of gibberish that can only be read by its intended recipient), then the beleaguered spook's job is significantly harder than it otherwise would be.

So Cameron - ever the Blairite - wishes to be tough on the causes of encryption, banning secure communication services without GCHQ-friendly holes in the technology (so called 'back doors'). The first trouble, of course, is that back doors are equally 'dumb pipes': as novelist and techno-libertarian Cory Doctorow writes, "there's no back door that only lets good guys go through it. If your [app] has a deliberately introduced flaw in it, then foreign spies, criminals, crooked police ... and criminals will eventually discover this vulnerability."<sup>1</sup>

Doctorow's bigger objection is economic: the most reliable technology for securing messages is open source, thus widely available on the internet globally, and trivially easy to distribute (it is also easy to ensure that it has not been tampered with). Any attempt to demand a blanket back door will have the effect of completely disabling 'legitimate' technologists from doing their jobs effectively (it is difficult to see how Amazon could conduct business if they were forced to introduce a security hole in their payment processing, for example), without affecting technologically competent enemies of the state one iota.

For these reasons, we hope wiser heads will prevail when there is not an election to win. Alas, not all technologists are

civilians: British spooks - an indolent crew, always looking for some way to avoid having to do some old-fashioned tradecraft - are thoroughly excited. So, we are sure, are the shadowy contractors who will benefit from the extra work.

## Sailors and pirates

Above all, the web and modern communications are both a product of the hypertrophic state in declining capitalism, and a persistent irritant to it. Here we arrive at Ross Ulbricht's predicament.

The story of *Silk Road* begins - of all places - in the US navy research labs. It was there that, in the mid-1990s, a mathematician and a pair of ingenious computer scientists first sketched out a new way of anonymising network traffic.

The internet may be a dumb pipe, but under normal circumstances, one can easily enough (if one is a spook with the right tools) suss out who sent a message, and who received it - and suss that out at any point. An encrypted message will have a sender and a receiver. A devious miscreant can misdirect things to a point, but not so much that a serious intelligence agency will be impeded significantly.

Then Paul Syverson, Michael Reed and David Goldschlag came up with a new approach - 'onion routing'. Take a message, apply complex encryption to it, and send it around a series of known points on the global network. At each point, a successive layer of encryption is removed, revealing the location of the next destination - hence the onion metaphor. By the time the last such relay sends the message to the recipient, all trace of the origin is lost entirely. At no point in the chain can an eavesdropper know both sender and receiver, or indeed deduce how far along in its journey it is.

A hypothetical possibility became a reality in the next decade, with the Tor Project ('the onion router'). Thousands of volunteer-run relays provide secure,

anonymous web access to millions of people. And they do it all on the state department dime, which provides 80% of the funds for Tor, in support of its foreign espionage.

It was *Silk Road* that gained Tor its first mainstream-news notoriety. Sitting behind the Tor network, it enabled the minimally tech-savvy to purchase and sell illegal drugs in maddeningly full view of the authorities, which for years could not do anything about it. (Transactions were made in the equally anonymous cyber-currency, bitcoin.) Presiding over the bazaar was the 'Dread Pirate Roberts', who picked his name from the novel and film *The princess bride*, where 'Roberts' is a persona handed down from one pirate to the next, to preserve a fearsome reputation. It was plainly a pre-emptive middle finger to US law enforcement ('Even if you get me, someone else will spring up in my place').

'Roberts', according to the US authorities, turned out to be Ulbricht. He was caught the old-fashioned way - somebody fingered him to the FBI, and he subsequently attempted to commission a hit, unaware that the would-be assassin was an undercover agent. His lawyers are suggesting that he was set up, and the real 'Roberts' was one Mark Karpelès, whose bitcoin exchange (by far the largest at the time) went spectacularly bankrupt last year, costing many foolish speculators their life savings. Karpelès was under heavy legal pressure at the time of the *Silk Road* seizure, and was (we now know) believed to be 'Roberts' by the FBI; we cannot discount the possibility that he squealed on Ulbricht, although the latter's story is hardly credible.

