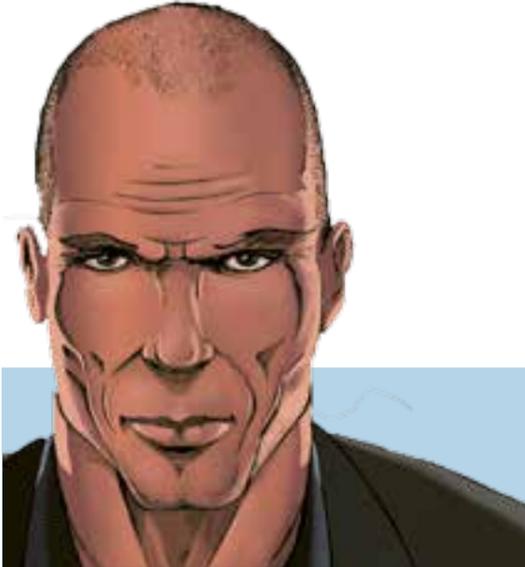


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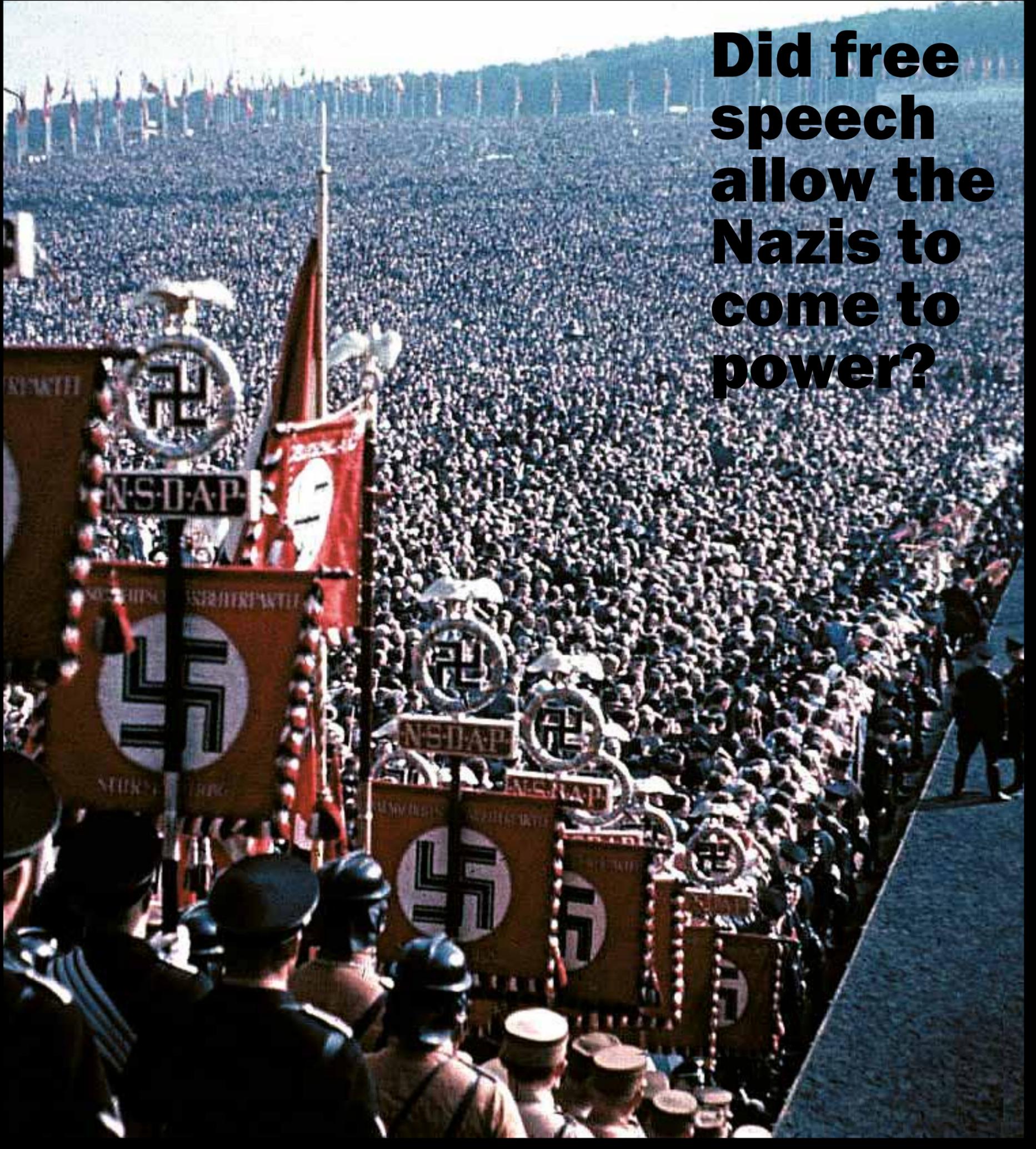
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No 1045 Thursday February 12 2015

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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**Did free speech allow the Nazis to come to power?**



# LETTERS



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

## Distorted

Chris Knight gives a completely distorted picture of Noam Chomsky's view on the origin of human language. Knight claims that Chomsky is "arguing that humans are so utterly different from apes or monkeys that the question of evolution is irrelevant" ("What can chimpanzees teach us about human nature?", February 5).

This is utter nonsense. Evolution is, of course, very relevant, and Chomsky has never denied it. Humans and apes or monkeys and, in fact, all the species of 'higher' vertebrates are very similar. Taking a more abstract viewpoint of theoretical biology, the same is true of all the living organisms: the existing forms of life have developed from earlier ones. This is evolution, an observational and, after the discovery of the genetic code, also an undisputable descriptive fact of nature.

The fact that humans have a specific capacity - the faculty of language - does not make us "utterly different", any more than the capacity for echolocation in some species of bats separates them from the rest of nature. The sophisticated ability of migratory birds to navigate, the behaviour of social insects, and all the specific properties of the various species of living creatures have evolved, ultimately, from unicellular organisms. The tough question is how.

Chris Knight refers to the version of a lecture in Delhi (January 1996), where Chomsky writes about a "strange cosmic ray shower [which] reorganised the brain, implanting a language organ in an otherwise primate brain". This is not science, Knight writes, but a slightly disguised biblical miracle account of human origins.

He fails, however, to mention that Chomsky calls his "cosmic ray account" a fairy tale. The whole point of the passage is ironic: because of the lack of evidence, all accounts on the origin of human language are just stories. But a relatively sudden emergence of language as a result of a genetic mutation in *one* of our ancestors some 75,000 to 100,000 years ago *might* be more plausible than a slow evolution during hundreds of thousands or millions of years.

The same time frame of somewhat less than 100,000 years ago is also the period when the first archaeological evidence of symbolic behaviour, art, etc on the part of our ancestors appeared, starting what paleoanthropologists call a "creative explosion". About 50,000 years later, the hunter-gatherers of Cro-Magnon people were surely like us - anatomically and behaviourally modern humans. It is reasonable to suppose that this "creative explosion" had something to do with the emergence of the faculty of language in humans.

As for the characterisation of language as an organ, this is innocuous as long as the term 'organ' is taken to mean a system that can be studied in a relative isolation from the rest of an organic whole. So the respiratory, circulatory and digestive systems together can be said to form the organ of metabolism.

Chomsky has always criticised the very common view of human language as an organ of communication, stressing that language is first and foremost an organ of thought. Language can be used for communication, but it can also be used for many other purposes. Basically, language permits "the free expression of thought over an unbounded range" (for this quotation by Chomsky, see CP Otero (ed) *Language and politics* Oakland 2004, p251).

Some scholars go even further and say that linguistic expressions are, in fact, identical with thoughts: there is no thought without language. Thoughts are simply silent linguistic expressions,

and the difference between the two is no more than the difference between speech bubbles of various shapes in a comic strip. Note, for example, that the notion of 'truth' would be impossible without language. (For this view, see the very interesting book by Wolfram Hinzen and Michelle Sheehan, *The philosophy of universal grammar* Oxford 2013.)

Note that the human language faculty also consists of subsystems which in themselves are not devoted to language, and which we share with other animals. One of them is memory, the other a capacity to categorise the outside world. Then there are the perceptual and motor systems, which are used to externalise linguistic expressions: hearing and speech as the most common of them, sight and signing for deaf people, and even touch for deaf-blind, as, for example, the fate of Helen Keller shows. One of the major tasks of linguistic inquiry is to sort out which component parts in the human faculty of language are specifically devoted to language, and which of them are shared with other physiological functions.

Chris Knight's story on the origin of human language is sympathetic, but it is just that - a story with no scientific basis. The greatest problem with tales like that is that they don't analyse the structure of human language at all. Such an analysis requires hard scientific work. But without such an analysis it is impossible to present any even slightly reasonable account on how nature gave us the wonderful ability to organise our thoughts and make them understandable to our fellow humans.

**Hannu Reime**  
Helsinki

## Losses and gains

In his discussion of the basis for human nature, I'm glad to see Chris Knight is focusing on the bonobos, those smaller relatives of the chimps. I also find myself convinced by his speculation about the differences between the two primate groups being down to the difference in food habitat.

Of course, there is another difference worth addressing: as geneticist Steve Jones has pointed out, bonobos have largely separated sex and reproduction. Females choose to have sex not only when in heat and fertile, but for recreation at other times, with both genders. In fact, the bonobos are famous for their use of sexual play in all kinds of interactions. They often make love in preference to fighting, unlike chimps, while like humans they do it face to face. They are a more egalitarian and pacific cousin all round.

That other relative of the chimp, the hominin or human, also separated sexuality and fertility. The species achieved this even more effectively by losing that natural signal of fertility, perineal swelling, through evolution into standing upright. Unlike chimps, male hominins didn't know when females were fertile and therefore couldn't concentrate energy on corralling them at those times against rivals. What is also possible is that a closeness of bonobo-type physical relations may have promoted solidarity, while those hands which were no longer feet were freed to make tools, throw spears, create art. This is not to say that any group equilibrium, with no single dominant alpha male, as with chimps, couldn't be disrupted - that is, relations altered by new forces of production.

I agree with Chris: humans are sociable and enjoy sociability, making for a closer group, but another thing about them is that they could also have been much weaker, relatively speaking, than other animals - the big cat, the mammoth, even the alpha chimp - and so may have faced the necessity of inventing advantages. Some of these inventions might be useful for all - cooking, fishing. Some might have been commandeered by chiefs or particular

families in mixed clan groupings. In central Asia, 30,000 years ago, bands of foragers came together and hunted from a common 'base camp', where in that cold climate somebody also invented the method of keeping meat frozen in large dug-outs (Finlayson, 2009). This 'Gravettian' culture, in achieving a surplus which was location-specific, became more settled - an innovation in safety which it probably wasn't hard to convince the majority to accept. Same with herding and agriculture - examples of which were associated with and therefore owned by some leading family, like those of Abraham or Odysseus.

Separate human societies probably developed differently and attained an evolutionary advantage over other groupings, even without war. It is now accepted that Neanderthals were not killed off by *homo sapiens* but died out on their own. Down the millennia there have been losses and gains with each development, but the sociable human can be convinced to accept that a loss in one area is a gain in comfort or security, especially if the arrangement is endorsed by compelling religion and power-politics. In needing to be convinced though - by mythologies and new visions, by ideology - the human animal shows that they are not inevitably committed to one path. In being able to change their mind, they show they are not fleshy robots.

Our job now is to convince the human animal that it would be better - more sociable, more self-satisfying - to try something other than living in an increasingly broken-down society, under the vampires of capital and the mythologists of national community.

**Mike Belbin**  
email

## Check your facts

In his article, 'A well-ordered militia' (February 5), Jack Conrad, defending the classic Marxist idea of the workers' militia, cites what he refers to as the "second stanza" (actually it's the fifth) of 'The Internationale'.

May I point out that the English translation he cites (with some very small typographical variations) was made by myself, and was published in the *Socialist Worker diary* for 1985. So I and the Socialist Workers Party of the 1980s, if not that of today, should not be numbered among the "cowardly, economic left", whom Conrad denounces so vigorously.

I realise that for people like Jack Conrad it is psychologically very important to believe that they alone hold the truth and that everyone else on the left is a coward or a traitor. Although it doesn't do much for comradesly relations, at least it provides a warm feeling inside. But please check your facts first.

**Ian Birchall**  
North London

## Self-appointed

I am not a Left Unity moderate. Where I differ with you is that you apply analysis derived from quite different historical circumstances to today. There are no *Squadristi*, no *Sturmabteilung* and no flying pickets on the horizon; we are not in an era of socialist insurrection. This is not the inter-war period.

I am not saying wait for the pre-revolutionary situation, but wait for the class struggle to involve the type of conflicts which make a workers' militia relevant. Marxists are not fortune-tellers, but insisting on programmatic demands that are not raised by struggle makes you look as if you believe you are some kind of self-appointed vanguard possessing a set of timeless truths. At the moment, economic violence, not violent coercion, is what western workers need a defence against.

**John Tummon**  
email

## Miners

Dave Douglass has forgotten nothing, but by equal measure has learnt nothing. Speaking on behalf of all "battle-hardened, class-conscious coalminers", he criticises our errors and misjudgements during the miners' 1984-85 Great Strike (Letters, February 5 2015). Basically what they amount to are:

1. Calling for the widening of the strategic battle between the Thatcher government and the National Union of Mineworkers by drawing in other sections of the working class.
2. Thinking that a national strike ballot would have been advisable.
3. Attacking the idea that nationalised industries were somehow 'ours'.

Comrade Douglass says "we" had a strategy - indeed, he says "we", with the help of brick-throwing anarchists, "were winning". Actually, of course, comrade Douglass is speaking on behalf of no-one except himself. That aside, maybe he should take a little time to think through a few problems with his endlessly repeated account.

1. The miners lost in 1984-85. They were left isolated by the TUC and Labour Party misleaders.
2. If you cannot get people to vote for you, it is unlikely they will be willing to fight for you. That there were so many scabs in Notts, the NUM's second largest area, was a huge problem.
3. Arguments about coal (and steel) being 'ours' came from the top. Leaving aside Arthur Scargill, I am sure comrade Douglass has heard of Mick McGahey, George Bolton, Pete Carter, Emlyn Williams and Kim Howells. They equated nationalisation with common ownership and their dream of a British road to socialism.

**Jack Conrad**  
London

## Bernsteinian

I would not call Mike Macnair's historiography "garbage", as he labels mine (Letters, January 29), because it is as good as far as it goes. I would only raise what Macnair leaves out, which I would not oppose to Macnair's perspective, but seek only to add to it. Perhaps it complicates it, but it does not necessarily "contradict" it. I have tried to find what is useful in Macnair's observations. He only dismisses mine. Fine, then: opposition it is. Non-dialectically and polemically.

If I were to be honest, I would have to admit that I derive my approach from Rosa Luxemburg's pamphlet *Reform or revolution?* and related writings, and that I accept Luxemburg's claim to be following Marx contra Bernsteinian revisionism and, later, contra Kautsky. As Michael Harrington quoted Luxemburg in his essay on 'Marxism and democracy' (1981):

"Marx proved that each political movement of a social class has a specific, economic basis. And he showed that all previous classes in history had achieved economic power before they succeeded in winning political power. This is the model which David, Woltmann and Bernstein apply slavishly to contemporary social relations. And it demonstrates that they have not understood either the earlier struggles or those taking place today. What does it mean that the earlier classes, particularly the third estate, conquered economic power before political power? Nothing more than the historical fact that all previous class struggles must be derived from the economic fact that the rising class has at the same time created a new form of property, upon which it will base its class domination ..."

