

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

weekly



worker



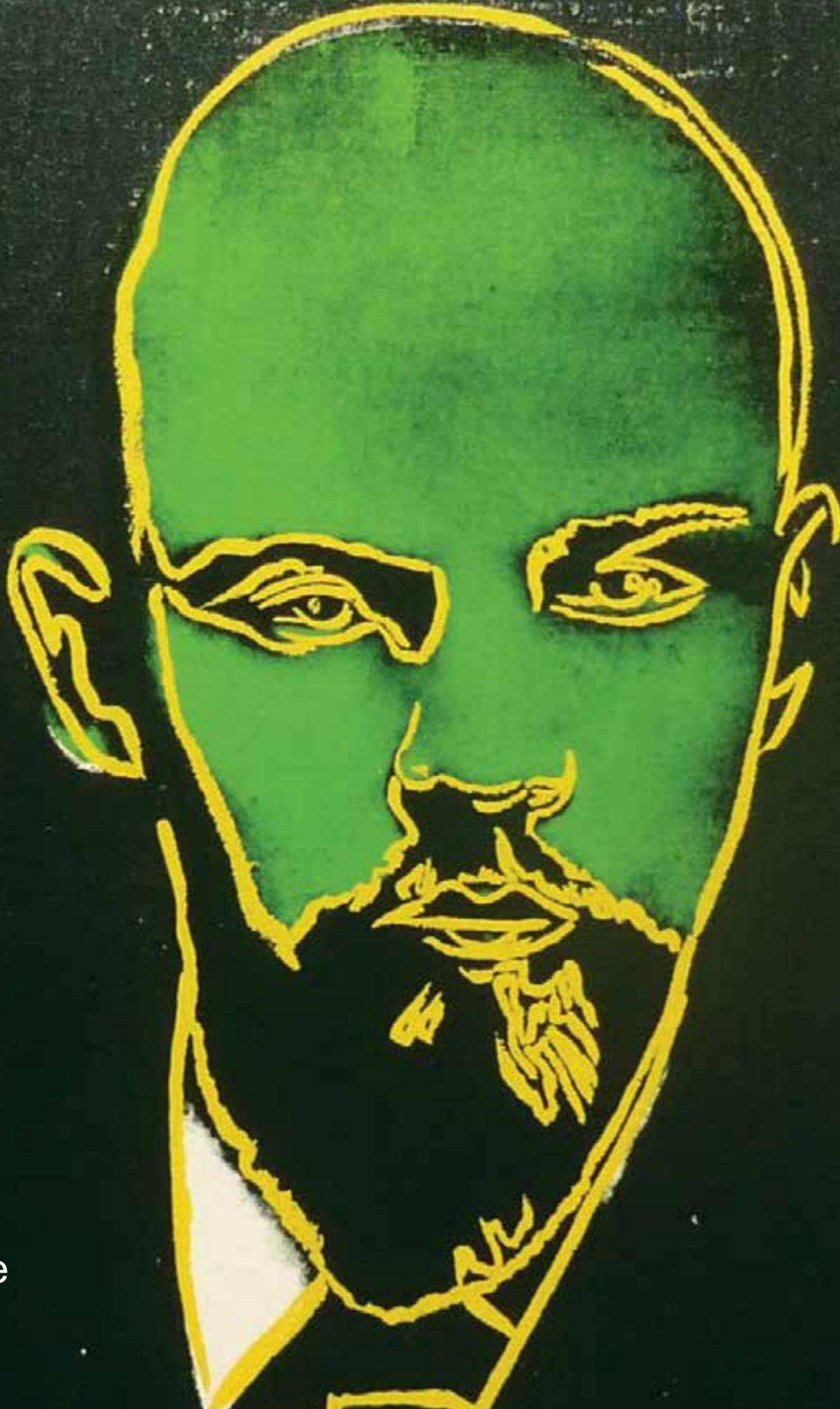
Greece running out of money fast. Bourgeoisie banks on splitting Syriza

- Migrants and open borders
- South Africa xenophobia
- Housing crisis
- German workers' movement

No 1055 Thursday April 23 2015

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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LETTERS



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

One nation

Moshé Machover cites the platform of the Joint List, which stood in the elections to the Knesset, in his criticism of my view that the Palestinians and Israeli Jews constitute one nation (Letters, April 16). We both support the Joint List, but that does not necessarily mean support for its politics, which are, in so far as they have been formulated at all, eclectic and of the lowest common denominator. This is not surprising for an alliance of Islamist, radical nationalist and Stalinist tendencies.