Somewhat predictably, *Silk Road* was immediately recreated, with a new 'Dread Pirate Roberts' in charge, and, while that site too has now been shut down, various online drug markets remain.

Thus, we have the complement to Cory Doctorow's warning about back doors: a security protocol funded by one arm of the American state, while others try desperately to break it. We know from the Snowden files that cracking Tor was a major priority, and an endless source of frustration, for the National Security Agency; we doubt Ulbricht's pursuers in the FBI could have fared much better.

## Great chaos

We on the Marxist left are accustomed to arguing that capitalism throws up its own

gravediggers: the class of wage labourers: indispensable to the reproduction of the system, but with a collective interest in destroying it.

Something like this phenomenon operates in a *fractal* way - it seems that we cannot zoom in on some tiny component of capitalist society without finding its own opposite in the same place. Nowhere is this clearer than modern technology.

I have argued before that, as befits its explosive growth in the period of capitalism's epochal decline, modern communication technology is primarily driven by *state* actors.<sup>2</sup> This is quite plain in the case of the secure encryption relied upon by both cybercriminals and spooks - not only is Tor propped up by the state department, but the basic building blocks of encryption, the techniques and algorithms, are based on highly abstruse mathematics and thus are developed in the *academy* far more than corporate R&D.

Any secure medium, however, is secure for everyone; only the most marginal advantages are available in technical competition, so long as the internet remains truly global. Attempts to gain an advantage are most successfully made through crude, clumsy, 'extra-technological' means (like Cameron's back door proposal). This is an aspect, in fact, of the contradictory nature of the state: quite as indispensable to capitalist reproduction as the proletariat, it nonetheless is forced by the ruthless logic of the system to act in ways that directly undermine day-to-day commerce.

This is visible both in the increasing statisation of economic activity and in the *destructive* effects of state institutions. Hardcore neoliberals like to claim that capitalism is good for peace, because war is bad for business (carpetbaggers and corrupt contractors excepted). Indeed it is: but by bringing forth a system of states in profound inequality with each other, capitalism makes destructive wars quite inevitable; and so we arrive at the present, marked by great chaos in large parts of the world.

Such is the final connection between Ross Ulbricht and David Cameron: the worst chaos is wrought by the so-called wars on drugs and on terror. A sane society would legalise the one, and prevent the other by ending the brutalisation of whole populations, rather than ramping up surveillance and repression at every opportunity. Unfortunately, we cannot expect such reasonable acts from a system at perpetual war with itself ●

paul.demarty@weeklyworker.co.uk

## Notes

1. www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jan/13/david-cameron-internet-surveillance-syria-russia-iran-communication.
2. 'The internet in the epoch of decline' *Weekly Worker* March 27 2014.



Dread Pirate Roberts

**MINERS 1984-85****More organised than the men**

**T**his interview with Jean Davis, a leading women's support group activist in the 1984-85 miners' Great Strike, was originally published in *The Leninist*, forerunner of the *Weekly Worker*, in January 1985.

There are many things to admire about it. Her solid

class instinct that the strike is about fighting to protect "what belongs to us"; her contempt for those miners who crossed the picket lines - her steely determination that "a committee" would be set up after the strike's victory to "deal with them" and ensure they "pay the penalty"; and her

unflinching position that the willingness of the miners to organise physical force to help make the strike effective was fully "justified".

All of which adds to the poignancy of her remarks about the future of the women's support group movement. She underlines the

dramatic political awakening that so many women of the pit communities had undergone during the struggle and her conviction that they "couldn't turn the clock back ... to being just housewives and working women ... our goal is forward." That is, "forward" to a mass, militant working class

women's movement.