"Now I ask, can this model be applied to our relationships? No. Precisely because to chatter about the economic might of the proletariat is to ignore the great difference between our class struggle and all those which went

before. The assertion that the proletariat, in contrast to all previous class struggles, pursues its battles not in order to establish class domination, but to abolish all class domination. It is not a mere phrase ... It is an illusion, then, to think that the proletariat can create economic power within capitalist society. It can only create political power and then transform (*aufheben*) capitalist property."

If Macnair were to be honest, he would have to admit that he not merely disagrees with Luxemburg, but indeed agrees with Bernstein - and not Marx. Macnair has no use for Marx's writings on the 1848 revolution, such as *The class struggles in France 1848-50*, the 'Address to the central committee of the Communist League', and *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, nor for much of Marx's and Engels' *Communist manifesto* or Marx's later political writings, such as *The civil war in France* and *Critique of the Gotha programme*, on which Luxemburg, Lenin and Trotsky based their perspectives. But the 1848-50 writings were dismissed by Kautsky as those of Marx and Engels "before they turned 30", on the basis of which Kautsky said sneeringly that the "communist theoreticians" like Lukács produced a "series of absurdities" in a "childish game" ('A destroyer of vulgar Marxism', 1924). This is what Macnair accuses me of doing. It is consistent with Macnair's approach, which Luxemburg called the revisionist "opportunist method."

Macnair adopts the Bernsteinian revisionist method of the supposed linear-progressive development of "evolutionary socialism", in which the "movement is everything and the goal nothing" because the movement absorbs the goal, and thus Macnair like Bernstein identifies the goal with the movement rather than recognising, as Marxists did, the real contradictions that emerge between means and ends, practice and theory, and social being and consciousness in capitalism. This demands a dialectical approach to the struggle for socialism that Macnair dismisses, as Bernstein and Kautsky did, substituting apologetics for Marxian critical theory. For Macnair, the struggle for democracy in the workers' collective movement is a direct political line to socialism, understood as democratic republicanism in society. Anything else - anything contradictory - is understood merely as an error based on the purported competing principle of bourgeois individualism. Macnair thus identifies socialism with democracy.

For Luxemburg, such an affirmative and not critical approach to bourgeois social and political relations in capitalism was understandable, if not forgivable, for Bernstein *et al* in a period of rising proletarian socialist organisation and consciousness. But that can hardly be said of Macnair's perspective today. What Macnair leaves out and seeks to repress about the history of Marxism is more important than what he says about it. He thus conceals more than he reveals.

Macnair is not a Marxist, but, like Bernstein and Kautsky before him, an ideologist for democracy. Such ideology showed its limits in 1848: hence the need for Marxism, which was not opposed to democracy, but recognised the need in socialism to go beyond it.

**Chris Cutrone**  
email

## Perishable

Possibly there is an astrological explanation as to why otherwise normal and sane people seek to defend Gilad Atzmon, despite the abundance of evidence relating to his anti-Semitism. Either that or stupidity - I will leave it to your readers to decide which of the above best explains Ted Rankin's and Harry Powell's letter denying that the jazzman is anti-Semitic and praising his "brilliant book" (February 5).

Those who sought to eradicate Atzmon's influence in the Palestine

solidarity movement never, at any stage, sought to ban Atzmon from airing his views - still less to deny him the right to earn a living playing jazz. However, there is no doubt as to Atzmon's anti-Semitic credentials. If messrs Rankin and Powell believe such accusations are a result of out-of-context, truncated quotations, then they can refer directly to my 'Guide to the sayings of Gilad Atzmon, the anti-Semitic jazzman' (<http://azvsas.blogspot.co.uk/2011/03/guide-to-sayings-of-gilad-atzmon-anti.html>).

Perhaps Atzmon's statement that "I do not wish to enter the debate regarding the truth of the holocaust" has been taken out of context. Perhaps the same applies to his statement in *Truth, history and integrity*: "If the Nazis ran a death factory in Auschwitz-Birkenau, why would the Jewish prisoners join them at the end of the war? We should ask for some conclusive historical evidence and arguments rather than follow a religious narrative ..." Or "Why were the Jews hated? Why did European people stand up against their next-door neighbours? Why are the Jews hated in the Middle East?" (Note how Atzmon seamlessly weaves the Jews of Europe with the Israeli Jews' treatment of the Palestinians. Both, after all, are unpopular!)

Apparently there is no "conclusive historical evidence" as to the existence of the extermination camps. Perhaps the *Auschwitz protocols* of two Jewish escapees, Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler, is not sufficient?

In his "brilliant" book, *The wandering who?*, Atzmon informs us that "The never-ending theft of Palestine in the name of the Jewish people is part of a spiritual, ideological, cultural and practical continuum between the Bible, Zionist ideology and the state of Israel ... Israel and Zionism, both successful political systems, have instituted the plunder promised by the Hebrew god in the Judaic holy scriptures."

Some of us see Israel's theft of Palestinian land as being a consequence of it being a settler-colonial state. Atzmon sees it as a product of the Judaic god.

Atzmon, anti-Semitic? Perish the thought.

**Tony Greenstein**  
Brighton

## Don't ask

We do not ask the impossible, comrades of the Labour Representation Committee majority, Socialist Resistance and Alliance for Workers' Liberty. What say you now, comrades of the LRC majority, who backed the EuroMaidan and the war against the democratic rights of the people of the Donbass?

It is now clear that a huge gulf has developed between the US policy of arming their Kiev puppets to risk World War III and the far more cautious Merkel and Hollande, who know that the USA is only too willing to fight to the last European to defeat Russia.

If the USA arms Kiev, Russia will have no option but to go in. Thirty million dead in World War II is a recent memory. They will defend their motherland with everything they have, as they did against Napoleon and Hitler. They cannot concede being pushed back like this and will not accept the neocon project to break up Russia itself.

And Russia does not have to accept defeat. They are a nuclear power. And the British ruling class itself is far more split than the USA right now. The warmongering Garton Ash last Monday laughed at the liberal *Guardian* readership: "America does the cooking, but Europe does the washing up," he crowed in a piece of wisdom from the pre-nuclear age.

The UK would be the first to get the H-bomb dropped on them in the event of a war now so recklessly being pursued by the USA. And they have their strong supporters here in Britain too.

Where do you stand, comrades? Can the LRC majority, Socialist Resistance and the AWL not distance themselves even now from the far right of US imperialism and get behind the liberal bourgeoisie and European capitalism in seeking to avoid war?

We do not set any unachievable goals for you. No demands that you rise to the political level of Karl Liebknecht and seek the defeat of your own ruling class. We are even conceding it is OK for you to wrongly designate Russia as an imperialist power, to make it easier for you to adopt a pseudo-Leninist mutual defeatist policy. But such politics are obviously a distant memory for you now.

We do not ask you to support the Donbass. You are obviously far too far now from revolutionary socialism to take such a step and become the anti-patriotic revolutionaries that all true international socialists are. We do not ask you to put the interests of the global working class before the outlook of your own narrow trade union bureaucracy. That is obviously too much to ask now.

The very idea that the best interests of the Ukrainian working class are best served by the defeat of Kiev, that the Donbass leaders themselves fear that because they fear their own working class more, hence the kidnapping and exile of the Borotba revolutionary socialists, is far too complicated for true patriots, who see only what the bureaucratic Len McCluskey sees. We do not ask it of you.

The idea that by far the best thing for the British and American working class is defeat in the Ukraine is very far from your minds. How soon we forget the Vietnam syndrome and the great leftist impulse this gave to the global working class after 1975, despite the liberal patriotism of the 'Bring our boys home' peaceniks. The wisdom that defeat of imperialism in a foreign war opens up revolutionary possibilities is obviously long gone from the consciousness of those who once understood it.

But at least join the peaceniks and protest the launching of World War III from the standpoint of British liberalism; you cannot continue as the agents of Joe Biden and his son's oil and gas company in the Donbass, or still follow the vision of John McCain, the modern-day Doctor Strangelove.

Salvage some measure of self-respect even now after the disgrace of supporting imperialism in Libya, Syria and the EuroMaidan.

**Gerry Downing**  
Socialist Fight

## Step by step

A Syriza central committee member, Stathis Kouvelakis, addressed a meeting in Cambridge earlier this week, which was jointly organised with Left Unity. He said the Syriza government was committed to a "renegotiation of the debt" and, when asked what would happen if Greece defaults, he said they're not aiming to default, but, if it comes down to it, "difficult choices will have to be made". He didn't elaborate, but I think we can take a guess at what he meant.

Incredibly, he also said that the army is not the main issue and, although Syriza is against Nato membership, it's not a priority right now. Anti-austerity was the main issue - hence the reason for the concessions to Anel. I wanted to ask, when would it be a priority? But unfortunately I wasn't called to speak. Comrade Kouvelakis said they would need to take things step by step towards a workers' state and hopefully this would lead to European solidarity and change across Europe.

However, at the end of the meeting, while stressing the importance of giving solidarity to Greece in opposing the troika, I asked him how a Syriza government would prosper, if it either defaulted or ended up compromising and caving in - especially given the fact that it had to rely on a 50-seat top-up. He told me this was a false choice, and avoided me after that.

I must say, it all smacks of Trotsky's *Transitional programme*. First it's anti-austerity, then we'll get to opposing Nato membership and imperialist wars and later form a workers' state. And apparently there will be radical inspiration across Europe - I cannot see it somehow.

He got enthusiastic applause at the end from the audience of around 80. Illusions in a Syriza government delivering its promises have got people very excited - although one naysayer (I was told he was the son of a Pasok member) said the reason for the Greek Communist Party's behaviour, which comrade Kouvelakis described as "sectarian", was its difference over the EU and euro membership.

**Justin Constantinou**  
Cambridge

## No surprises

The Rugby Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition is not surprised to discover today that papers handed to BBC *Panorama* and other media outlets show that the HSBC bank, through its Swiss subsidiary, has helped its clients evade taxation.

It was the bankers who caused the so-called economic crisis in the first place by lending money they did not have. These same bankers, like many other wealthy people, have always found ways of avoiding paying their taxes - legally through tax avoidance schemes or illegally by tax evasion. It is clear from the documents handed over that the bank helped wealthy clients to illegally evade tax worth billions of pounds throughout the world, including 7,000 clients based in Britain.

The records go back to 2007, when Labour was in government, so they are no less guilty than the Tories in not seeking ways to prevent this happening. Tax evasion and avoidance by wealthy individuals and companies costs the British economy over £120 billion a year - collection of these revenues would be enough on their own to pay off the country's economic deficit and avoid public spending cuts.

The present Tory-Lib Dem government cannot hide behind Labour on this one. Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs recently informed the government they had only contacted one in six people who were UK residents, but had money in HSBC Switzerland. Only small amounts of taxation have been collected. It is even the case that HMRC and the government agreed with the Swiss authorities, after the leaks about HSBC were found, not to prosecute except where the cases would be virtually guaranteed to succeed. This helps explain why so little has been recovered.

Ordinary working people have suffered increasing poverty since the banking crisis in 2007, with lower wages and massive cuts to their public services, whilst the wealthy have largely got away with their criminality - which is what tax evasion is.

All this is yet further evidence that it is one rule for the rich and one for everyone else in Tory, Lib Dem and Labour Britain. In a report published last week by *Inequality Briefing*, since the year 2000 the pay of chief executive officers has risen five times quicker than that for the average worker in Britain. Company pre-tax profits have also risen much more than average pay. We are not all suffering from austerity in anything like the same way.

This latest banking scandal is just one more example of the divided society we live in. Failure by successive governments to take tax evasion seriously simply adds to the contempt so many people have for the politicians in the main parties. We challenge any Tory, Lib Dem or Labour MP/PPC to defend what their government has 'achieved' on the question of tax evasion.

**Pete McLaren**  
Rugby Tusc

# 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 February 15, 5pm:** Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by open discussion and *Capital* reading group. Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. This meeting: Vol 1, 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 February 17, 6.30pm:** 'My recent stay with the Hadza of Tanzania'. Speaker: James Woodburn. Cock Tavern, 23 Phoenix Road, London NW1. Talks are free, but small donations are welcome. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: <http://radicalanthropologygroup.org>

## 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).

## After Charlie Hebdo

**Thursday February 12, 6.30pm:** Meeting, Camden Centre, Judd Street, London WC1: 'Islamophobia and the war on terror'. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: <http://stopwar.org.uk>.

## Save Hartlepool Hospital

**Saturday February 14, 11am:** Rally, Victory Square, Hartlepool, part of the national day of action for the NHS. Supported by Teesside People's Assembly: [www.facebook.com/TeessidePA](http://www.facebook.com/TeessidePA).

## Solidarity with Greece

**Sunday February 15, 1pm:** Demonstration, Trafalgar Square, London WC2. Organised by Greece Solidarity Campaign: <http://greesolidarity.org>

## Miners drama

**Wednesday February 18, 7.30pm:** Theatre performance, Sheffield Trades and Labour Club, Duke Street, Sheffield, S2. The Miners' Great Strike on stage with the Red Ladder Theatre Company. £7 (£4 concessions). Organised by Red ladder: [www.redladder.co.uk/whatson/going-back](http://www.redladder.co.uk/whatson/going-back).

## Has capitalism killed fashion?

**Saturday February 21, 12 noon to 6pm:** Discussion, Cafe 1001, The Old Truman Brewery, London E1. Part of Alternative London Fashion Week. Organised by Brick Lane Debates and War on Want: [www.facebook.com/events/432981450200249](http://www.facebook.com/events/432981450200249).

## No arms for Israel

**Tuesday February 24, 7pm:** Film screening, Passing Clouds, 1 Richmond Road, Dalston, London E8: *The lab*, documentary about Israeli arms trade. Followed by Q&A. Organised by Hackney Palestine Solidarity Campaign: <https://hackneypsc.wordpress.com>.

## Greece: a way out?

**Wednesday February 25, 7pm:** Meeting, John Smith house, 145/165 West Regent Street, Glasgow G2: 'Austerity in Europe and Greece - is there a way out?' Speaker: Hillel Tickin. Organised by Glasgow Left Unity: <http://leftunity.org>.

## Exposing immigration myths

**Thursday February 26, 6pm:** Public meeting, London Metropolitan University, room TM1-83, Tower Building, Holloway Road, London N7. Organised by London region UCU: [www.ucu.org.uk/londoncommittee](http://www.ucu.org.uk/londoncommittee).

## Housing and the class struggle

**Saturday February 28, 1pm:** Public meeting, Red Shed, Vicarage Street, Wakefield. Admission free, including a light buffet. Organised by Wakefield Socialist History Group: [www.theredshed.org.uk/SocialHist.html](http://www.theredshed.org.uk/SocialHist.html).

## Campaign for Labour Party Democracy

**Saturday February 28, 11.30am to 4.30pm:** Annual general meeting, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. Organised by CLPD: [www.clpd.org.uk](http://www.clpd.org.uk).

## Music beats austerity

**Saturday February 28, 7.30pm:** Night of radical music to challenge cuts and privatisation, Manchester Academy 2, Oxford Road, Manchester M13. Organised by People's Assembly: [www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk](http://www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk).

## Going through the change

**Tuesday March 3, 7pm:** Film, Bishopsgate Institute, 230 Bishopsgate, London EC2. Made for the National Women Against Pit Closures during the 1984-85 strike. Followed by discussion with filmmaker Anne-Marie Sweeney and NWAPC speakers. £5. Organised by Bishopsgate Institute: [www.bishopsgate.org.uk](http://www.bishopsgate.org.uk).