The attitude of Zionism is quite clear. There is no such thing as an Israeli nationality. Nationality is defined on the basis of either religion or quite arbitrary factors. In reality, there are two nationalities that are *de facto* recognised - Jewish and Arab. Zionism decrees that there can be no separate Israeli nationality. In the words of former chief justice Simon Agranat, "The desire to create an Israeli nation separate from the Jewish nation is not a legitimate aspiration. A division of the population into Israeli and Jewish nations would ... negate the foundation on which the state of Israel was established." I understand that Moshé disagrees with the decision in Tamarin and more recently in Uzi Ornan that there is no separate Israeli nation, but he confines this to Hebrews - ie, Israeli Jews.

Certainly, Israeli Arabs are oppressed both collectively and individually. They are non-Jewish and Arab-speaking, and that is reason enough for such discrimination. It is *in that sense* fair enough to describe them as a national minority, just as Jews in Poland were classed as a national minority. But socialists and communists would have opposed the classification of Polish Jews as members of a separate, Jewish nation.

Of course, Israeli Arabs are part of the Palestinian people, though the Joint List supports a "just solution", not the right of return of the Palestinian refugees. As for being part of the Arab nation, this is primarily a means of identifying with the oppressed Arabs of the Middle East. It has little practical import.

What I don't think one can do is generalise from the specific, regardless of the context. In Turkey the logical extrapolation from Kurdish nationhood is indeed divorce and separation into two states. The same is true in Sri Lanka with the Tamils. It is not out of choice that the PKK has accepted the unity of the Turkish state. Israel, being a settler colonial state, is quite happy to accept that Israeli Arabs form a separate nation and to transfer to another state. When she was conducting 'peace negotiations', Tzipi Livni pushed the idea that Arab areas of Israel, such as 'the Triangle', would indeed be handed over to a Palestinian state.

Moshé says that if what I say is correct then an American nation could not have existed until late into the 19th century. Perhaps he would tell us when he believes the American nation was formed? Before the civil war? Before the abolition of slavery or segregation? Talk of an American nation is meaningless.

Moshé rejects the suggestion that Zionism has created a Palestinian nation, which includes its own settlers. I suggest that the basis of a separate non-Arab Hebrew or Israeli Jewish nation means the continuation of Zionism. Being Jewish in Israel is not a question of culture or language, but of apartheid privilege. How does this Hebrew nation define itself other than in antagonism to the Palestinian Arabs, within and without?

Moshé is wrong in suggesting that I conflate the Zionist mode of

colonisation with that of South Africa. I don't, but I do recognise that there are similarities, which today are being played out on the West Bank. Apartheid means separate development and racial segregation. Is that not where Zionism is heading?

Tony Greenstein
Brighton

No nation

Tony Greenstein and Moshé Machover both show weaknesses and irrationalities in their own respective understandings of the Middle East. Indeed, at times they manage to expose outright denials of reality in each other's analyses.

Machover is rightly scathing about the delusion of Greenstein that there is no national oppression in the relationship between Israeli Jews and Palestinians, and about Greenstein's contention that the relationship is purely one involving "racism" against Palestinian Arabs. Greenstein fears that any acceptance of the existence of national oppression would legitimise the existence of an Israeli 'nation', and therefore logically legitimise the separation of Jews and Arabs and the further ethnic cleansing of Israel's remaining Palestinian Arab population.