The defeat of the strike was also the defeat of the exciting and tangible possibilities inherent in the women's support groups that were so integral to the titanic battle of 1984-85 ●

**Mark Fischer**

mark.fischer@weeklyworker.co.uk

**Fighting for the future**

Jean Davis is treasurer of her women's support group in Deal, Kent; she is also a striking member of the National Union of Mineworkers, working as assistant canteen cook at Betteshanger pit

**How did your group get off the ground?**

There was an open branch meeting of the National Union of Mineworkers, Betteshanger branch, and we were asked if we would consider forming a group. Twenty women stopped behind and we decided to hold a meeting and we formed ourselves into a committee.

One of the other reasons was that when we were originally on strike the miners' wives in Nottingham and Leicester were on the picket line urging their husbands to carry on working. We started off by going on a rally in support of our husbands fighting for the right to a job, and that's really how the group started. That was seven weeks into the strike.

**Have you been able to set up a kitchen?**

Yes. When the children's Easter holiday came up, we decided to cook meals for them. We had a group of women coming forward and volunteering their services in the local welfare club for the cooking of the meals at lunchtime. When the children went back to school, we carried on with the meals - this time in the evening.

Now, because of the situation in the Kent coalfield, pickets receive a cooked breakfast and a cooked lunch, and then they cook in the evening for the children. So in total it's between six and eight hundred meals a day.

**What have been the major problems that you've faced?**

The major problems have been the gas and electric bills for especially the younger wives, who didn't experience the 72 and 74 strikes, and have just come into this very, very difficult dispute in 1984. The younger husbands go away picketing and the wives are left at home and don't know where to start to cope with the bills. So we've got two retired members that have been dealing solely with department of health and social security problems - gas, electric, telephone, rent.<sup>1</sup> Also, on a Saturday afternoon we have two people that come from London, who for the duration of this strike have given their services free on DHSS problems and strikers' problems. So we've had a lot of help, and it's been good help.

**Do the women have representation on the strike committee?**

Yes, I'm the representative on the strike coordinating committee. I give any information on the women's group: there are six women's support groups in the Kent area, and so I sit in on the meetings with the men every morning. As a member of the NUM I'm entitled to air my views anyway, so, although I go out and speak as a miner's wife, I always make the point that I'm a woman member of the NUM out on strike with the men.

**When you began did you have help or any hindrance from the local labour movement?**

**Contempt for scabs**

The local Labour Party, the membership, have been very good. Several of our own people are members of the Labour Party, many are actively involved.

**What do you think of the national leadership?**

I met Neil Kinnock during the general election when he was down here canvassing for our local Labour candidate.<sup>2</sup> I not only spoke to him when he came into the canteen: I also spoke to him in the town. I felt sure and very confident when speaking to him and hearing what he had to say. I didn't think he would sit on the fence so long as he has done.

We voted him there, let's face it. The Labour Party is the party of the working people, and, after all is said and done, he is not airing the views of the wide variety of Labour Party members. That is proved by the Labour Party support groups that I've visited - the support that they've given us is tremendous, so obviously he doesn't speak for the rank and file, which is the ordinary working person such as ourselves.

**What contact have you had with miners support groups?**

We've now got in the town a miners support group, so that is very good. We've also got several support groups around the country, without whose help we would never have survived. Three of us, from the women's support group, have been all over the country

doing meetings and raising funds to feed the children. You can imagine, with the amount of meals we do a day, the cost is quite big, because it is all fresh vegetables, fresh meat, and the children have squash and a sweet.

We are very well organised, in some cases more organised than the men; that's something women are famous for. You've got to be very well organised - we got ourselves organised within a matter of weeks and from then we've gone from strength to strength. Originally, at our first meeting we had 30 to 40 women: now we've got a hundred plus.

**We've heard about the recent Women Against Pit Closures delegate conference. Were there any problems with this, and what is the national organisation and coordination of work like?**

The coordination and organisation is an excellent one really. I went up, on behalf of the Kent area women's groups, to a steering committee meeting. And to actually meet other wives from different areas is tremendous, because the different areas have got such different problems; to hear it first hand is excellent because we in Kent area are cut off from the rest of the mining community.