## Dismantling racism

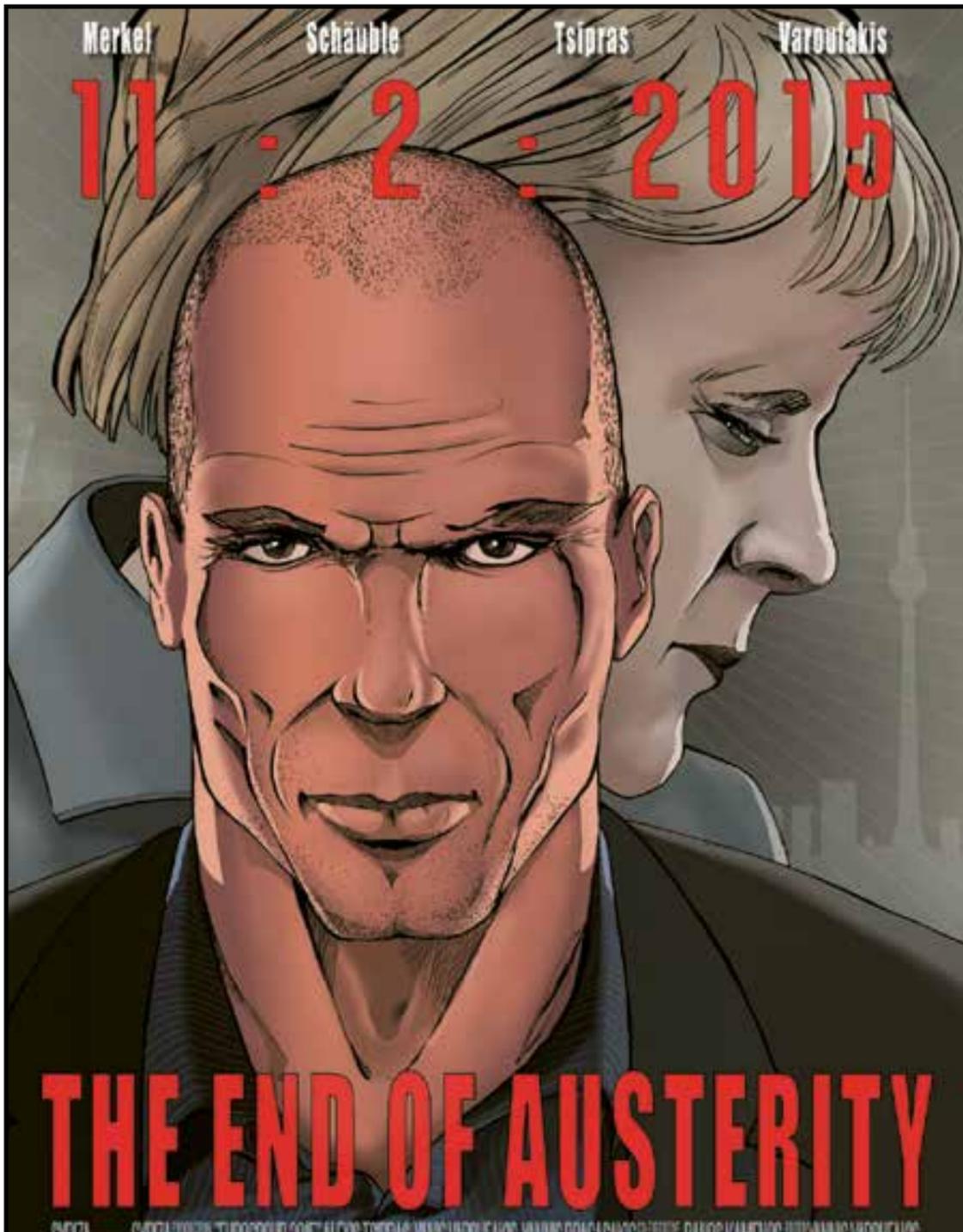
**Wednesday March 4, 6pm:** Tom Hurndall Memorial Lecture, lecture theatre C0.14, John Dalton building, Manchester Metropolitan University, All Saints, Oxford Road, Manchester M1. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: [www.palestinecampaign.org](http://www.palestinecampaign.org).

## CPGB wills

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

## GREECE

## No more Herr Nice Guy



Yanis Varoufakis, new hero: as depicted by Stefanos Papadatos

Having barely been in office two weeks, the Syriza government of Greece is wasting no time in forcing the issue that got it there.

That issue is, naturally, the punitive bailout terms under which the country suffers. And 'suffers' is the right word: there are countries hit by economic sanctions, the modern form of siege warfare, which have not suffered so much as Greece has these last few years. It is in hock to international institutions and it is simply unable to pay. And attempting to meet the demands involves ever greater acts of social violence: all money raised by slashing public expenditure is hoovered up greedily by the International Monetary Fund, European Central Bank and the European Commission - Greece has an unsustainable debt-to-GDP ratio of 175%. It is difficult to imagine it ever being able to service such huge debts.

So the representatives of Syriza and the Independent Greeks (Anel) are attempting to convince the powers over them to acknowledge that which, to any reasonable observer, is merely obvious. The IMF, ECB and above all the German government - all must see sense, and come to the negotiating table in good faith. They may yet see some of the money; but if they insist on asset-stripping every last inch of Greek society, they will see almost none of it.

A country held in a permanent state of utter penury does not have money to spare on servicing odious debts.

In those terms, it is reasonable to say that Greece is not *entirely* internationally isolated. Calls to loosen the fiscal chokehold have already come from the likes of Mark Carney of the Bank of England; on Tuesday, as the countdown to euro zone finance ministers' negotiations on the Greek question rolled by, US treasury secretary Jack Lew weighed in, criticising "casual talk" about forcing Greece out of the euro, and suggesting that euro zone fiscal policy should be more generous.

The target of these barbs is the German government, unsurprisingly - the fiscal brick wall at the heart of Europe. In particular, finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble is cutting an intransigent figure. "The reasons," he said after a meeting with Syriza's finance minister, Yanis Varoufakis, last Thursday, "for the difficult journey to be undertaken by Greece ... is to be found in Greece, and not outside Greece, and definitely not in Germany." There would be no compromise at the euro zone meeting: Greece must meet its obligations.

Varoufakis had raised the spectre of the 1930s in his appeals to the German government: "No-one understands better than the people of this land how a severely depressed economy, combined with a ritual

national humiliation and unending hopelessness, can hatch the serpent's egg within its society. When I return home tonight, I will find a country where the third-largest party is ... a Nazi party." Schäuble was not moved.

Indeed, he and his colleagues are in no mood for moving at all. They had already interpreted Mario Draghi's €1 trillion quantitative easing programme as a snub; one can only imagine the anger at hearing Jack Lew's comments. Are the Germans the last people alive to believe in old-fashioned fiscal responsibility? The doctrine of 'moral hazard' looms large for the euro zone's largest and most politically dominant country: if the EU relents to the (in absolute terms, modest) demands of Greece, who will be next with the begging bowl? Every euro zone country south of the Alps, by the looks of it - and Ireland to boot. Even the French would prefer a little more fiscal latitude than Angela Merkel and Wolfgang Schäuble are prepared to countenance.

### Dig your own hole

It barely needs to be said that Schäuble is talking horseshit: the notion that Greece's present predicament has endogenous causes is as risible and self-serving as, in the British context, Tories blaming Labour's 'overspending' for our own. This was a global crisis from the outset.

The question for the state regimes of the world was how to deal with it; a question more sharply posed for the relatively more hegemonic of those states. Germany may be dominated by the United States, but it was in a good position to stamp its authority on any European response to the financial chaos unleashed in 2007.

Greece epitomises the Germans' choices in the years since. The electoral victory of the self-styled radical left coalition, Syriza, is partly an index of the population's inability to take much more of that kind of brutality; but also that, by imposing such programmes on the 'responsible' parties in Greece, the troika have effectively strangled the political mainstream. The parties with which they could do business have been brushed aside by others who, when Lehman Brothers fell seven years ago, were fringe concerns: Syriza most dramatically, and Golden Dawn most worryingly.

However one wants to parcel out the blame on the 'purely economic' front, the present political situation - that Greece has a government that is not only unable, but *unwilling*, to pay its debts in their present form - is as German a product as a Volkswagen. Berlin's hard-line approach to trouble at its periphery led, first of all, to the destruction of the last Pasok government, and the replacement of George Papandreou with an unelected 'technocrat', supported by both main parties. The Samaras government which followed tried repeatedly to get some relief from the troika and the northern European powers, pointing in the vague direction of Syriza as a warning, but to no avail.

Now, Samaras is out; Alexis Tsipras and Varoufakis are in. There was much talk in advance of the election - from Syriza and Anel alike - about destroying the corrupt, clientelist political establishment. We wonder if Syriza will keep to its words here. Or have they already fallen for the temptation of handing out lucrative jobs to their supporters, now they are in government? In other words, will Syriza merely replace Pasok when it comes to crony politics?

Certainly Tsipras and Varoufakis, are concerned to appear reasonable, to reconsider privatisations they have vetoed, and make other concessions. It may not mean much, however, if they stick on the crucial point: Greece cannot service its present debts, and should not do so, and will not do so without substantial modifications of the terms. It is difficult to see the troika and the Germans acceding to this, and indeed pressure is piling on: QE or no QE, the ECB has ruled that Greek government bonds are no longer accepted as collateral for loans, and credit agency Standard and Poor's has downgraded those bonds to B-, just one notch above 'junk'.

### Impatience

If anything, the coming showdown emphasises the immediately *European* dimension to Greece's crisis. The economic tumult is spread across the euro zone, however trivial Greece's GDP is compared to larger EU economies. The concomitant political deadlock is affecting many discrete polities, from Spain to Finland. Most crucially, however nakedly desperate the situation in Greece is, resolution cannot come within its borders alone.

Varoufakis is coming in for leftwing criticism for his willingness to junk Syriza's election promises for the sake of getting a deal on the debt; but his merry jaunt around

Europe, meeting up with fellow finance ministers, reflects above all the *need* for an international perspective here. It happens that this *soi-disant* "erratic Marxist"<sup>1</sup> is happier cutting deals; but what alternative does he have?

Syriza's left critics have only the most myopic of answers, encapsulated in the advice of Alex Callinicos of the Socialist Workers Party: "The strength of the left in Greece depends on the revival and further expansion of the mass movement that developed so explosively 2009-12."<sup>2</sup> In other words, more strikes, more protests, more *action!* Except that action does not feed the starving or shelter the homeless; it does not offer employment to those on the dole queue; it does not, in short, offer a *positive alternative* to a decaying status quo.

Comrade Callinicos quite hilariously includes the Antarsya coalition his Greek allies have foolishly backed in a total "radical left vote" of 42.5%: after all, without the essential contribution of Antarsya, that vote would have been a paltry 41.9%! There is a reason why the party of 'protest, protest, protest' got such derisory support: because they have nothing to offer except ... protest. By contrast, Syriza has a programme, of a sort, and a plan - however desperate - to use the reins of government to alleviate the Greek crisis.

A genuine alternative to Syriza's approach would face facts squarely: taking power in Greece alone is no stronger a position than taking power in the Cotswolds. The struggle of the working class is an international one at its very core, and quite plainly so in the situation that obtains in contemporary Europe. A million mass demonstrations in Athens are not worth five that spread across borders; and all the protests in the world will not suffice to achieve the tasks before us. We need a revolutionary *political* alternative to capitalist decay ●

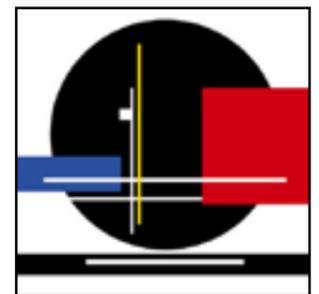
Paul Demarty

paul.demarty@weeklyworker.co.uk

### Notes

1. <http://yanisvaroufakis.eu/2013/12/10/confessions-of-an-erratic-marxist-in-the-midst-of-a-repugnant-european-crisis>.
2. *Socialist Worker* February 3.

### General election fund



We are collecting

The Communist Platform is raising money towards Left Unity's general election campaign.

So far five candidates have been selected in key seats. Obviously to run an effective campaign Left Unity will need substantial finances. There is a £20,000 national target. We are calling upon Communist Platform members to collectively make a contribution towards this target.

To donate, go to <http://communistplatform.org.uk>.

# Aftermath of Syriza's election

Azhdar Ashkan can see no long-term solution to the crisis within the current order

Since 2007, the Greek economy has experienced three recessions, which sometimes approached depression-like dimensions. Consequently, when Greece's debt-to-GDP ratio passed 145%, Athens could no longer borrow money on the capital market to keep its system afloat.

This fact, along with Greece's other financial difficulties, created a crisis that could have evolved into the country's exit from the euro zone. To avert that possibility, in 2010 the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund - the so-called troika - agreed to provide Greece with a bailout. The *quid pro quo* was that in exchange for implementing deep structural reforms, along neoliberal lines, and embracing an extensive austerity programme, Greece would receive emergency bailout loans of €246 billion, along with other measures that would allow the Greek financial system easy access to low-interest funds.

As I am sure readers will know, among the conditions imposed on Greece were the requirement to raise taxes, the cutting of government expenditure, the implementation of structural changes, the raising of the retirement age, the running of a budget surplus and a commitment to repay government debts. Further, the continuation of the bailout programme was tied to progress in implementing austerity, as determined by monitoring and audits acceptable to the creditors. The bailout was scheduled to end in December 2014, but was extended by two months. A review of Greece's success or otherwise in fulfilling its commitments is due by the end of February.

Ever since the onset of the austerity programme, the Greek people and the Greek economy have experienced severe pain and hardship. GDP has shrunk by 20%, Greece's main stock index has shed roughly a fifth of its value in the past three months, depositors have withdrawn several billion euros from the country's banking system, and government debt stands at €323 billion, or over 175% of the country's GDP. Unemployment is above 25%, with the rate for people under 25 standing at more than 56%. Over 100,000 companies have stopped trading in Greece and many thousands of small businesses have gone under. The average wage has fallen to €600 a month and many social welfare programmes have been slashed. One third of the population is living below the poverty line, with another third barely above it. A substantial rise in homelessness, suicide, domestic violence, divorce and crime is evident.

Against this background, Syriza ran its election campaign on a platform of ending the austerity programme, improving the economic conditions of the people and renegotiating Greece's debt. Syriza promised a great deal - the reinstatement of discontinued or scaled-down social programmes, reversal of some structural changes, an increase in pensions, a rise in general and minimum wages, the granting of tax relief to low-income people, loans to small businesses, job creation, a halt to the sale of government assets and privatisation, keeping social programme spending off the balanced budget calculation, dropping the commitment to run a high budget surplus, and many similar propositions. In short, Syriza promised to deliver relief to Greek citizens, while keeping the country in the European Union and the euro zone.



Wrecked by euro debt

The government now wants to renegotiate and restructure the debt by rolling over the loans from short term to long term at a low interest rate. It also wants some debt forgiveness, the adjustment of the terms of debt repayment, including a grace period, along with a relaxation of the strict austerity measures imposed on the Greek populace.

Out of the total Greek debt, €53 billion has been borrowed from various euro zone countries. Any change to the terms of these loans must be negotiated individually between Greece and the country involved. This, obviously, is not an easy task and presents Syriza with a serious challenge. Another €142 billion derives from the bailout fund and the renegotiation of the terms of these covenants must be unanimously approved by all euro zone countries. A difficult task, to be sure, particularly considering who the lenders are. The largest contributor to the fund is Germany, with €56 billion, thus making it the most important factor in the process. Angela Merkel has already signalled her rejection of any restructuring of the debt and other countries in the pack - eg, the Netherlands, Finland, etc - are taking a similar stance. The share of the ECB and other European central banks is €27 billion and the ECB has stated that it would be illegal to renegotiate the terms. As for the IMF's share of €28 billion, if past practices are any indication, it too will reject any kind of relief.