This is an attempt by Greenstein to deny reality and force it into a particular theoretical mould that is at variance with that reality: the paradigm of the "colonial settler state". Thus Greenstein writes: "Above all, this idea depends on whether or not you see Israel's Jewish population as forming a nation separate from that of the Palestinians. I do not accept that because of the nature of settler colonialists: they are incapable of forming separate nations unless they utterly vanquish or exterminate the indigenous population ... the obvious conclusion is that Palestine ... contains one nation - Jewish Palestinians or Hebrews and Arab Palestinians. To argue, as the majority of Jewish settlers do, that Israeli Arabs are a different nation and do not belong within the Israeli state, that they should be 'swapped' for the settlement blocs, is a primary example of racism."

The idea that the Israeli Jewish population, as currently constituted, are part of the same nation as the Palestinian-Israelis is absurd. The key to this is consciousness: for them to be both part of the same nation, both groups have to be conscious of this. Neither are.

On the other hand, Machover's position that the 'modern Hebrews' (ie, the Israeli Jewish population) themselves constitute an actual nation, local to the Middle East, also denies reality. The flaw in this logic again resolves around the question of consciousness: the Israeli Jews have no belief in themselves as a nation local to the Middle East. They consider themselves to be part of a worldwide Jewish 'nation' and that the state of Israel therefore belongs to all Jews.

Machover has elsewhere resorted to a tortured analogy - using categories derived from the Marxist conception of the development of the consciousness of the proletariat - to explain the lack of a genuine national consciousness of the 'modern Hebrews', claiming that they are a 'nation in itself' without being conscious of the fact, in a manner analogous to the proletariat constituting itself as a 'class in itself' without having gained the consciousness of its mission to liberate humanity (ie, to become a 'class for itself').

But, unlike the consciousness of the universal working class, the consciousness of nations is based on concrete particularisms. And the presence or absence of a concrete example of particularist consciousness is pretty decisive in determining whether or not that form of concrete national entity exists objectively. Of course,

this is not entirely subjective; it has to be at least feasible in material reality for that concrete national particularism to exist. But, nevertheless, without consciousness of its own existence, no nation can objectively exist.

The oppression of the Palestinians does not stem from being a national minority in a conventional national state. Rather, they are the excluded *majority*, and it is in this that their national oppression consists. What excluded them is not a conventional nation, but rather the territorial manifestation of a wider, semi-national formation, which claims to be the 'Jewish nation'.

Zionism cannot jump over material reality - it did not succeed in forging the diverse Jewish population in many countries into a nation. The attempt to do so was reactionary social engineering. But the creation of Israel nevertheless represented a reactionary *material* change. It created a semi-nation - with a pan-Jewish Zionist bourgeoisie in command, occupying stolen Arab land, which regards the territory it seized as its own 'national' asset. This semi-nation, based on a conception of the Jews as a secular people, as opposed to a religious population, is what subjects the Palestinians to national oppression by exclusion from their own homeland.

Greenstein is obviously wrong, and absurd, to argue that Israeli Jews are *currently* part of the same nation as the Palestinian Arabs. On the contrary, they are part of the Jewish semi-national formation that oppresses the Palestinians. But, because this semi-nation is not a viable nation, if Greenstein's conception was modified in a particular way, it would point to the solution.

For Israeli Jews to *become* part of a common nation with the Palestinian Arabs, they would have to renounce the secular Jewish identity - the conscious ideological basis of this semi-national formation. Such renunciation of 'Jewishness' would be quite compatible with practising Judaism - religious Jews could easily be part of a common nation with Christian and Muslim Arabs if the inherently chauvinist 'secular' identity were to disappear.

Gilad Atzmon and Shlomo Sand, who pose this necessity for Israeli Jews to consciously become part of a common nation with Palestinians through renouncing secular 'Jewishness', are pointing to the progressive solution to the Israel question that eludes Greenstein, because of his false dogma of the "colonial settler state". These non-Marxist thinkers are pretty close to the truth, though they do not have a political strategy to put their insights into practice. A movement of conscious Marxists, armed with this understanding, could create a force to overturn Zionism and lead to a real revolutionary change in the Middle East.