**Would it have been better therefore if it had been a bigger conference?**

To limit it to start off with was a good idea. To have a lot of women together when you're first organising is wrong - you've got to take a step at a time and learn how to make it bigger and better the next time.

**Politicisation**

**Unlike before, the women have given much more political (as well as soup kitchen) solidarity. What sort of reactions has this provoked among the women themselves and among the miners?**

I can say on my own behalf I'd never spoken publicly to anybody and at the beginning I was very, very nervous. Through this strike I've learnt quite a lot politically - the women have learnt a lot politically.

I think that to say the men are proud of us is making an understatement. The attitude of the miners is so totally changed. I don't think they ever believed, even now after nine months, that the strength of the women could be so strong. I think the rank-and-file membership of the NUM will be the first to admit that without the women's support there would be a lot more cracks in the membership than there is.

We could never go back, never; we couldn't turn the clock back nine months to being just housewives and working women, because nearly all the miner's wives are working women: now our goal is forward. The thing I do say to people when we're asked about this political thing is that what we've learnt is by meeting other people. To say that the strike has opened our eyes is an understatement. I didn't think myself that I'd ever become so involved, but we have all become so much more politically aware.

In fact more wives started coming to the meetings when the scabs went to work; people didn't like the idea that they were living in a police state, especially the women - their husbands were getting beaten, arrested and no charges being made, and their husbands and sons being locked up.

**What has been the experience of picket line violence in this area?**

We're absolutely horrified about it. We had a case the other day at Tilmanstone. A girl of 16, whose father is a miner at Tilmanstone and who's been on a picket line for many weeks: the police caused a bit of a shove and got their batons out and started laying into the lads and she got pushed over. One policeman held her by the arms and another hit her over the head. The lads weren't prepared to stand by and see that young girl hit. Really and truthfully the violence is caused by the police.

You see the police with helmets on, riot shields and boots - there is no comparison. No-one is going to stand on a street corner and let 15 or 20 police get out of a van and knock hell

out of us without defending ourselves in some way. They wouldn't think twice about doing it to women or children - if they're going to arrest you and take you away to give you a good hiding, they'll do it to the women and the children. Even murderers and rapists get treated better than our lads. **With the advance of the strike, we have seen increasingly planned tactics by the pickets to prevent scabs and lorries getting through. For example, recently we saw a case where an earth mover had been placed across a bridge and when the police went to remove it they were forced to retreat by a barrage of bricks being hurled at them. What is your opinion of that? Some people have shrunk away from such organised protection of their picket lines.**

Well, the key to an effective picket line is organisation, and like any form of defence you have a strategy and a plan. Now the scabs have had a very cushy time of it - in and out, and that's your lot - and we don't like them living in our communities and laughing at our men, with police protection.

**So would you say that whatever these lads do in defence of their picket lines is justified?**

Of course it's justified. It's justified what any of us do, including the women. It's justified in protecting what belongs to us and what we're fighting for. The tactics are that you put pressure on them by standing on a picket line and watching them cower and run for the bus hiding their faces. **How are the scabs going to live in these communities after the strike?**

Well, they've made their decision and after this strike there will be a committee set up which will deal with them: they'll have to pay the penalty.

**What about the future of the women's support groups? We've argued that these groups should remain after the strike, and that they should participate in other strikes and struggles, particularly those concerning women workers and a woman's right to work.**

That's right. As a national group of women's support groups, I can assure you that all groups will stay together after the strike - that has been agreed. The first priority is obviously women in struggle: we must support those that have supported us ●

**Notes**

1. The DHSS was a government department that operated from 1968 to 1988 and, after a number of different manifestations, morphed into the department for work and pensions in 2001.

2. Neil Kinnock was the leader of the Labour Party and of the parliamentary opposition from 1983 to 1992. He was a thoroughly traitorous scab during the miners' strike (See *Weekly Worker* January 15).