Greek banks, like other European banks, have access to funds under the Emergency Liquidity Assistance scheme. The ECB, however, has just decided that, effective from February 11, Greece is no longer exempt from the rules forbidding banks from holding low-grade bonds. Accordingly, Greek banks can no longer use government bonds as collateral for loans and thus are deprived of a major source of low-interest-rate funds. All the while, the February 28 debt service deadline is looming. (Some of the IMF loans are due in March and August, while €7 billion in bonds held by the ECB matures in July and August.)

All indications point to Greece's inability to meet the repayment schedule. However, the troika seems unwilling to consent to any major change and this deadlock could cause creditors to decline Greek bonds, which would further limit the country's access to low-interest financing. Such a scenario would cast doubt on the survivability of the Greek economy and lead to an unavoidable default, with ensuing capital flight, a run on Athens banks,

insolvency and the eventual collapse of the Greek financial system. The resulting chaos would be felt far beyond Greece's borders. The possibility of this outcome itself increases uncertainty and this in turn will make the recovery of an already fragile Greek economy even more remote.

## Resolution?

Theoretically, the Greek debt crisis could be resolved in several ways. First, nationalisation of the debt, accompanied by radical and fundamental changes in the Greek economy. Alternatively, Greece could declare bankruptcy. Under this alternative, it might see a positive cash flow, as it would stop servicing its current debt. However, while theoretically feasible, this option cannot realistically be considered viable at this time, since it would lead to the immediate shut-off of all financing sources.

Another theoretical option would be to pursue a rapid growth and export path to bring the economy out of the debt trap and the current crisis. But this path too, by its nature, is a long-term solution and cannot be implemented at present. The Greek government and EU officials would have to address and overcome several structural obstacles within both Greece and the EU. This renders this alternative unfeasible for the time being.

A further alternative would be currency devaluation and the creation of inflationary creep. This is the alternative that both the US and UK have adopted somewhat successfully. Once again, however, since management of the currency resides with monetary authorities outside Greek jurisdiction, this alternative is not open to Greece while it remains in the euro zone.

There are many internal obstacles that stand in the way of a sustainable, long-term resolution of the Greek crisis. The short list includes corrupt institutions, inefficient and bureaucratic government apparatuses, an unfair tax system, inefficient tax collection, inadequate budgetary and fiscal procedures, insufficient recognition and enforcement of property rights, a populace that now distrusts government, and widespread expectations established over many years of working class struggle. These cultural, historical, social and political factors prevent any meaningful resolution of the problems faced by Greece. The underlying causes have not been, and probably will not be,

addressed.

Parties, segments and groups blame each other for the troubles. The austerity programme, the EU, Germany are among those identified as the culprits, but no viable solution to Greece's problems has been suggested. Nor has anyone accepted any responsibility for contributing to the crisis. Some even talk about the forgiveness of loans from Germany in place of the World War II reparations that the Germans should have paid. The previous Greek government, instead of addressing the crisis at its roots, resorted to a nationwide 'distribution of the burden' through tax-raising and reducing salaries across the board.

The EU structure and Greece's creditors are also contributors to the current crisis. The prevailing neoliberal paradigm of slashing government activities and balancing the budget at all costs is the underlying factor in the Greek crisis and it constitutes a major hindrance in the path to a recovery. This prescription, and the creditors who subscribe to it, prevent the Greek government from effectively intervening to stabilise the economy by implementing an active fiscal policy. Greece is under an obligation to follow an austerity programme that chokes the economy and thwarts the possibility of any economic growth in the short or medium term.

A fundamental element in economic development and growth is the level of investment. But an unstable environment adversely affects that level, particularly in relation to foreign investment. Moreover, austerity measures prohibit the Greek government itself from devoting resources to crucial elements of investment: namely health and education. The austerity prescriptions also negatively impact on consumer demand, which is another engine of growth. Reduction in wages leads to reduction in consumption. This, coupled with the decrease in government spending and the requirement for a balanced budget, reduces aggregate demand and, just like the 1930s, transforms a mild recession into a devastating depression. The current institutional 'deflationary bias' inherent in the EU only exacerbates the situation.

The euro zone's monetary system and its supranational currency, controlled by monetary authorities not accountable to any nation-state, effectively removes monetary policy tools from the hands of individual governments. The actions of these monetary authorities will favour financial markets and stronger members of the EU, while the 'denationalised' euro renders the Greek government incapable of meaningful intervention in economic affairs through monetary policy.

Currently, most of the bailout money received by Greece is used to service its loans. That is, Greece borrows money to pay its debt. That, essentially, turns the Greek bailout into a bailout of its lenders. Similar to Germany and eastern European countries after World War I, Greece is being crushed under the weight of its foreign obligations. The currently imposed measures of cutting government expenditure, raising taxes and producing a surplus of more than 4.5% of GDP, along with the present debt service structure, makes it impossible for Greece to recover from its malaise. Any serious plan to resolve the Greek crisis must include loosening the grip of the austerity programme, allowing some relief to the Greek people, reducing the level of the required surplus, guaranteeing

future assistance, renegotiating the debt structure and rolling over the existing loans.

Syriza's ascension to power and the potential default and exit of Greece from the euro zone will have several significant consequences for the rest of the EU as well. The Greek election result could give all anti-austerity parties a great boost and if Alexis Tsipras and co register any measurable success, voters in Spain, France, Portugal and Italy might follow the Greek path. If Syriza fails, however, the chaotic aftermath in Greece and across Europe would provide the ultra-nationalist, rightwing, anti-euro parties fertile ground upon which to grow and even potentially assume power. That would mean the ending of the euro zone and disaster for the world.

## Short-term

Although the troika is taking a hard line at present, the prospect of the potential repercussions of Greek failure might persuade it to be more accommodating. Syriza itself is a coalition with appreciable internal conflicts. In addition, the populations of other EU countries do not have unlimited tolerance for austerity and will eventually insist on a permanent solution. Therefore, the window of opportunity for reaching an agreement is not very wide and will not be available for long. The crisis in Greece, and its potential exit from the EU, substantially adds to the uncertainties about the future of the EU itself and its common currency, not to mention the viability of the EU as a reliable economic and political entity. Therefore, stronger members of the EU may assume a more proactive role in promoting and facilitating general economic growth in Europe. The whole quantitative easing programme and its continuation by the ECB, which effectively devalues the euro, might be viewed as a step in this direction.

For now, in all likelihood, after a period of tough negotiations, Greece will get some short-term relief - both in terms of its loans being extended and renegotiated, and in the shape of the easing of the austerity measures. The Greek government could offer some relief by reducing or even ending some austerity targets, and implement some reforms and house cleaning relating to tax organisation and collection, and government efficiency. The current *de facto* devaluation of the euro through the ECB's quantitative easing, pumping money into the European economies, will continue and the Greek economy could show some signs of a mild recovery.

These actions, nonetheless, will not provide a long-term solution to the Greek crisis. The bomb will still be ticking. Due to the fact that structural obstacles, both in Greece and within the EU itself, are not addressed, long-term solutions remain elusive. Unless these issues are satisfactorily resolved, the burden of carrying Greece and keeping the euro zone intact will be heavier, as time goes by. The threshold of tolerance for the EU countries and their populations, sooner or later, will be crossed and Greece will eventually be forced to leave the euro zone.

The probability of resolving the obstacles are currently next to zero. Accordingly, the likelihood of a long-term resolution to the Greek crisis is about the same. The stronger members of EU are well aware of this, and quite possibly are, behind the scenes, preparing themselves for this eventuality and realignment ●

**EUROPE**

# Making a beginning

The left should campaign for a Europe-wide constituent assembly, argues Chris Gray

If Sir Walter Raleigh, Richard Hakluyt and their associates could devise and implement a project for England's aggrandisement at the expense, primarily, of Spain, can we in the 21st century envisage a project whereby English people and the other three nations traditionally grouped with them can join with continental neighbours to arrest the bureaucratisation, Balkanisation and immiseration of Europe? Can we open the way to a society within which all can enjoy freely the benefits of democracy and, at the very least, an international civil minimum of wellbeing?

Yes, it is a very tall order, but an important contribution to the debate on the kind of immediate demands we ought to be raising in relation to the European Union can be located in the Communist Platform of Left Unity. This makes clear that the aim should be "not a quasi-democratic, confederal EU, but a united Europe under the rule of the working class". The demands it proposes are:

- Power to the EU parliament. Replace the EU Commission by an executive democratically responsible to the parliament. Abolish the Council of Ministers.
- For a democratically controlled European Central Bank.
- Towards indivisible European unity.
- For the free movement of people. Against all immigration controls.<sup>1</sup>

This goes to the heart of the matter and in my view the focus should definitely be the parliament. At the very minimum it needs to acquire the full powers of a legislature, which at present it lacks, since "it cannot directly introduce proposals for new laws; it cannot enact laws on its own and it cannot raise revenue".<sup>2</sup>

Another power which the parliament does not have is the ability to reject individual nominees for the post of commissioner - it has to accept all the commissioners or reject them *en bloc*:

Under the circumstances, it is unlikely to reject the college [ie, all the proposed commissioners] unless it has serious reservations about one or more of the nominees. This happened in 2004 when the nominee from Italy - Rocco Buttiglione, who was to have been the new justice commissioner - commented ... that homosexuality was a "sin" and that "the family exists in order to allow women to have children and to have the protection of a male who takes care of them". The resulting outcry led to Buttiglione being replaced as the Italian ...<sup>3</sup>

There is also a strong objection to the Council of Ministers. First, it is in practice subordinate to the CPR, the Council of Permanent Representatives (from individual states), which gets to discuss the Commission's legislative proposals before the Council of Ministers gets a look-in, in effect dealing with some 90% of its business before the latter meets. Secondly, it gives national government ministers an input which is beyond what they are specifically elected for.

In our UK system, MPs are elected ostensibly to look after the interests of a certain geographical constituency, and, in the vast majority of cases, they do this in practice, uniting with like-minded individuals in a particular political party. If that party wins a parliamentary

**Continental unity**

majority (either on its own or combined with some other party or parties) certain MPs from it are selected by the prime minister to act as ministers, but their responsibility is to the UK parliament and electorate only.

Natural justice demands that they should have an opportunity to express a view on any particular EU legislative proposal through the UK government, but why should they be given the right to interpose their views (along with their opposite numbers in other EU states) in a topsy-turvy legislative process, whereby potential laws originate in the Commission and are then considered by the Council (if the CPR has not already pronounced on them) and only then by the European parliament? The proper, democratic way would be to have the proposals originate in the parliament and then be implemented under executive supervision.

Last, but possibly not least, it might be a good idea to replace the Council of Ministers with a directly elected second chamber, giving equal representation to all member-states, in view of the disparities in size - the population of Germany is around 200 times bigger than that of Malta, for example - as suggested by Moshé Machover.<sup>4</sup>

**Constituent assembly**

To change the EU set-up will take a colossal effort by the whole European left and any allies it can rope in. Agitation and propaganda cannot be confined to EU countries, but needs to include such states as Norway and Switzerland, where the working class has interests in line with working people in EU countries. Hence it is worth trying to organise a Europe-wide constituent assembly. Ideally this should be a labour and trade union movement assembly, at least in the first instance, but if the established organisations of the European labour movement, such as the European Trade Union Confederation and the Second International, are unwilling or unable to countenance such an initiative, then 'unofficial' enterprise must step in. (There is a parallel with the oppositional meetings against World War I held at Zimmerwald in Switzerland in 1915 and Kienthal in 1916). Such an assembly could discuss (in addition to constitutional reform of the EU) such policy areas as:

1. A common European economic plan, focusing on a solution of the sovereign debt crisis and sustainable development, and including democratic control of banks
2. Energy policy
3. Agriculture and fishing
4. Climate change
5. Unemployment
6. Workers' rights
7. Women's rights
8. Taxation
9. Health
10. Education
11. Defence
12. Languages and international problems

What might the left recommend in these areas? Most of the necessary EU reforms have already been mentioned, but we would surely insist on *our* political representatives receiving a level of remuneration in line with the earnings of a skilled worker, plus legitimate expenses. We would also almost certainly wish to end the shuttling of the parliament back and forth between Brussels and Strasburg. Let us look at these topics in turn.

**Common economic plan**

It is impossible to anticipate the content of such a plan. To draw it up would involve discussion in every single country, with the fullest possible participation. What would most definitely be included would be a mechanism whereby funds centrally collected and available, in addition to the resources of banks in each member-state, would be disbursed to those regions and enterprises in need of investment. This would, of course, require social ownership of banks with a degree of workers' control, plus control by the EU parliament over the European Central Bank.

It would also be necessary to take steps to deal with the existing solvency of banks and governments and remove the crushing debt burden being carried by the peoples of Europe. This is no easy task, but a prerequisite for its solution must be a thorough democratic debt audit, as advocated by the Committee for the Abolition of Third World Debt.<sup>5</sup> This process is something which citizens should

demand as of right.

**Energy policy and sustainable production**

Without detailed investigation of each country's energy requirements no viable policy can be specified, but some basic choices need facing. Obviously we would want to maximise clean and safe energy production. Chris Goodall in his book *Ten technologies to fix energy and climate* thinks that it might be possible to have a mixed portfolio of renewable power sources, providing most electricity without carbon emissions by 2025. In his version this would consist of: wind power (25%); solar power (mostly concentrated solar power in Africa, 25%); marine (tidal and wave, 15%); fuel cells and biomass combined heat and power, 10%; carbon capture and storage (CCS)/nuclear (25%).<sup>6</sup>

There are some problems with this list. For one thing, African countries might legitimately wish to use the solar power generated on their territory for their own benefit. Perhaps such power in the form of electricity could in part be exported to Europe, but an amicable arrangement would have to be worked out. Also, CCS is problematic, as Goodall himself acknowledges.

The other components in the mix are hinted at by the Australian environmentalist, Ted Trainer, who has laid down six principles which need applying. I reproduce five of them here:

1. A simpler, non-affluent way of life.
2. The development of many small-scale, highly self-sufficient local economies.
3. More communal, cooperative and participatory policies.
4. Alternative technologies.
5. An almost totally new economic system. [You bet! Production for need rather than for profit].<sup>7</sup>

His sixth principle is simply "New values", but what does he mean by that phrase in practice? The moral seems to be: experiment, and if it works it works.

**Agriculture**

As regards agriculture, the left needs to turn its attention to wasteful practices indulged in by farming on a large scale (aka 'agribusiness'). George Monbiot has shown the need for this and another person who has written on the topic is Guglielmo Carchedi, who states that malign agricultural subsidies lead to "reduced crop diversity, the overproduction of crops that are highly erosive, the cultivation of marginal lands that tend to be more subject to soil erosion and moisture deficiencies, and the conversion of wasteland and forestland to agricultural production."<sup>8</sup>

On a European scale the results of untrammelled pursuit of profits have been pretty devastating. According to Carchedi, "For the whole of Europe, including the former USSR, 23% of total agricultural land (that is, 2,188,000 square km) is degraded (ie, unfit for agriculture) because of erosion or pollution."<sup>9</sup> This confirms Marx's observation that under capitalism (and production methods borrowed from it) the art of robbing the labourer is also the art of robbing the soil.<sup>10</sup>

**Climate change**

More and more people are surely waking up to the fact that this is a serious issue threatening to get really serious very shortly. Climate change is one of the several "planetary boundaries" being investigated by a group of scientists led by Johan Rockström at the Stockholm

Resilience Centre and Will Steffen at the Australian National University. These boundaries are thresholds or tipping points, which indicate a risk of "irreversible and abrupt environmental change" should they be exceeded.<sup>11</sup>

Clearly there is much more to be said on this topic, which is bound to grip our attention from here on. For now I would merely draw readers' attention to a useful article by Seumas Milne. One cannot but agree with his conclusion:

The intervention, regulation, taxation, social ownership, redistribution and global cooperation needed to slash carbon emissions and build a sustainable economy for the future is clearly incompatible with a broken economic model based on self-interest and the corporate free-for-all that created the crisis in the first place. Given the scale of the threat, the choice for the rest of us could not be more obvious.<sup>12</sup>

**Unemployment**

The basic principles here are that all those capable of working should do so, and that paid work should only be engaged in if it satisfies some valid existing human need (what is validly needed is, of course, inevitably a question for argument and democratic decision). Consideration should be given to the proposal put forward for a basic income as of right (ie, a security minimum), as advocated by Guy Standing.<sup>13</sup>

Such an approach is a far cry from that of apologists for capitalism, such as Walter Eltis, who urges us to "recreate the conditions where widespread private-sector job creation used to occur".<sup>14</sup>

Eltis sees this happening, under capitalism, via lower levels of taxation and "greater flexibility in Europe's labour markets", but there is absolutely no guarantee of it. Keynes was right in this regard: the economy is likely to revolve around a situation of less than full employment - indeed there is a tendency for less labour to be used as part and parcel of a rise in the technical composition of capital.