Ian Donovan
Communist Explorations

Grow up

I was pleased to read comrade Steve Freeman's letter about the Republican Socialists, as it cogently presented the argument and answered some of the points that my letter in the same issue criticised - rather intemperately, admittedly (April 16). However, I stand by the bulk of my criticism.

The problem lies not with the Republican Socialists, but with the political culture of the communist-socialist movement as a whole. Either there is a complete collapse into a 'broad movement' or an obsession over a 'fundamental principle'. The current CPGB has been guilty of this by advocating votes for Labour, but insisting that leftwing parties support a people's militia (eg, No2EU). This navel-gazing can lead to statements that seem like Dada manifestos, comrade Pete McLaren's letter last week being a prime example.

According to this epistle, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition is "the sixth largest party contesting the general election". I haven't bothered checking, but I presume that what is meant is: 'Tusc is fielding the sixth largest number of candidates in the general election', which isn't quite the same. Amazingly, this is "the largest coordinated left challenge since World War II - over 70 years ago" (NB: 70 is the fingers of both hands seven times).

But wait, there's more! "Dave Nellist outlined how Tusc was the only genuinely anti-austerity party in these elections". So have the SPGB been voting for austerity since 1904? Or is this a more recent split?

The point I want to get across is more eloquently put in the most recent edition of *Red Pepper*, in which the Green Party's anti-capitalist value is assessed. Since the last election, the Greens have gained members, votes and credibility through a number of factors. In contrast, the communist-socialist movement is, arguably, in a worse position. The anti-establishment *Zeitgeist* and appetite for a different socio-economic system cried out for a single Marxist vision, but this has been lost to either the Greens, nationalist visions or the xenophobia of the UK Independence Party. This election is lost and we can only hope for a Labour-SNP coalition.

To advance the cause, I suggest the following as a minimum statement of principles for a TUC-type organisation comprised of parties, unity projects, trade unions, campaigns, individuals or anything else that is on our side:

1. The current capitalist system only benefits a few people and is harmful to most people;
2. We seek to change the current capitalist system, so that everybody can have a dignified and fulfilling life.

It is about time that we grew up and made a difference.

Dave Brown
Clevedon

Growing stench

Nicola Sturgeon stormed onto our TV sets. It all goes to show that the Scottish referendum was no ordinary event. A nation had woken up to the possibility of a different future. The majority decided to stay where they were, many frightened by the dire warnings of disaster from unionist politicians and powerful members of the business class. Surely the end?

This election will prove it is not all over by any means. Jack will not go back in his box. Now we can see the real impact of the referendum. The 45% who rejected Westminster and voted 'yes' have torpedoed the union. It is not sunk yet - only holed below the waterline. Water is pouring in and the ship is beginning to list.

Scotland found a taste of freedom and the possibility of a self-governing republic. Just as powerful is the whip of reaction from England. With two weeks to go, the Tory campaign is stagnating. Press the panic button and hit Scotland. Out come Cameron, Tebbit, Major, Clegg and an embarrassed Miliband.

The Tories understand that England is divided over this. But a significant minority have chauvinist instincts and if their resentments can be mobilised then Scotland could do for Cameron what immigration has done for Ukip. Brew up a storm and count the votes piling up. Of course, when the Tories are mobilising anti-Scottish chauvinism, they will lose voters in Scotland. Small beer when the majority of votes are in England. The key thing for Cameron is to exploit resentments and win this election. For short-term advantage the Tories are building their funeral pyre of unionism.

Back in September after the referendum, Cameron played the English card as a weapon against Labour calling for 'English votes for English laws'. That

is as far as it went until now. Standing in Bermondsey as an anti-unionist candidate was not the obvious thing to do. 'Another Scotland is possible' is a message of hope for England too. People are listening. Scotland's rebellion is England's opportunity.