## TRADE UNIONS

# Democratic organisation needed

Stan Keable of Labour Party Marxists attended the January 17 Reclaim the Union meeting of Unison activists

Unison members must be wondering what happened to the promise of the superior strength, the greater protection against government attacks, that would result from the merging of three public-sector trade unions into one mega-union in 1993, when the National and Local Government Officers Association, the National Union of Public Employees and the Confederation of Health Service Employees joined forces. With almost 1.3 million members, Unison is second in size to Unite, whose 1.4 million members are mainly in the private sector, and twice as big as the next largest, the GMB.

Today, however, faced with continual public-service cuts, job losses and increasing workloads, instead of feeling the strength of the union around them, Unison branches are, it seems, left to fight alone.

A privileged, unelected, overpaid and unaccountable bureaucratic caste enjoys the comforts of the union's plush Euston Road offices, imploring lay activists to 'recruit, recruit, recruit', while giving little or no help to the embattled branches on the frontline of austerity. Speaker after speaker at the unexpectedly packed Reclaim the Union meeting (around 120 attended) in the Mechanics' Institute in Manchester confirmed what it means to be a Unison branch secretary today: "loads of stress, no money and no support", as Kirklees local government branch secretary and would-be left general secretary candidate Paul Holmes put it. Comrades gasped in shock and disbelief when Paul told us that incumbent general secretary Dave Prentis had turned down invitations to appear on the BBC's *Question time* panel 17 times. We expect our gen sec to seize every opportunity to fight our corner.

The purpose of the meeting was to coordinate left nominations for Unison's national executive council elections, which branches must submit before the February 20 deadline. In the first half of the meeting, left slates were agreed, or were in preparation, for each region and each service group (local government, health, education, water, police and justice, etc) as well as for 'self-organised groups' (unfortunately referred to as SOGs) of black and young members.

The process of adopting left slates of NEC candidates was carried on harmoniously, with chairperson Max Watson, convenor of the NEC left caucus, telling people to "get together in the break and sort it out", wherever there were too many, or too few, candidates for the available seats. However, the "open discussion on the nature of the campaign: slogans, demands, etc" was totally unfit for purpose. Speakers were allowed two minutes each, so it was impossible to develop, or challenge, an idea adequately. No motions were proposed, so the campaign has no concrete policies. The level of unity achieved was simply the elimination of competition between left candidates, but with no explicit agreement at all about exactly what the campaign stands for.

Of course, everyone was against the coalition government, public-service cuts and austerity, and wanted a fighting, democratic union, instead of one suffocating under the "dead hand of the bureaucracy", as one comrade put it. But democratising the union so that its officials are controlled by the membership, and winning rank-and-file support for a positive socialist programme, will require much more than an ephemeral election campaign to replace one set of bureaucrats by another. It will require the building of a *membership* organisation, where the



Roger Bannister: running

politics and tactics of the campaign can be argued out openly and determined democratically, by voting - not left in the hands of the NEC left caucus to resolve elsewhere, *after* the meeting. The opportunity was missed to launch such an organisation.

Incidentally, I am still a member of Unison United Left, but it is evidently now defunct, and no-one even mentioned it. It was never able to achieve real unity of the left in Unison, after the Socialist Party in England and Wales withdrew in 2004 rather than subordinate itself to the larger Socialist Workers Party. Despite this UUL struggled on, at the time the SWP was engaged in its disastrous Respect popular front. However, it seems to have finally come to an end in 2013, when Marshajane Thompson and other feminists pulled out over the SWP's handling of the rape allegations against 'comrade Delta'.

They attempted to relaunch the Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic Unison<sup>1</sup> left network based on the divisive 'safe spaces' principle: "What we won't do is seek, jointly, to be the 'leadership' of the 'left' or 'rank and file' alongside those who can tolerate the treatment of women by the leadership of the SWP. We will not organise alongside nor devote any energy to promoting those who support the SWP Central Committee." These are Marshajane Thompson's words.<sup>2</sup> Excluding what is still the largest group on the British left is not the best way to build left unity, which requires toleration of the views of others, alongside unity in action. Needless to say, no-one mentioned the CFDU either. It was stillborn - the most recent post on its website being October 28 2013.