It is obviously easier to achieve full employment and full maintenance in a situation where the working class is dominant and production is not subject to the pressures of competition between enterprises. Such arrangements will be conducive to

- (a) a reduction in obligatory working hours
- (b) work-sharing
- (c) programmes of public works

This would serve as a continuation of a desired movement arising under capitalism, the essence of whose demands was spelt out in Trotsky's *Transitional programme*:

Under the menace of its own disintegration, the proletariat cannot permit the transformation of an increasing section of the workers into chronically unemployed paupers, living off the slops of a crumbling society. *The right to employment* is the only serious right left to the worker in a society based upon exploitation. This right today is being shorn from him at every step.

Against unemployment ... the time is ripe to advance, along with the slogan of public works, *the slogan of the sliding scale of working hours*. Trade unions and other mass organisations should bind the workers and

the unemployed together in the solidarity of mutual responsibility. On this basis all the work on hand would then be divided among all existing workers in accordance with how the extent of the working week is defined. The average wage of every worker remains as it was under the old working week. Wages, under a strictly guaranteed *minimum*, would follow the movement of prices. It is impossible to accept any other programme for the present catastrophic period.<sup>15</sup>

### Workers' rights

As Lenin emphasised in 1920, workers will need protection from their own state (since the state is oppressive by nature). Hence they are everywhere entitled to full trade union representation, plus freedom of speech, freedom of association, right to due process of law, etc. Minimum wage entitlement should continue and be kept under review in order to ensure that it is adequate. Enterprises should be run under workers' control: ie, if management wants to introduce some practice that the majority of the workforce are opposed to, the workers can veto it.

Workers' control must not be understood in a purely anarchist or anarcho-sindicalist sense, however: if the issue is one affecting more than one enterprise, or the class as a whole, then the will of the majority in the given constituency - that is to say, of those having the right to vote, not in the sense of 'parliamentary division' - should prevail, with those opposed having the right to try to alter it at some future date.

### Women's rights

All the various demands on this topic cannot be specified here in detail, since the situation in each country is different. However, my feeling is that the (UK-based) CPGB *Draft programme* has the right basic thrust:

Women carry the main burden of feeding babies, house management, supermarket buying, family cooking, child ferrying, etc, which is performed gratis. Given the ever increasing pressure on time, such work is often frantic, demoralising and allows no kind of rounded cultural development.

Advanced capitalism has created the material prerequisites for the liberation of women. However, women cannot be fully emancipated until the disappearance of the division of labour and without going beyond bourgeois right, which entails: to each according to work done ....

Communists say:  
Turn formal equality into genuine equality. Socially, economically, politically and culturally there must be substantial equality.

- Open free, 24-hour crèches and kindergartens to facilitate full participation in social life outside the home. Open high-quality canteens with cheap prices. Establish laundry and house-cleaning services undertaken by local authorities and the state. This to be the first step in the socialisation of housework.

- Fully paid maternity leave of 12 months, which the mother can choose to take from up to three months before giving birth. The partner to be provided with six months' fully paid paternity leave - three months of which should be compulsory - to encourage equality and bonding with the child.

- Free abortion and contraception on demand.

- Provision for either parent to be allowed paid leave to look after sick children.

- Maximum six-hour working day for all nursing mothers.

- Full support for women fleeing violence within the home.<sup>16</sup>

### Tax harmonisation

It almost goes without saying that a socialist United States of Europe would institute a uniform taxation system in order to ensure adequate state funding at international, national and regional levels.

### Defence

The traditional left policy in this area is for a people's militia. To this we should add the necessity of retaining and investing in all possible means of defence against nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, as well as new nano-technological ones. This would mean, for the UK, retaining the Sea Captor missile system introduced by the Royal Navy in March 2012.

### Languages and nations

There are some 40 languages spoken by peoples who are native to Europe historically, plus many more tongues used by more recent immigrants. Obviously, for practical purposes all the inhabitants of a given 'state area' should be fluent in the language of that country, but, with that proviso, there should be no special privileges for any one language. This necessarily entails counter-measures to offset the power of the dominant world language, English. (Why should Icelanders be deprived of a computer programme in Icelandic just because that involves an additional expense for the company providing the programme?). In Ireland, where Irish is one of two official state languages, more support for it is no doubt needed.

This is not to denigrate the advantages that flow from an extended use of English - and, to a current lesser extent, French - as a *lingua franca* within Europe, but there is a potential cultural loss involved in the erosion of other languages resulting from the spread of English and the attendant suppression or marginalisation of non-English cultures. We are not in favour of blanket or exclusive promotion of national culture, or even a plethora of competing national cultures: on the contrary, we favour the enhancement of any democratic elements and influences arising within each and every 'national culture', and see Europe as the collective creation of all its nations, including those least known or understood outside their own borders (the Baltic, Balkan and Portuguese peoples, for example).

Nor are we in favour of the continued suppression and marginalisation of peoples currently not possessing a state of their own. That is why, following a successful overthrow of capitalism in Europe, the presumption is that existing nationalities in such a position will have a chance to acquire their own state if they wish - unless there is good reason for the (temporary?) abrogation of this right (see below).

In speaking of nations (and nationalities), we refer to "a distinct community of persons with common historical traditions, a common language, a common cultural and a common economic life, a common historically defined territory and above all what Lenin called the 'will to separate existence'".<sup>17</sup>

We do not, as socialists, wish to box up European nations separately: we are in favour of international cooperation as a matter of course. On the other hand, we are not in the business of suppressing legitimate national demands when put forward by a majority of members of any particular nationality - unless the exercise of such rights threatens the revolution of the international working class. What we favour is the self-determination of nations within a cooperative framework - which means, ideally, that in any given case national independence should be freely conceded by the oppressor nation (the example quoted by Lenin with approval was the separation of Norway from Sweden in 1905).

Agreement on frontiers is obviously needed - this is what is wrong with

article 1 of the Rome Treaty, which declares such frontiers as exist to be sacrosanct. To quote Shachtman again,

The very essence of the democratic demand for the right of self-determination for an oppressed people is the democratic determination of its frontiers on an irreproachable basis, for the purpose of establishing the democratic will of the majority of the population within these well-defined frontiers.<sup>18</sup>

We are left with the question of tax havens and feudal survivals on the European mainland, plus the Channel Islands. Specifically, we have Gibraltar, Andorra, Monaco, Luxemburg, San Marino and Liechtenstein. (Switzerland and Norway are in a different category, even if Swiss banks play a role, which needs looking into). Tax havens require suppressing in the interests of a uniform taxation policy - which consideration leads one to think that these territories should merge with one or more neighbouring states. Here again every case is different: eg, Spain is surely entitled to Gibraltar, but in that case it should surely hand back Ceuta and Melilla to Morocco.

### Conclusion

These suggestions for a programme are meant as a basis for discussion and not as some form of ultimatum. There is an old Irish saying which runs: "Every beginning is weak" and the above is only a beginning. I am also reminded of a story about David Lloyd George, who, as a young trainee solicitor, developed the habit of reading sections of Hallam's *Constitutional law* during his lunch break. When asked why he did this, he replied: "*Achos mae arnaf eisiau dyscu*" - "Because I want to learn". Truly we all have a lot to learn in relation to the state of Europe.

Of late there have been some encouraging signs that the need for a Europe-wide initiative on the left is being recognised. A resolution passed at the November 2011 AGM of the UK Labour Representation Committee roundly declared that "The Europe-wide capitalist crisis requires a Europe-wide working class response" and outlined in summarised form a programme much the same as that put forward here.<sup>19</sup> Then, in response to a 'Common appeal for the rescue of the peoples of Europe' issued by veteran Greek socialists Mikis Theodorakis and Manolis Glezos, Balázs Nagy urged that

Working people of every country should organise columns which can converge on Brussels to express their determined opposition to the predators and their desire to reduce their first victim, Greece, to the status of a colony. In Brussels, they should organise a huge demonstration.

In preparing to defend the people of Greece and in order to get rid of the permanent threat hanging over all working people and all peoples, we should build support for the main central demand: for a *working people's Europe!*<sup>20</sup>

Then there is Syriza, whose leader, Alexis Tsipras, explained:

Europe needs a new plan to deepen European integration. Such a plan must challenge neoliberalism and lead European economies back to recovery. It should prioritise the needs of workers, pensioners and the unemployed, not the interests of multinational companies and bankrupt bankers. Syriza-USF [United Social Front] has committed itself to this road. We know it is a difficult one. But it is the only plan that can restore the European vision of social justice, peace and solidarity.<sup>21</sup>

He goes on to add, most pertinently: "*This plan will succeed only if popular struggles radically change the balance of forces*" (my emphasis).

Then we have the Greek socialist, Savvas Michael-Matsas, who issued a resounding call:

The working class, employed, underemployed or unemployed, all the deprived masses, immigrants and 'locals', urgently need a programme, a collectively developed plan of action, coordination and anti-bureaucratic organisation on national and international levels to fight back the on-going catastrophe, and open a revolutionary international socialist way out: to abolish the debt to the international usurers, to bring down the dictatorship of the 'markets' and nationalise the banks under workers' control, to end unemployment by nationalising all industries that fire workers or 'de-localise' or close down, under workers' control and workers' management [Actually the two should be seen as distinct, "control" in this case leaving the management in place, the other replacing it - CG], to expropriate the expropriators. A decisive struggle is needed to bring down the architects, managers and gendarmes of people's misery, the governments and state power of capital, to establish workers' power and replace the imperialist European Union by a United Socialist States of Europe.<sup>22</sup>

Another manifestation of a possible revival in the fortunes of the European left is the emergence of Podemos in Spain. Both Podemos and Syriza are members of the grouping in the European parliament which goes by the name of European United Left/Nordic Green Left. As the name implies, this is something of an umbrella organisation, formed by a merger of the Confederal Group of the European United Left with the Nordic Green Left group in January 1995. According to Wikipedia, "the group is ambiguous between reformism and revolution".<sup>23</sup>

The call for an all-European initiative is by no means new. CLR James wrote that, while the American Shachtmanites in 1943 supported the various European liberation movements from Nazism in the name of democracy and national independence, his own tendency urged that the proper aim was for proletarian power under the slogan of the socialist United States of Europe. Further:

Since 1943 the Fourth International has been ceaselessly warned of the necessity for giving as concrete an expression as possible to the slogan of the United States of Europe. Precisely because of its complete failure to do this, it has suffered and continues to suffer a series of terrible blows.<sup>24</sup>

Similarly in November 1943 Max Shachtman asserted:

Europe's only hope for survival, to say nothing of progress; its only way out of the barbarism, into which it is sinking; its only weapon against being exploited, disenfranchised and degraded, either by British, American or Russian imperialism [sic], or by a combination of them, is the economic and political unity of the continent. Such unity is an essential necessity for the life of the old world now. It is realisable only in the form of a United Socialist States of Europe.<sup>25</sup>

Whatever the outward political form of Europe, what is essential is that the

democratic will of the working class, organised on a continent-wide basis, should prevail within it.

To whom, after all, does the European continent rightfully belong? Does it belong to the entrepreneurs, the capitalists, the government ministers, the bureaucrats, the generals, the spin-doctors, the press barons, the police chiefs, the fashion editors, the advertising executives, the merchant bankers, the hedge funds, the vulture funds, to what remains of the landed aristocracy - or even to the 'Leninist' leaders of some obscure leftwing sect? No. These lands belong to us, to the common people who possess little or no property, the plebeians, the workers, the anonymous heroes and heroines of modern times.

It was our predecessors, our ancestors, who built Europe. They made the farms, the villages, the cities, the castles and the cathedrals. They shed their blood on the battlefields, they gave their lives in the struggle for freedom. We are the heirs of all those who fought for the liberation of the enslaved - of the earliest Greek democrats; of the slaves who rose with Spartacus; of the Ciompi, the wool-combers of Florence; of the English peasants of 1381; of the Commune of Salonika; of the Dutch in their struggle against Spanish-Habsburg oppression; of the Scots Covenanters; of the Levellers and Diggers in mid-17th century England; of the *Sans culottes* in Paris, the impoverished artisans of that great city; of the United Irishmen of 1798; of the Luddites, of the Chartists; of the Silesian weavers of 1844; of the Communards in 1871; of the Russian workers and peasants of 1905 and 1917; of the French resistance, the Yugoslav Partisans, the Warsaw Ghetto fighters, of the Slovak national uprising of 1944; of the Hungarian workers in the revolution of 1956, and many more.

We are the heirs: we should step forward and claim our inheritance ●

### Notes

1. *Weekly Worker* February 13 2014.
2. See J McCormick *The European Union: politics and policies* Boulder 2008, p155.
3. *Ibid* p114.
4. Letters *Weekly Worker* February 27 2014.
5. See E Toussaint and D Millet *Debt, the IMF and the World Bank: sixty questions, sixty answers* New York 2010; Question 56: "What is debt auditing?", pp304-07.
6. C Goodall *Ten technologies to fix energy and climate* London 2008, p261.
7. See S Newman (ed) *The final energy crisis* London 2008, pp300-08.
8. G Carchedi *For another Europe: a class analysis of European economic integration* London 2001, p224.
9. *Ibid* p227.
10. K Marx *Capital* Vol 1, in part 4, section 10: "Modern industry and agriculture": [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch15.htm#S10](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch15.htm#S10).
11. See the UN's *Resilient people, resilient planet: a future worth choosing*: [www.un.org/gsp/sites/default/files/attachments/GSReport\\_unformatted\\_30.Jan.pdf](http://www.un.org/gsp/sites/default/files/attachments/GSReport_unformatted_30.Jan.pdf).
12. 'Refusal to accept global warming is driven by corporate interests and the fear of what must be done to try to stop it' *The Guardian* February 20 2014.
13. G Standing *The precariat* London 2011 and *A precariat charter* London 2014.
14. W Eltis *Britain, Europe and EMU* London 2000, p103.
15. L Trotsky *The transitional programme*: [www.marxist.net/trotsky/programme/p2frame.htm#wages.htm](http://www.marxist.net/trotsky/programme/p2frame.htm#wages.htm) (emphasis in original).
16. CPGB *Draft programme* section 3.13, 'Women': [www.cpgb.org.uk/home/about-the-cpgb/draft-programme/3-immediate-demands](http://www.cpgb.org.uk/home/about-the-cpgb/draft-programme/3-immediate-demands).
17. M Shachtman *Communism and the negro* published as *Race and revolution* London 2003, p71.
18. *Ibid* pp79-80.
19. See 'Europe: bring arguments out' Labour Party Marxists November 2013 ([http://labourpartymarxists.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/lpm3\\_nov2013.pdf](http://labourpartymarxists.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/lpm3_nov2013.pdf))
20. M Theodorakis and M Glezos, 'Common appeal for the rescue of the peoples of Europe': <https://ariusila.wordpress.com/2011/10/11/fw-common-appeal-for-the-rescue-of-the-peoples-of-europe>.
21. *The Guardian* October 9 2012.
22. *Critique* August 2013, p443.
23. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European\\_United\\_Left%E2%80%93Nordic\\_Green\\_Left](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_United_Left%E2%80%93Nordic_Green_Left).
24. CLR James *State capitalism and world revolution*: [www.marxists.org/archive/clarj/works/1950/08/state-capitalism.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/clarj/works/1950/08/state-capitalism.htm).
25. Reprinted in M Shachtman *The bureaucratic revolution: the rise of the Stalinist state* New York 1962, p136. He reiterated the call in 1944 - see p147.