Then the situation began to shift. Simon Hughes, the former MP for Bermondsey now seeking re-election, played the Scotland card in his interview in the *Evening Standard*. He told us that "Londoners are in danger of seeing their taxes 'hijacked' to Scotland if Ed Miliband does a deal with the Scottish National Party". He said that "vital public services would be in the firing line if SNP leader Nicola Sturgeon demanded a high price to prop up a Labour government".

Scratch a British unionist and you will find an English chauvinist. Any threat to the permanence of the union is seen by its supporters as an attack on the British way of life. If you are upper class or middle class then this danger feels real and present. It very soon turns into anti-Scottish attitudes. The Tories want to do to Scotland what Ukip has done for immigrants.

Queen Anne's 1707 Act of Union chained Scotland to England "forever". Now the union is well past its sell-by date. It is starting to smell. The stench is growing. There is only one answer, chuck it in the bin, the quicker, the better. Only conservative Marxists want to keep it in the fridge as long as possible.

Republican socialists demand the immediate end of the chains that bind Scotland to England. Once again the left in England in the shape of Tusc and Left Unity have been found wanting. They have no policies and nothing to say. I repeat that it is vital that there is at least one anti-unionist candidate in England who is prepared to call on Tusc, Left Unity and the CPGB to stop following the British road to nowhere. I call upon all of them to immediately issue public statements condemning English chauvinism promoted by the Tories.

Steve Freeman
Bermondsey and Old Southwark

Embarrassment

About 30 people attended a meeting of the campaign group, Liverpool Against the Cuts, recently, at which anti-austerity political parties standing locally were invited to speak. The parties agreeing to participate were Tusc, Left Unity and Old Swan Against the Cuts. The latter's candidate is a member of the grandly-named International Socialist League - the British Section of the International Workers League/Fourth International (ISL). The Tusc candidate is a member of the Socialist Party in England and Wales.

The speakers addressed questions from members of LATC about the election in May this year. Generally, they agreed that the Labour Party will continue to impose cuts and fail to represent workers' interests; that the Green Party is inconsistent and unreliable; that Ukip is taking advantage of division between workers and the Scottish National Party of workers' fear and anger about austerity.

My questions were: "Do you think that a classless alternative to capitalism is realisable in today's world? If so, how would a vote for you and your party help bring this about? In other words, what is your vision of socialism and how to get there?"

After the meeting, the SPEW speaker apologised to me for not answering my questions. I appreciated his honesty. He had spoken of how a Tusc government would nationalise the banks, energy and pharmaceutical companies. Tusc would impose strict controls over the movement of capital abroad and call on workers' in other countries to support these measures. This gained him a round of applause. When he said that Tusc is opposed to the idea of open borders, I assumed he was referring to restrictions on capital rather than labour. I did not have a chance

to interrogate him on this.

In contrast, as I passed the Left Unity speaker going out of the building, she remarked briefly that she liked my questions. I thanked her. She targeted the crisis of capitalism as a cause for the movement of labour across borders. She also highlighted the militancy and potential power of Chinese and Indian workers. She emphasised that it was the task of workers worldwide to end capitalism and its global economic and environmental crises. This is a healthy corrective to the tendency to focus on local or national strategies for change.

The ISL speaker was opposed to immigration controls and Ukip's scapegoating of foreign workers. He wanted to explain why the left is so weak in the UK. Appealing to the activists at the meeting, he argued that when workers are organised and militant then the left is strong. He therefore urged listeners to agitate for class struggle and to organise in the workplaces and communities from below.

This explanation surprised me. I had expected that a Trotskyist speaker would mention Stalinism and Labourism as barriers to class-consciousness. The combined influence of these historical forces has, in my opinion, weakened both the left and the working class by either ignoring, distorting or polemicising against the potential for a classless alternative to capitalism in the present. As a result the electorate tends to associate socialism and communism with the failure of utopian projects and actual historical dystopias.

None of the speakers answered my questions directly. This made me wonder whether there is an unspoken consensus that this might have generated disagreeable controversy and differences of opinion. Maybe, I thought, our left candidates are afraid to think about the socialist future in public because they might face hostility, ridicule and division. In other words, the topic would not be an 'election winner'. Nonetheless I was glad that they gave attention to the ideas of building the class struggle from below, what measures a workers' government would introduce if elected and how to develop a global perspective on workers' liberation.