### Gen sec candidate

The second half of the meeting consisted of hustings for the single left general secretary candidate which everyone desired. Unlike the NEC elections, this is not urgent, as no timetable has been set, and the contest may take place late in 2015. Unfortunately, this was not explained at the start. Had the lack of urgency been made clear, and had an alternative timetable and procedure been proposed for adoption of a candidate, the meeting might have opted to postpone a decision. As it was, the meeting voted (68 for, 22 against, 24 abstentions) in favour of adopting a candidate by majority vote of those present. This would seem to indicate (roughly, of course) the presence of a solid group of 24 SPEW members or disciplined supporters, a non-aligned group of 22 or more who preferred delay, but were

not acting under SPEW discipline, and a substantially larger bloc of SWPers, perhaps Labour left supporters and others who had come expecting a vote.

The three runners on offer were given 10 minutes each to present their case, followed by two-minute "questions" (or 'contributions') from the rest of us, and two minutes each for the prospective candidates to reply at the end. A frustrating experience, and the wrong way to approach the matter. Surely, agreed policies for the Reclaim the Union campaign should be adopted first, and then a candidate chosen who would promote those policies.

The prospective candidates were: Paul Holmes, a Labour Party member for 35 years (but "very angry"), who stood in 2010 as the candidate of the so-called 'United Left', coming third with 13% of the vote in a 14% turnout<sup>3</sup>; established leftwing front runner Roger Bannister of SPEW, who came second last time with a respectable 20%; and the SWP's Karen Reissman, a first-timer.

In the 2005 and 2010 contests, the left had failed to agree on a single candidate - as may yet be the case this time - and Roger Bannister, although nominated by fewer branches than his 'United Left' rivals, had gained by far the biggest vote. He bluntly announced that he would stand again this time, no matter what this meeting decided, unless he was convinced (in other words, unless SPEW was convinced) that another left candidate stood a better chance of winning. SPEW's Glen Kelly backed this up by announcing that their supporters would not participate in a selection vote, if one was taken at this time.

Needless to say, this did not go down well, and does not augur well for the prospects of uniting the left in Unison, which can only be based on voluntary, democratic unity - the acceptance of decisions by majority voting, not the "consensus" which SPEW speakers claimed to be seeking. One speaker asked if we really wanted a president like comrade Bannister, who puts two fingers up to democracy. Isn't that what we are trying to overcome? Another speculated that SPEW had done a count, estimated that their candidate did not have majority support in the room, and then cynically announced they would not accept a vote.

Decision-making by "consensus" necessarily means behind-the-scenes negotiations (not transparent democracy) - in this case between the little 'revolutionary' bureaucrats of the two groups which currently dominate the Unison left: SPEW and the Socialist Workers Party. It excludes, disenfranchises, depoliticises and demobilises socialists who do

not belong to these two groups and the mass of rank-and-file Unison members that must be organised into the Reclaim the Union campaign if it is to be effective - not as voting fodder to elect an alternative bureaucracy, but as active members with equal rights to determine the politics of the campaign. And to develop an ongoing struggle beyond a single round of elections. Promoting 'revolutionary' bureaucrats is an unconvincing and ineffective way of challenging the bigger Labourite bureaucrats in control of the union.

In his defence, comrade Bannister pointed out that SPEW had made it quite clear, throughout the preparatory discussions of the NEC left caucus which convened the meeting, that it did not want, and would not accept, a vote to select a single left candidate at this time. Such a vote had not been put on the agenda of the meeting, the actual wording being: "General secretary left candidate debate". This agenda item, of course, contributed heavily to attracting the unexpectedly high attendance, and many comrades said that they had come expecting a vote to select a single left candidate.

But, whereas SPEW had instructed its members not to participate in any such vote, the SWP's leaflet, *A united left to meet the challenge*, primed its members to force the issue - in the full knowledge that SPEW would not accept the result if it lost the vote: "We have to hold a measured debate today with the aim of reaching agreement on a united candidate."