**SWP**

# Did free speech allow the Nazis to come to power?

Eddie Ford criticises the SWP for misunderstanding history and insisting upon the 'principle' of no-platforming

Reading *Socialist Worker* these days is a rather depressing experience, and it appears to be getting worse and worse - even if it still has some way to go before it gets as excruciatingly boring as the life-sapping *The Socialist*. Instead of a publication that is trying to constructively engage with the actually existing left and critically examine its own traditions and practices, we enter into an ideological alternative universe: a dreary, philistine world, where all that matters is the next demonstration or strike, where spontaneity is everything and programme is nothing. Indeed, where history itself is junk.

Nowhere is this more apparent than when it comes to the linked questions of fascism, free speech and 'no-platforming'. This sees the Socialist Workers Party totally abandon the Marxist approach, embracing a form of hysterical 'anti-fascism' that hopes to act as the extreme leftwing conscience of the bourgeoisie - moralistically pushing it to take this or that action against the scourge of fascism. As regular readers of the *Weekly Worker* will know, for the SWP it is an article of faith - a 'principle', apparently - that fascists or "Nazis" (seemingly identical, interchangeable, terms for the comrades) must be denied a platform. A sacred shibboleth - unlike, what we saw in Respect when the SWP headed it - abortion rights, secularism, open borders, etc: these can be sidelined in the service of getting votes.

Anyhow, this 'principle' is hammered home again in a recent editorial article prompted by Marine Le Pen's February 5 appearance at the elite Oxford Union and the English Defence League march in Dudley two days later ('Should fascists be allowed freedom of speech?', January 27). We are ritually told that fascists "should never be allowed to speak publicly or organise openly", as whenever "Nazis" are "allowed the space to organise" they will build a "hard core of street-fighting thugs" that will carry out "murderous attacks" on ethnic minorities and the left as part of an attempt to physically "take control of the streets". The most obvious example being, we are informed, Adolf Hitler's Nazi party in the early 1930s that attacked Jewish people on the streets and smashed up meetings of trade unions, social democrats and communists. In other words, freedom of speech leads directly to the gas chambers. That is because "Nazis" are "not like other political forces" or "even other racist parties", such as the United Kingdom Independence Party - rather they are an utterly alien menace, a deadly virus that if left unexpunged will infect the entire body politic.

Of course, the SWP's basic premise is laughable nonsense - but we shall return to that a bit later. However, what is most noteworthy about the above article - for all its thumping SWP orthodoxy - is that it includes a very brief discussion about the implosion of the British National Party, now thankfully facing electoral extinction. We are reminded of Nick Griffin's 2009 appearance on the BBC's *Question time* show and the fact that Unite Against Fascism and other campaigners "fought hard to keep him



It wasn't UAF that did for the BNP

off the air". Yet the debate went ahead anyway and Griffin was "humiliated on the programme, as his racist and bigoted arguments were torn apart".

Here is the first time ever, at least to the knowledge of this writer, that Griffin's disastrous *Question time* performance has ever been mentioned by *Socialist Worker* - but what it says clearly contradicts, or at the very least throws into serious doubt, the SWP's dogmatic interpretation of the no-platform *tactic* (an approach that is shared to one degree or another by large sections of the left, alas). Previously, the comrades had insisted that giving the 'oxygen of publicity' to Griffin would have all manner of dreadful consequences: setting off a chain reaction of increased attacks on mosques, physical assaults on members of the left, and so on. Now we discover that, far from having stormtroopers on every street corner and swastikas flying from every building, Griffin's views were "torn apart" - ripped to shreds in front of millions of people. As a result, he lost all credibility, and eventually his job as BNP leader - he was finally kicked out of the organisation just to make his downfall complete. Obviously, something does not compute about the SWP's analysis.

Naturally, *Socialist Worker* goes through a few contortions in a desperate effort to retain the old ideological line - making out that a "record" 3,000 people "reportedly" enquired about BNP membership that night and droning on about how the explanation for the organisation's demise is due to UAF "campaigning to smash it" - not because it was "defeated in debate". Truly pathetic stuff. You need only have looked at the BNP's website after the *Question time* show ended, as *Weekly Worker* journalists did, to see the flood of angry comments from supporters/members who had found Griffin's performance a complete embarrassment: their "overawed" leader had been fucking useless, when he should have been "fully prepared" for questions relating to his past - ie, his description of the Nazi genocide as a "holo-hoax" or defence of the "totally non-violent" David Duke, former Ku Klux Klan leader.

What our SWP comrades still refuse to recognise is that it was not Weyman Bennett or UAF shouting themselves hoarse *outside* the Television Centre that led to the BNP's demise, but rather Griffin's co-panellists - especially Bonnie Greer - in what was clearly a carefully stage-managed set-up. At the end of the day, Nick Griffin was more discredited by the BBC bosses' decision to 'platform' him than UAF's frantic no-platforming.

## Intransigent

All of which brings us to the broader political point about freedom of speech and why communists fight for it so intransigently. Needless to say, communists do not bend over backwards to help reactionary organisations, fascist or otherwise, spread their views - we aim at all times to *politically defeat* all backward ideas. We most certainly do not have a relaxed, 'live and let live' attitude or suffer from libertarian complacency. Fascism is distinguished from other reactionary streams of thought, after all, by being the last line of defence - a desperate rearguard action - of class society in times of *severe crisis*, and the chilling brutality which it deploys is not an accidental or contingent phenomenon, but a necessary function of its *counterrevolutionary* social role: to crush the working class and its organisations.

From this understanding it follows that communists are the most vocal and steadfast opponents of fascism. And one of our most powerful weapons is precisely exposure, debate, criticism: ie, free speech. With that in mind, communists recognise that the bourgeoisie is not a champion of free speech. Indeed it is a thoroughly *anti-democratic* class. The SWP/UAF, on the other hand, has historically concentrated on getting 'respectable', mainstream opinion on its side - whether forlornly or not - and at its very worst has made direct, and rather revolting, appeals to the bourgeois establishment's 'anti-fascist' credentials. This has involved UAF openly calling for the state to ban EDL marches or imprison far-right figures for 'hate speech'. This is peddling dangerous illusions in the

state, which is never neutral; in fact, it is objectively pro-capitalist, which ultimately means at a certain juncture it can be *pro-fascist*.

In an article on the anti-Le Pen protests outside the Oxford Union, *The Guardian* quotes an illuminating remark from Weyman Bennett (February 5). Fulminating at the decision to invite the "notorious Islamophobe", Marine Le Pen, he mentions how her father, Jean-Marie, "once called the holocaust a 'detail of history'" - which proves that fascists "should never be allowed a platform", as one thing leads inexorably to the other.

Comrade Bennett's throwaway comment offers a revealing insight into the SWP mentality, which essentially is to build a popular-frontist coalition against fascism - nothing must be done to alienate 'progressive' bourgeois opinion. But what the SWP is *really* doing is handing over the right to decide which political discourses are acceptable or not to the bourgeois state and its courts, police, armies, etc. By doing so you are granting these powers to a state apparatus which in times of extreme crisis will itself turn to fascism. It is, after all, what the ruling class will ultimately deploy against us when we threaten its rule. Therefore, we must demand of the bourgeois state that *all* opinions must be permissible - open to debate and contention.

The main political lesson of Marxism is that this state, at any and all times, is *the main enemy* - not "the Nazis". Nick Griffin or any other far-right crackpot should be perfectly free - as far as the police and state are concerned - to expound their garbage. Laws against 'extremism' or 'radicalisation' are just as much a threat to communists as they are to fascists or political Islam - far more so, in fact, as we have a fundamental *class* hostility to the bourgeois state.

Yes, we in the CPGB are perfectly prepared to use the no-platform *tactic* under certain circumstances, but we oppose the traditional far-left approach, which boils everything down to often pointless displays of physical force or, in the shape of UAF, a liberalistic, 'something must be done' howl. But it is a profound

mistake to elevate no-platform into a principle.

Furthermore, our insistence on freedom of speech is programmatically linked to our overall conception of socialism - which is rooted in the entire Marxist world view. Plainly, to reject freedom of speech is to reject Marxism itself and hence the entire project of universal human emancipation - it is hardly an optional add-on. Why? Socialism, the first stage of communism, can only be the act of self-liberation for the great majority, by the great majority - not merely the winning of a parliamentary majority. Therefore it follows that the working class cannot be treated as little children incapable of handling awkward and complicated questions - children who need to be protected from bad ideas.

## Punishment

The *Socialist Worker* article claims that Le Pen's presence at Oxford can help "revitalise" the forces of Nazis in the UK: the "fascists will take any freedom they are offered and use it to rampaging [sic] through the streets, as the EDL did in its heyday" (whenever that was). Of course, the FN came first in last year's European elections in France on 24.86% of the vote and is expected to do well in this year's local/regional elections.

True, a Le Pen government would be highly unpleasant, and the left should make every effort to mobilise against it - overthrow the bastards if possible. But the idea that it would be a "Nazi" government is patently ridiculous. No doubt in the past forces within the FN talked about the 'politics of the street' and physically confronting the left - and some diehards probably still do after a few bottles of wine. But that is clearly not the strategy of the current FN leadership, nor would it define or characterise any future Len Pen-led government; the left should deal with what *is*, not indulge in fantasy politics.

Interestingly enough, while Ukip does not want anything to do with the FN, the two are actually *similar* organisations: xenophobic, chauvinist, rightwing. Yet curiously the SWP says Ukip is *not* fascist - though apparently it is "racist", because it calls for a tighter, points-based, immigration system. In fact that makes it little different, when all is said and done, from the Tories, Liberal Democrats, Labour or, for that matter, George Galloway and No2EU (rest in peace). Are they all "racist" too? Additionally, could the SWP central committee please explain what the *fundamental difference* is between the FN and Ukip?

Whilst we wait for these and other answers, it is obvious that the SWP leadership completely misunderstands the history of the 1920s and 1930s, or at least pretends to. As Clara Zetkin famously said, quite correctly, fascism was a *punishment* inflicted on the working class for not having taken power. But we are not in the 1920s or 1930s. As things stand now, there is no immediate threat to the ruling order from the working class - accordingly, there is absolutely no possibility of the bourgeoisie ceding political power to fascist thugs ●

eddie.ford@weeklyworker.co.uk

## MINERS 1984-85

# Still not too late

It is hard to believe now, but during the miners' Great Strike of 1984-85 the bulk of the left in this country at best "toyed" with the idea of a general strike, as this Alec Long article from *The Leninist* of February 1984 puts it. That, or groups actively campaigned against the demand.

Possibly the most craven

of these was the Socialist Workers Party, a self-regarding sect whose leaders viewed the strike with the interests of the SWP and the defence of its narrow perspectives foremost in their minds. This epic battle was thus characterised as an "extreme example of ... the 'downturn' in the movement".<sup>1</sup> Consequently,

the SWP constituted itself as one of the most conservative, bureaucratically sluggish organisations in the solidarity movement.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps the most explicit - and ghastly - expression of this came from the pen of leading SWPer Chris Harman, who, in the midst of the strike, wrote: "This isn't

1925 or 1926. This is more like 1927" (that is, the miners' were *already* defeated - the situation *during* the miners' strike was akin to that after the strategic defeat suffered by the British working class with the failure of the 1926 General Strike).

In vivid contrast, *The Leninist* - forerunner of the

*Weekly Worker* - even at this very late stage in the strike fought to harness the latent energy and élan of the miners and the networks of solidarity around them to launch an all-out, class-against-class struggle for victory ●

Mark Fischer

mark.fischer@weeklyworker.co.uk

## With or without the TUC: general strike!

"But if you do so [call a general strike]," went on Mr Lloyd George, "have you weighed the consequences? The strike will be in defiance of the government of the country and by its very success will precipitate a constitutional crisis of the first importance. For, if a force arises in the state which is stronger than the state itself, then it must be ready to take on the functions of the state itself, or withdraw and accept the authority of the state."

"Gentlemen," asked the prime minister quietly, "have you considered, and, if you have, are you ready?"

"From that moment on," said [TUC negotiator] Robert Smillie,<sup>3</sup> "we were beaten and we knew we were."<sup>4</sup>

During the course of the miners' strike a number of different political groups and individuals have toyed with the general strike idea, most without any real notion of what such a call entails. We, however, have been unique in the Communist Party in advancing this slogan. *The Morning Star*, true to form, has been so far behind the struggle that it has not even informed its readers as to why it would *oppose* the demand for a strike wave of general strike proportions. In this article we shall explain why we have called for this action and why we believe it to be both necessary and realisable.

For us, the general strike is an objective requirement of the strike in two ways. First, in the 'narrower' sense it is a need in order to win this 'sectional' dispute. The 70s are dead and gone forever: the crisis of British imperialism has upped the stakes and has led the bourgeoisie to sharpen its claws and stiffen its backbone. Increasingly therefore it will become necessary to mobilise the power of the labour movement as a whole in order to win sectional battles.

This is especially so with the miners, as their fight is in that sense a test case. The outcome of this dispute will set the tone for and the character of the class struggles to come. A defeat for the miners would mean a massive wave of demoralisation among the best elements of our class and consequently a stepped-up onslaught from the buoyed-up Tories on the living standards of all workers; a victory, on the other hand, could see our class imbued with a confidence and militancy unparalleled possibly since before 1926.

This perspective has been fully recognised by the ruling class. *The Financial Times* of April 6 1984 reported the highly significant fact that the Confederation of British Industry is "telling its member-companies to aim for zero increases in unit labour costs during the next 10 years and where possible to seek actual reductions of about three percent."

Central to this struggle to drive down the living standards of all workers is the battle against the traditionally most powerful union,



Left to fight alone

the National Union of Mineworkers, and this explains why the full forces of the bourgeois state have been ranged against the striking miners.

*Militant's* of December 14 1984 cretinously claims that: "To some extent it [the miners' strike] has already taken on features of a general strike situation." What *Militant* is attempting to describe in its typically ham-fisted way is the feature of the strike we have pointed to above: the mobilisation and the placing on a 'war footing' of the full might of the state. So the miners have now been on strike for 11 months in defence of their jobs and communities, but this battle is only part of an *overall* offensive first to remove the 'bottleneck' of the miners and then against the living standards of the working class as a whole. Therefore to pit the undoubted strength, guts and sheer will to win of 140,000 miners against the fully activated power of the bourgeois state is heroic, but inadequate.

In the wider sense also, the general strike is an objective requirement of this struggle. The miners' livelihoods and right to work is being destroyed by a moribund, irrational system, which has moved into inevitable crisis. The phenomenon of the general strike is the highest expression of class cohesiveness and combativeness short of revolution itself. As Lloyd George knew (see the opening quote), such a mass action can paralyse not only the economy, but also the normal administrative functions of the state. Workers are then posed with the practical difficulties of running a society day to day. In his book, *The post-war history of the British working class*, Alan Hutt gives some idea not only of the confusion that

can sometimes result, but also of the immense possibilities:

When the government rejected the general council's offer to run food trains, this question resolved itself into the issue of permits for the road transport of food. Headquarters tried to systematise the business by instructing the localities that the only authority to issue permits was the Joint Transport Committee, to consist of delegates from the transport and railway unions. In very many cases, however, this authority was assumed by the local trades council or council of action ... (p142).