At the end of the hustings session, the votes were as follows: Roger Bannister - nil; Karen Reissman - 61; Paul Holmes - 15; abstentions - 41. So despite the total abstention by SPEW supporters, who will evidently not accept the result anyway, the SWP's candidate gained an absolute majority of those present. Arguments made in her favour included that she is a woman like 84% of Unison members, and there has not yet been a woman gen sec; that she is a leading health service activist, and the fight to defend the NHS will be of key significance both in Unison's general secretary election and in the general election.

Against comrade Reissman were those claiming that the SWP is toxic. In fact, not only is she an SWP activist, but, in the words of Labour left activist Jon Rogers, she "chaired the session of a conference of her discredited party, at which a victim of rape was denied a platform"<sup>4</sup>.

Cryptically, Paul Holmes said that he expects to see four candidates for the position of Unison general secretary, as there has been a "tear" in the union bureaucracy. So he is expecting the right wing to be divided this time, but he is also expecting the left to remain divided, fielding two rival candidates, as in the previous two elections. However, the election has not yet been called, so there is still time to put things right, as comrade Rogers suggests: "Neither Roger nor Paul indicated that they felt bound by this avoidable foolishness - and the 'left' (such as we are) will need to meet again at national delegate conference to try to take the decision which we should not have pretended to take today"<sup>5</sup> ●

### Notes

1. <https://fightingdemocraticunison.wordpress.com>. The original CFDU was one of the groups that came together to form the United Left in 2001.
2. [www.workersliberty.org/story/2013/10/25/workers-liberty-statement-split-unison-united-left-see-comments-after-the-article](http://www.workersliberty.org/story/2013/10/25/workers-liberty-statement-split-unison-united-left-see-comments-after-the-article).
3. Incumbent 'moderate' gen sec Dave Prentis gained 67% in 2010, which means that less than 10% of those eligible to vote backed him.
4. <http://jonrogers1963.blogspot.co.uk/2015/01/one-step-forward-one-step-back.html>.
5. *Ibid.*

## 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

2014 was  
warmest  
year

## Business as usual

In 1880, William Gladstone was prime minister, Queen Victoria was on the throne and Friedrich Engels wrote his *Socialism: utopian and scientific*. And it was also the year that temperatures were first reliably recorded. The news in the past week has been that 2014 ranked as Earth's warmest since 1880. And at a joint press conference on January 16 David Cameron and Barack Obama placed "the international fight against climate change" among their top areas of cooperation.

The Goddard Institute of Space Studies, part of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (Nasa), and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration have both released data showing a continuing long-term trend in the warming of the planet. The GISS press release stated that since 1880 Earth's average temperature has increased by about 0.8° Celsius, and GISS director Gavin Schmidt was clear about the cause: "The long-term trends are attributable to drivers of climate change that right now are dominated by human emissions of greenhouse gases." The 10 hottest years on record have all come since 1997.

If that does not make people take note, then we can take a look at some of the extreme weather events of the past year. At the beginning of 2014 Britain had its wettest winter for 250 years, Australia suffered from intense heat waves and the Philippines continue to be battered by destructive tornadoes. Adjectives such as 'intense' and 'destructive' are not used for effect: they reflect very real concerns - 97% of climate researchers are in agreement with the conclusions of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC): anthropogenic greenhouse gases have been responsible for "most" of the "unequivocal" warming of the Earth's average global temperature over the second half of the 20th century.<sup>1</sup>

However, public opinion is as fickle as the weather, and climate scientists are believed about as much as the politicians who appear on our TV screens. But that is how the climate deniers like it, despite the persuasiveness of the statistics and the evidence of extreme climactic events themselves.

Cameron and Obama will acknowledge climate change, but for them it will be business as usual. Their predecessors mouthed similar phrases in response to the previous five assessment reports of the IPCC. They promised 'action' on the international frameworks, such as Kyoto and emissions trading, but they have been frameworks without teeth, committing no-one to reduce carbon emissions.