The councils of action, which were themselves embryonic soviet-type organisations, in some areas assumed responsibility for the administration of large areas of civil life, a prelude to and an augury of the way the working class will one day take control of the running of society as a whole.

Some in the workers' movement have timidly backed away from the perspective of a general strike for fear that it might prove impossible to win workers to back one. This, of course, is the totally wrong way to pose the question; we ought to think in these terms - we *need* a general strike, now how do we go about *getting* one? Concretely, we have argued that the ideal vehicle for winning this action is a National Minority Movement-type organisation, springing from a transformed miners' support movement.

The National Minority Movement (NMM) sought to bring together all the workers in rank-and-file organisations around a national structure and unitary demands for an unremitting fight for what the working class needs, not

for what capitalism can afford. On its foundation in August 1924 it not only represented 200,000 workers, but, as can be seen from its programme, it was under no illusions about the reformability of British capitalism. The NMM committed itself "to organise the working masses of Great Britain for the overthrow of capitalism ... to carry on a wide agitation and propaganda ... against the present tendency towards social peace and class-collaboration and the delusion of the peaceful transition of capitalism to socialism ..."

The raw material for such a movement exists not only in the miners support committees, but especially in the 25% of workers that *The Sunday Times* revealed last year would be prepared to take industrial solidarity actions with the miners. This 25% are the pacemakers, the opinion formers - a militant minority who, if nationally organised and given a cutting political edge, can sway the mood of the majority.

The TUC are not going to organise a general strike. What we need therefore is an alternative organisational centre that can establish sufficient authority with the class to win one. That is the key task and one that is intimately linked to the fight to reforge the Communist Party, the organisation that set up the original National Minority Movement.

It would be wrong to close this article without commenting on the idea floated most notably by *Militant*, but also by others in the labour movement: that of a 24-hour general strike. In our view this would be, in the words of the great Polish revolutionary, Rosa Luxemburg, to turn the "thunder of a general strike into a damp squib". Writing on the abortive 1902 general strike in Belgium, Luxemburg effectively demolished those like

*Militant* and *Socialist Organiser* who would seek to straightjacket such a mass upheaval even before it begins:

A general strike forged *in advance* within the fetters of legality is like a war demonstration with cannons whose charge has been dumped into a river within the very sight of the enemy.

*Militant's* timidity is an inevitable product of its congenital Labourism. For this group, despite all its 'revolutionary' pretensions, the activity of the working class and its striving towards revolution must be subordinated to the election of the 'next' Labour government "committed to socialist policies" (with lots of *Militant* backbenchers, hopefully). This Labour government, like tomorrow, never comes, of course. However, in the meantime, *Militant* insists that the working class confront the capitalists with fists firmly thrust in pockets: it sets workers up for a real pasting.

Others on the left are actually actively hostile to the call for a general strike. Yet the mere fact that groups as disparate as the staggeringly irrelevant Revolutionary Communist Party, through to the economic Socialist Workers Party, have combated the idea illustrates that the call is far more than a throw-away one-liner from the likes of Tony Benn. It is being debated, both pro and anti, because the struggle itself is throwing up the question as an objective need; we do not have to invent it. The lame-brains of the British left thus choose to ignore reality and vilify the call for a general strike as ultra-leftist. Instead, apparently: "It is more important to talk first of all about what the miners themselves can do to bring about victory."

As if the miners alone have not done enough already! We have called for a general strike in this dispute not to sound impressive or to warm ourselves with our rhetoric. We have called for it simply because it is needed. The miners' fight is a fight for all workers. Let all workers join the struggle alongside the miners. They have suffered alone for all our sakes too long and too much.

- Don't let the miners stand alone!
- For a general strike against pit closures and the Tory anti-trade union laws!
- For a militant, *organised* fighting minority movement.

Alec Long

## Notes

1. T Cliff *Socialist Review* April 1984.
2. See, for example, the report in *The Leninist* of the 1984 Mineworkers Defence Committee conference, reprinted in the *Weekly Worker* (January 8 2015).
3. Robert Smillie (1857-1940) was a miners' leader who played an important role in breaking the union from the Liberal Party to Labour.
4. Quotation taken from Aneurin Bevan's book, *In place of fear* (London 2010).
5. Forerunner of today's paper, *The Socialist*, journal of the Socialist Party in England and Wales, of course.

## REVIEW

## Machiavellian manoeuvres in the dark

Peter Kosminsky (director) *Wolf Hall* BBC2, Wednesdays 9pm

**A**s this edition of the *Weekly Worker* lands on your doormat or graces your browser window, the fourth episode of the BBC's six-part dramatisation of Hilary Mantel's novels, *Wolf Hall* and *Bring up the bodies*, will have been aired. It will be interesting to see if viewing figures have held up.

Following much fanfare and hype from the Beeb, 3.9 million viewers tuned in for the first instalment. By episode two this was down by about a million and episode three saw 2.6 million viewers stick with it. Perhaps those who switched over to *Midsummer murders* on ITV were hoping for more *Downton Abbey*-type period soap opera. While Mantel's hefty books have been overwhelmingly well received, winning two Man Booker prizes (*Wolf Hall* 2009; *Bring up the bodies* 2012), many critics have been less taken with the BBC's adaptation, which has received a mixed bag of reviews. While there have been some glowing responses and few who rubbish it entirely, there is a significant number of the commentariat of the opinion that - well, it's good, but not all it was hyped up to be. I think some of this can be put down to impatience.

In an attempt at 15th century authenticity, director Peter Kosminsky has filmed indoor night-time scenes in candlelight, which seemingly flummoxed a lot of viewers, who failed to make out what was going on. Another commonly held criticism is that the plot is not explicit. Kosminsky's minimal introductory titles and reliance upon dialogue between characters, completely avoiding monologues or voiceovers, leaves the audience having to work at what is happening. While reading some reviews of *Wolf Hall*, I could not help but wonder if critics would have preferred Thomas Cromwell to have had a cringe-worthy Carrie Bradshaw-style voiceover narration ... *The Daily Telegraph's* Michael Leapman criticised Kosminsky's failure to make use of the energy of actor Mark Rylance (playing Thomas Cromwell), who confined himself "largely to a single facial expression" (February 6). Quite what Leapman had in mind for the character is anybody's guess: 'Shaolin Tudor'?

For what it is worth, I have found the direction of *Wolf Hall* to be skilful. The story is ostensibly told from the point of view of the lawyer and advisor to Henry VIII, Thomas Cromwell. With that in mind, we are rarely privy to anything said beyond the earshot of Cromwell. The audience tends not to enter a room before he does. We are told the story mostly through his experiences.

Rylance is a skilled actor and gives a strong performance as Cromwell through well written dialogue and subtle expression. His co-star, Damien Lewis, who readers may remember from HBO's *Band of brothers* or more recently as Sergeant Brody in *Homeland*, is also very strong as Henry VIII (though I do struggle not to think of him as Brody). Lewis's handsome demeanour is at odds with the stereotypical image of Henry as a portly, gout-ridden man - even in Holbein's painting he's far from pretty. Jonathan Pryce as Cardinal Wolsey was a bit stiff, but, given that his character soon became exactly that, it is not massively off-putting. Incidentally, Wolsey would have been 57 at the time, not the octogenarian he appears to be on screen.

As to the plot, we all know the general history. King Henry, his desire for a male heir, his wives, their



Mark Rylance as Thomas Cromwell

eventual lack of heads ... and then the fight with Rome and the reformation of the Church of England. What we see in *Wolf Hall* is the high stakes, the Machiavellian political power-plays of the Tudor court. The moron who equated prince Charles's Clarence Court with *Wolf Hall* clearly has no understanding of real politics. The petty desire for backhanders and knighthoods among those who grovel before the royal family today bears no comparison to the life-and-death gambles, plays and manoeuvres that could see you to either massive wealth and influence or your head on the block under Henry Tudor.

*Wolf Hall* portrays the political calculations, vengeances and sexual desires and frustrations of the key characters through subtly themed episodes. Thomas Cromwell is depicted affectionately by Rylance. He is not shown as a kind of Peter Mandelson of the day - spinning events, his loyalty bought; but as passionate man with progressive views. We see tenderness and pain, as we witness the death of his wife from sweating sickness, and especially so, as we watch his children suffer the same fate. His character's humanity and passion are developed through his affair with his sister-in-law (trapped in a sexless marriage) and his slightly steamy flirtations with both Boleyn sisters. This Cromwell is not Leo McKern's *A man for all seasons*: a cold, calculating bureaucrat. Undoubtedly, the real man was a clever, astute politician, whatever his flaws. A player in the court who lived a lavish lifestyle, but who never reached the heights of power, due to

his background.

### The story so far ...

In the first episode, *Three-card trick*, we watch the fall of Wolsey, as he fails to get annulment for Henry's marriage to Catherine of Aragon. The loyalty of Cromwell to the cardinal, his master, while others jump ship, is also featured. Much mention is made of both characters' 'humble' origins: Wolsey is a butcher's son; Cromwell the son of a blacksmith (perhaps this is seen as the reason for Cromwell's loyalty). We meet and then watch the departure of Cromwell's wife and children - this is done remarkably movingly, given we have known the characters for little more than 20 minutes. We also meet the shrill and calculating Anne Boleyn and her more affable sister, Mary (Henry's previous lover). We do not meet Henry himself until the first episode is drawing to a close.

But there is more of Henry in episode two, *Entirely beloved*. Here begins the emergence of trust towards Cromwell by the king, who takes him into his confidence. Cromwell, in typical form, plays a tactical hand, advising Henry to tax the corrupt monks and monasteries. Cromwell is now on the inside. Later Henry summons him in the middle of the night - the household fears that he is being arrested. Instead he is taken to the king's bedside, as he has woken from a nightmare in which his dead brother and heir to the throne has visited him. Cromwell eases Henry's worries, spinning the dream to show the king as a courageous leader. He has Henry's ear - and his trust.

Wolsey is up north in Yorkshire, but receiving far too much of a following for comfort. Cromwell's decision to remain in London could have been taken, as he claims, in order to fight Wolsey's corner in the corridors of power - or perhaps it was to distance himself from Wolsey, whose fate is looking grim. Harry Percy, who Wolsey once tried to stop marrying Anne Boleyn, is sent to bring Wolsey back to London for his execution. Wolsey dies on his way back, refusing to eat.

Meanwhile, Thomas More, the lord chancellor loyal to the Catholic church, is portrayed as eccentric, cunning and powerful. More is traditionally viewed, especially in Catholic accounts of history, as the 'good man', who righteously defends his faith at his own cost. In Mantel's portrayal, More is the villain, the torturer of 'heretics' who would have the *Bible* translated from Latin. His lackey, Stephen Gardener (played by Mark Gatiss), Cromwell's nemesis, provides witty, curt and knowingly cynical exchanges with Cromwell that would befit a 15th century version of *Yes minister* or *The thick of it*.

Episode three, *Anna Regina*, is where the series really gets going. It is set two years later in 1531, when Cromwell is better off, yet engineers himself a job as 'keeper of the jewels'. James Bainham, Cromwell's barrister, is arrested for promoting William Tyndale's English version of the *Bible* (copies of which had been smuggled into England from Germany).

Henry takes matters into his own hands, asking parliament to endorse him as head of the church, so that he

has the power to annul his marriage to Catherine. The Commons vote is orchestrated by Cromwell to take place in full view of the king, ensuring a significant majority.

Rumours that Anne's prized virginity had been long lost to the once amorous Harry Percy cause Cromwell to pay the latter a visit. Cromwell leans on him, informing Percy that the world is no longer run by armies, but by bankers. And, of course, Cromwell knows all of Percy's debts and his creditors.

Meanwhile Cromwell's own sex life is becoming intriguing. His affair with sister-in-law Johane ends when her mother finds out (this would have been regarded as semi-incestuous by Catholics at the time). It is implied that he sees her as a substitute for his late wife, accidentally referring to her as "Liz", as she leaves.

There are others on Cromwell's 'list' of affections. In a scene prior to Anne's marriage, when it is clear she and Cromwell have won, Thomas and Anne watch the courtyard below them from a balcony. There is a fairly erotic shot with Cromwell, stroking her heaving breasts. Although the next cut sees him standing further back, indicating that this was a mere fantasy on Cromwell's part, this is so incongruous with the style of the series that we are left questioning if the liaison took place at all.

In a later scene, Thomas is in the gardens at Calais (while Anne is at last naked in bed with Henry). Mary Boleyn offers herself to Cromwell, albeit as her second choice, having believed she was stood up. When her tardy suitor arrives unexpectedly in the darkness, Thomas puts a knife to his neck before anyone can realise what is happening - Cromwell's past in Europe has made him more than just a man of words. Thomas leaves Mary with her lover and goes to bed "to pray".

Not satisfied with the Boleyn sisters, Cromwell also appears to have an interest in Anne's young maid, Jane Seymour, whom Anne treats dismissively. We met Seymour earlier in Anne's chamber, where she had been sent as an ineffectual spy (not understanding any French). Then she appeared naive; now she seems marginally more worldly, but still a bit wit.

As the third instalment closes, Anne, now pregnant, believes herself secure. The so-called 'Holy Maid of Kent' is prophesising against Henry's marriage and claims to see his daughter to Catherine, Mary (later to be known as Bloody Mary, on account of her burning of heretic Protestants), taking the throne (incidentally, we first meet the weak and shrimp-like Mary when she is suffering from period pains). And James Bainham is burned at the stake after, having been released, he was unable to keep quiet about his convictions and was re-arrested. This subtly thematic circle of events is a good example of the director's well-crafted story-telling.

So far, *Wolf Hall* has been intriguing, if at times slow in pace. Mostly well cast, with clever, sometimes understated dialogue, written by Peter Saughton. It is thoughtfully produced and carefully, yet subtly staged. It is not the most visionary or hard-hitting work, nor is it the best thing I will ever watch on TV, but it is worth taking the time to appreciate and digest the nuance, the writing and the craft that has gone into it.

However, those looking for something that is instantly accessible and demands nothing of its audience would do better to switch over to *Midsummer murders* ●

Sarah McDonald

DEBATE

# Thoughts on Karl Marx and art

Marx's ideas about art began to take shape in his 1844 *Economic and philosophic manuscripts*. But they also recur and are developed further in his later writings, including *Capital*. We live in an age when artistic decadence has reached its nadir, whereby art as a commodity is the only thing that matters; be that the art of the old masters or today's anti-art. In other words, it is time Marx's ideas were re-examined.

Artistic labour is creative and free work: the subject (artist/creator, consumer of art) establishes a particular relationship with the object (creation "in accordance with the laws of beauty" or the "artistic assimilation of reality" in the form of the work of art). Initially the artist transforms the materials, the ideas at his/her disposal, by giving raw matter a determinate form. The result is a new, aesthetic object, in which the human wealth of the subject is objectified or revealed.

The aesthetic relationship evolves on a socio-historical basis, in the process of humanising nature by means of work and objectifying the human being. The formal elements of art undergo change in line with a change in the socio-historical conditions: eg, classical, medieval, etc. (But this occurs dialectically: it is not a mechanical process.)

Art as superior labour reaches its most developed stage during the bourgeois epoch - although the artist is cut off from the majority of other workers (ie, alienated labour to create use/exchange value). Unlike the latter, artistic labour is freely undertaken, and tends to satisfy the artist's inner need to objectify, express and reveal his/her essential powers in a concrete, sensuous object. By freeing itself from the narrow material reality of (alienated) labour, art reaches a higher level of objectification and affirmation of man as a human being. These powers are realised in practical aesthetic objects.

What is beauty? Aesthetic objects exist only for social beings. Man elicits the aesthetic from things by means of his material, practical activity, giving determinate form to material nature with the aim of expressing a spiritual (imaginative), human content. Beauty is consciously produced form; ugliness is absence of form. Beauty is



Superior labour

the imitation of form in nature/human constructions, as an effective means to express the work's content, and, at the same time, the artist's point of view/feelings about his subject. It cannot exist outside of humanity. Beauty is not an attribute of a universal being: it is created by man in artistic objects. Moreover, because it is social and human, the aesthetic object reveals its essence only to man; it exists only for 'natural human beings' - that is, for social beings:

Aesthetic consciousness ... is not something given, innate or biological; rather it emerges historically and socially on the basis of practical, material labour; the subject exists only for the object and the object exists only for the subject. [But] the aesthetic object cannot be reduced to the subject; it exists independently of subjective perception or evaluation.<sup>2</sup>

The "aesthetic" therefore is not purely subjective. It is also objective. According to Mikhail Lifshitz, Marx agreed with Schiller's observation: "Beauty is simultaneously an object

and a subjective state. It is at once form, when we judge it, and also life, when we feel it ..."<sup>3</sup> This means that we need to have an objective standard of taste. Of course, this is fraught with contradictions. This subjective/objective nature of art is analogous to Marx's discovery of commodity fetishism: it is an objective, scientifically determined observation, which Marxists hold to be true; but it needs to be overcome, because the masses are ruled by commodity fetishism at the subjective level (the need for money in order to live, etc).

The two most important contradictions are the commodity form and the bourgeois division of labour: Under the commodity form, there is also the problem of the inverting power of money: "It transforms loyalty into treason, love into hate, virtue into vice ... nonsense into reason and reason into nonsense"<sup>7</sup> - compare mass art, which is commercially determined. It presents the most profound human problems only in the most banal and degraded forms (which is hierarchical, because it separates intellectual/spiritual from practical labour), or it merely affirms them, in order to keep man in his place, thus closing the window to his understanding of a truly human world - and with it "the possibility of becoming conscious of his alienation, as well as the means of abolishing it"<sup>8</sup>.

On the question of the objective side of art, or the need for an objective standard of taste, Marx writes: "If you wish to enjoy art, you must be an artistically cultivated person."<sup>9</sup>

Judgement of taste was once the preserve of the (semi-autonomous) bourgeois art institution. But in the period of late capitalism the old consensus, based on the enlightenment ideal of art as a 'free activity of the spirit', which elevates it above prosaic reality, has been exchanged for post-structuralist theory: ie, the 'logics of disintegration'. Judgement of taste is purely a subjective matter. What matters more is that art's value is monetarised, be it a Rembrandt, a Picasso drawing dashed off in a few minutes, a soft-porn picture of Jeff Koons and his wife, or anti-art (eg, Koon's set of basketballs, or Tracy Emin's *Unmade bed*). The obsession with anti-art objects, in which the distinction between the art object and consumerism is blurred, means anything can be art.

But not everyone can be an artist. For that, one needs the backing of the art institution, albeit one which is increasingly tied to the art market. Thus the artist becomes a productive labourer, whose product "comes into being only for the purpose of increasing ... capital"<sup>10</sup>.

If the schism within real and concrete man is to disappear - for art *not* to be an exclusive, privileged sphere, decadent or otherwise - we need a successful communist revolution. If not, art and society continue to decay. Where does this leave man as a species-being? ●

Rex Dunn

## Notes

1. According to Walter du Halde: [http://dialectica2epoca.cybersite.nu/text\\_100542.html](http://dialectica2epoca.cybersite.nu/text_100542.html).
2. A Sánchez Vázquez *Art and society* London 1979, chapter 3.
3. M Lifshitz *The philosophy of art of Karl Marx* London 1973, p96.
4. K Marx *Economic and philosophical manuscripts*: [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/epm/3rd.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/epm/3rd.htm).
5. *Ibid.*
6. A Sánchez Vázquez *Art and society* London 1979, p282.
7. [www.academia.edu/7443151/The\\_Sense\\_In\\_Which\\_Communist\\_Must\\_Be\\_Communitarian](http://www.academia.edu/7443151/The_Sense_In_Which_Communist_Must_Be_Communitarian).
8. A Sánchez Vázquez *Art and society* London 1979, pp254-55.
9. My emphasis - [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/power.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/power.htm). Unlike Adam Smith, Marx sees the artist as an unproductive labourer; but only as long as his labour is part of his nature: ie, not intended to be "subsumed under capital ... for the purpose of increasing that capital"; and not just for himself, but for the art industry as a whole.
10. K Marx *Theories of surplus value*: [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1863/theories-surplus-value/add1.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1863/theories-surplus-value/add1.htm).

and a subjective state. It is at once form, when we judge it, and also life, when we feel it ..."<sup>3</sup> This means that we need to have an objective standard of taste. Of course, this is fraught with contradictions. This subjective/objective nature of art is analogous to Marx's discovery of commodity fetishism: it is an objective, scientifically determined observation, which Marxists hold to be true; but it needs to be overcome, because the masses are ruled by commodity fetishism at the subjective level (the need for money in order to live, etc).

The two most important contradictions are the commodity form and the bourgeois division of labour:

The need for money is ... the real need created by the modern economic system, and the only need it creates. The quantity of money becomes more and more its sole important property. Just as it reduces everything to its own form of abstraction, so it reduces itself in the course of its own movement to something quantitative. Lack of moderation and intemperance become its true standard.<sup>4</sup>

This idea is developed further in *Capital*. The tendency to amass capital is the essence of capitalistic progress: ie, production for production's sake (compare ancient society); but the contradictory nature of the development of the productive forces is "clearly inimical to some fields of spiritual activity - art, for instance" (*Theories of surplus value*). So spiritual production calls for a different kind of labour than that used in material production. Marx writes:

Only through the objectively unfolded wealth of human nature can the wealth of subjective human sensitivity - a musical ear, an eye for the beauty of form, in short, senses capable of human gratification - be either cultivated or created ... The cultivation of the five senses is the work of all previous history. [But under the commodity form] sense, which is a prisoner of crude practical need, has only a restricted sense. For a man who is starving, the human form of food does not exist, only its abstract form exists [as a means to an end; to live, work - in this sense, man is reduced to an animal. But the idea of food in the literal sense also applies to food in the metaphorical sense: eg, art.] The man who is burdened with worries and needs has no sense for the finest of plays ...<sup>5</sup>

In *Wage labour and capital*, as well as in *Capital*, Marx points out that, on the one

# What we fight for

- Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.
- There exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called 'parties' on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed 'line' are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.
- Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members should have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.
- Communists oppose all imperialist wars and occupations but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question - ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.
- Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, 'One state, one party'.
- The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.
- Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.
- Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally.
- The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote.
- We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.
- Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.
- Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women's oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.
- Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin's Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.
- Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism - a system which knows neither wars, exploitation, money, classes, states nor nations. Communism is general freedom and the real beginning of human history.

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## Fighting fund

### If your phone rings

One comrade who has responded to our appeal for new or increased standing orders is MS, who states: "I feel I should contribute to this excellent publication." And he is as good as his word, for the accompanying SO form payable to the *Weekly Worker* is for £40 a quarter, starting in March. Another form just received is from comrade DC, who is increasing his current payment by £1 a month. Every little helps!

Those new payments will be too late for our February fund, but the idea, of course, is to swell that list of regular donors and/or the amount they pay, so that we make our £1,750 target every month. At the moment, we're struggling a bit, but I'm confident that this situation will soon be reversed. A team of comrades are currently ringing or emailing our contacts, soliciting new or increased SOs. So if your phone rings ...

Just to stress how important those regular standing orders are, the total we received last week in

that way was £160. That's from nine donations, ranging from £10 to £40 (thank you, AD!).

But that's not the only way of contributing to our monthly fighting fund. For instance, over the last seven days there were three PayPal donations from NW (£20), DF and KD (£10 each). Then there is the good, old-fashioned other ways - £10 cash from Hassan and cheques from CN (a fantastic £50) and LP (£20) - all helped up this week's tally to £270. That takes the running total for February to £523, but once again we're lagging behind - we need to raise well over £1,000 in just over two weeks!

That's where you come in. Let us have your contribution by cheque, PayPal, bank transfer or ... yes, standing order! ●

Robbie Rix

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# weekly worker

**Labour left  
remains short  
on ideas and  
divided**

## Wishful thinking rather than hard truth

Stan Keable of Labour Party Marxists was at John McDonnell's Labour Left Platform roundtable discussion on February 7

An air of desperation and self-deception hung over the 200 or so left activists, MPs and 'policy experts' gathered together in the big hall at the University of London Union at the invitation of leading left MP John McDonnell, under his Labour Left Platform umbrella. Simon Hewitt, a young member of the Labour Representation Committee's *Labour Briefing* editorial board, expressed this desperation: "Labour will be dead in five years if we don't sort ourselves out."

The fragile nature of the lowest-common-denominator (ie, undemocratic) consensus type of left unity achieved was illustrated when former Lambeth anti-cuts councillor and Unite activist Kingsley Abrams announced that he had resigned his Labour Party membership and defected to the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition in disgust. He had taken a stand against cuts on Lambeth Labour council in line with Unite policy, but Unite did not fight his suspension from the Labour group, which was now implementing cuts. The 'emergency budget' anti-austerity motion to Labour's national policy forum had been voted down by the affiliated trade union delegates. And, to cap it off, Unite had just made a £1.5 million donation to Labour's election fund, on top of its affiliation fees.

Comrade McDonnell remarked that he had handed the microphone to Kingsley because "several others have done the same" (eg, Warrington anti-cuts councillor, Unite activist and LRC national committee member Kevin Bennett also defected to Tusc recently), and, ominously, "we do talk about the philosophical question whether to be in or out of the Labour Party". Since the meeting we have learned that RMT president Peter Pinkney has joined the Green Party and will be standing as a Green candidate for Redcar in the general election.<sup>1</sup>

Can the left persuade Labour's front bench to adopt an alternative, anti-austerity economic programme, in the short time available before May 7? Or will Labour continue alienating good class-struggle fighters with its austerity-lite commitments, promising to make the working class carry on paying for capitalism's crisis? Given the haemorrhaging of Labour votes to the Scottish National Party and the Greens, both posing to the left, against austerity and Trident, an absolute Labour majority now seems unlikely, but, with the Tories losing support to the UK Independence Party, Labour may well end up with the most MPs. Comrade McDonnell's plan is to make the left into a coherent force which can then negotiate as a player in any post-election coalition negotiations.

In the Marxist tradition of 'telling it like it is', I have to say to comrade McDonnell that this wishful thinking is delusional. Unfortunately, if we are to change the world, we must

first be truthful about where we are at. Our class is in a weak condition at present - confused, disorganised and disorientated; and so is the left itself. There is no quick fix for this condition, no short cut, no easy road to socialism. A protracted struggle must be undertaken to democratise and rebuild our movement and re-educate our class in socialist ideas and politics before it can deliver effective solidarity to anyone, let alone approach the question of taking state power away from the capitalist class.

Much more than a simple majority of MPs is required: socialism cannot be delivered from above by an enlightened elite. A genuinely socialist government in Britain (not a Miliband/Balls Labour government trying to run an imagined ethical capitalism) implementing its minimum programme of immediate measures in the interests of, and empowering, the working class, could not survive the inevitable counterrevolutionary efforts of capital, unless it was based on the active, conscious support of a substantial majority of working people. Nor could it last long on its own, if the workers' movement in Europe had not also matured to a similar level, capable of delivering real solidarity action to a socialist government here, under attack.

### Alternative

A notable lacuna in the left's 'alternative narrative' (comrade McDonnell's words) was the omission of any demands for democratisation of the state. The three themes were austerity, rail nationalisation and trade union rights. It was left to the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory (promoted by the Alliance for Workers' Liberty) to proclaim, on its leaflet, the abolition of the monarchy and the Lords, a federal republic, and a worker's wage for MPs. These demands may not be doorstep voters today, but they are indispensable

conditions for the working class to overpower capitalism.

Commendable though it is to attempt to bring the weak, divided, disorganised and rudderless Labour left into the same room - "the first time in a long while that all of the left organisations in the Labour Party have come together", in comrade McDonnell's words - this gathering was evidence, to any objective observer, of the palpable weakness of the left and of the workers' movement as a whole, not our strength.<sup>2</sup> As Aslef national organiser Simon Weller remarked, the speeches complaining about anti-working class coalition government policies amount to "preaching to the choir". Privatisation of public transport has been going on for 40 years, he said - in other words, under Labour as well as Tory administrations. The question not being answered was, "How do we set about changing the Labour Party? - and it is not

through the national policy forum!"

The key to developing an effective workers' movement, and to transforming the party and the unions, is democracy - and democracy starts at home, in the organisations of the left. The ineffective, pretend unity of fudged consensus 'decisions' made without transparency, motions, debate and voting, will not do. We need organisational unity in action, based on freedom of discussion and acceptance of majority decisions.

Comrade McDonnell, opening the meeting, said: "People understand that they are being ripped off, and are desperate for a real Labour government", but they are "not seeing a display of real Labour politics". The purpose of the Left Platform, as stated on its website, is to "demonstrate practically what a Labour government could do in office", and "to consolidate a common left policy platform that can give people hope".<sup>3</sup>

But fostering hope in a Labour government under present realities means setting people up for disillusionment.

History shows that Labour governments running capitalism undermine and disempower the workers' movement, setting the scene for more rightwing Tory governments. The 'official communist' programme (*Britain's road to socialism*) of a series of increasingly leftwing Labour administrations is a pipe dream. Our movement must be built in opposition to whatever capitalist government is in office, and the task of transforming the

trade unions and the Labour Party into vehicles for socialism, of "breaking the stranglehold of the bureaucracy", as Brent and Harrow LRC activist Steve Forrest put it, will be hindered by Labour taking government office. We need socialist MPs elected, to give a voice to the workers' movement. But we need a Miliband Labour government like a hole in the head.

Unfortunately, sectarian divisions amongst the Labour left are every bit as alive as between the left groups outside the party. True, the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy had signed up amongst the Labour Left Platform sponsors, and I spotted its secretary, Pete Wilsman, in the hall. But there was no sign of its leading light, Ken Livingstone, while Christine Shawcroft only ventured as near as the pavement in Malet Street, as the brave lone seller of the so-called 'original' *Labour Briefing* - in competition with the one produced by the LRC, whose sales team was out in force.<sup>4</sup> Comrade McDonnell alluded to these difficulties when he commented that the event had "showed that we can work together".

The next step, said comrade McDonnell in his summing up, is to "ask every Labour candidate" to support the Labour left's "alternative narrative" of "what needs to be done", which had been the achievement of the event. And we will reconvene in the first week after the general election to take the campaign forward, as that is the time, he claimed, when a new Labour government (if that is the result) will be most susceptible to pressure from the left ●

### Notes

1. See [www.chroniclive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/rmt-union-president-im-standing-8598307](http://www.chroniclive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/rmt-union-president-im-standing-8598307).
2. See also Jon Lansman's useful summary of what was said in each session, and his pertinent criticisms of the left: "While the Labour left continues to work in the amateurish manner described above, the right has little to fear" ([www.leftfutures.org/2015/02/reflections-on-the-left-platform-meeting/#more-41075](http://www.leftfutures.org/2015/02/reflections-on-the-left-platform-meeting/#more-41075)).
3. <http://leftplatform.com>.
4. When the 2012 AGM of the *Labour Briefing* magazine voted to merge with the LRC, Jenny Fisher, Christine Shawcroft, Richard Price and three others, instead of accepting the democratic decision, turned the merger into a split. They set up Labour Briefing Cooperative Limited and launched a rival magazine entitled *the original Labour Briefing*.



John McDonnell

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