What government is going to commit economic and political suicide by prioritising the safeguarding of the planet in the long term over the ability to make a profit in the here and now? And what pro-capitalist government can prioritise the long-term interests of the planet, when the lifespan of the political leader is determined by the next opinion poll, an editorial in the evening newspaper or the latest Twitter time bomb in our 24-hour-networked world?

Former US president Jimmy Carter



Unusual weather

once said: "The biggest handicap we have right now is some nutcases in our country who don't believe in global warming." However, it is the corporate lobbyists, the 'greenwashing' publicists and the free-market think tanks that persistently cast doubt on the science of climate change - not the lunatic fringe, who think that the scientific consensus is an anti-west and anti-democratic plot. Carter may believe that catastrophic climate change can be prevented by working within the status quo, but when the battle for public opinion on the issue is so divisive, business as usual is the safe option.

And business as usual will be on the agenda as Cameron and Obama sit down with their respective cabinets and kowtow to the needs of capital. They tell us time and again that wealth can only be created through the free market and free enterprise. But if companies are forced to limit production in line with the needs of the planet that will call into question

future profits. Investors are going to turn elsewhere, and the companies in question will be threatened with bankruptcy. That, under the system of capital, means a fall in production and increased unemployment. Bourgeois governments must therefore attempt to promote growth, irrespective of the nature of that growth and the climatic consequences.

Capitalist expansion will continue - today China, tomorrow India. Marx said in the *Communist manifesto*: "The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the entire surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere."<sup>2</sup> The capitalists cannot but be indifferent to the fate of both the majority and the future of the planet in its drive to continuously expand.

Marx said there was an "an irreparable rift in the interdependent process of social metabolism, a metabolism prescribed by the natural laws of life itself"<sup>3</sup> Just as there

is a contradiction between exchange-value and use-value, so there is a contradiction between capitalism's lust for growth and the ecological capacities of the environment to handle that growth. What Marx called a "metabolic rift" between society and nature show that capitalist reproduction is both contradictory and non-sustainable.

Capitalism and the preservation of the ecosystem are diametrically opposed to each other. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development at Rio in 2012 called for the reconciliation of the environment and the economy. Such pious calls for a more compassionate, more considerate production that embraces 'sustainable' development, while also 'sustaining' capitalism, have, of course, come to naught.

Left Unity has just released its draft manifesto for comments. Quite rightly, it includes a set of minimum demands which Left Unity will fight for within

capitalism: eg, the use of renewables, an end to fracking and reduced energy use. However, the preamble recognises this "metabolic rift" between society and nature. It says: "Ecological devastation, resulting from the insatiable need to increase profits, is not an accidental feature of capitalism: it is built into the system's DNA and cannot be reformed away."<sup>4</sup> This puts Left Unity in an altogether different league compared to the petty bourgeois Green Party, which does not seek the end of capitalism, but the *greening* of capitalism ●

Simon Wells

### Notes

1. WRL Anderegg *et al.*, 'Expert credibility in climate change', Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America: [www.pnas.org/content/107/27/12107.abstract](http://www.pnas.org/content/107/27/12107.abstract).
2. [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch01.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch01.htm).
3. K Marx *Capital* Vol 3, London 1991, p949.
4. <http://leftunity.org/environment-policy>.

Subscribe			
	6m	1yr	Inst.
UK	£30/€35	£60/€70	£200/€220
Europe	£43/€50	£86/€100	£240/€264
Rest of world	£65/€75	£130/€150	£480/€528

**New UK subscribers offer:  
3 months for £10**

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

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

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Tel: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Sub: £/€ \_\_\_\_\_

Donation: £/€ \_\_\_\_\_

**Standing order**

To \_\_\_\_\_ Bank plc \_\_\_\_\_

Branch address \_\_\_\_\_

Post code \_\_\_\_\_ Account name \_\_\_\_\_

Sort code \_\_\_\_\_ Account No \_\_\_\_\_

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

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Name (PRINT) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_