Despite admiring the sincerity and courage of the candidates, I left unconvinced I should vote for any of them. It is hard to be a genuine left reformist in the UK today. I thought of the revisionist 19th century Marxist, Eduard Bernstein. Marxist readers of this paper will remember that Bernstein is associated with the statement: "The final aim is nothing; the movement is everything". I find the reluctance or inability of experienced class-struggle militants to discuss the final aim of socialism/communism/a classless world society in public embarrassing. I wonder whether this timidity is not confined to elections only, but rather is a permanent outcome of despair and the absence of access to an adequate Marxist education today.

Paul B Smith
email

Lessons

The final reprint of *The Leninist's* coverage on the miners' strike was from just after it ended in March 1985 ('Lessons of the Great Strike', April 9). Mark Fischer reflects on the theme at the time that the National Union of Mineworkers had not been broken and the cause wasn't lost, but in retrospect he now thinks we had.

Personally, I think you were right the first time. 1985 hadn't broken the miners or the union. We suffered a great defeat of confidence and lost almost 100,000 men in the first rush to get out after the defeat, as the closures steamed through. We had also the existence of the yellow-dog Union of Democratic Mineworkers, which had taken something less than 20% of our total membership, but was an obstacle to regroupment and recommitment. But, when the dust settled, coal was still more

than 85% of the grid and 85% of that power was produced by coal mined by union miners. We still had power. One year after the end of the Great Strike, pit, regional and area strikes were sweeping the coalfields, a national rank-and-file miners' organisation had been established with its own widely circulating paper. Arthur Scargill was soon to be re-elected president in a national election based on individual secret ballot and - guess what - we commissioned a national ballot for industrial action and achieved more than an 80% 'yes' vote and the National Coal Board/British Coal backed off and withdrew its draconian 'national disciplinary code', which had stopped the Yorkshire coalfield with wildcat actions and mass picketing.

It was at that point that the Thatcher plan for the industry was dumped, basically to smash the NUM, close all but the super-profitable pits and sell off a decentralised, privatised, non-union, super-profitable coal industry. This was replaced by the Major plan, which essentially aimed to rid the country of the NUM and its influence by closing down the industry lock, stock and barrel and switching to nuclear and gas power regardless of the economic and social consequences. Labour added its weight to this process by diving up to its armpits in 'environmental' and 'green' policies in the European Union and the imposition of a scheme which would end coal power and coal production in Europe. We are now living in the last days of this plan, with only my own pit, Hatfield Main, left standing. We can say with certainty we are indeed defeated now, although we weren't at the end of the strike and not really for another 10 years later.

There are a few other observations I would make on Jack Conrad's comments from the time. As I constantly remind readers in this paper, the NUM did not think it could do it alone, and from before the start of the strike constructed strike coordinating bodies in London and all the big regions, of all the mass unions, to coordinate action and plug any holes. We had every reason to think they were sincere and many, if not most, were. The NUM was not "split down the middle", by the way. It had a fraction of about 20% break away. A scab rump left us. We did not split 50-50, as Jack suggests. Neither did the end of the miners' strike usher in a new period of working class militancy, with strikes across industry just as bitter as ours had been. And, needless to say, 'revolution' was not placed on the agenda following our defeat.

I am puzzled by the references to Buckton, Knapp, Todd and Slater, as if they stabbed us in the back and let us down, when the absolute opposite is the case. No British National Union of Seamen seafarer handled coal or sailed scab cargoes, while coal ships were tied up for 12 months. No train broke our picket lines - indeed they imagined they saw a picket line, which they refused to cross, when our lads were too lazy to turn up and mount one. Thousands of train drivers and guards were sent home without pay, many suspended for refusing to run scab trains or cross picket lines. Leicester had only 31 men on strike and 2,219 scabbing. The Coalville signal box men refused to allow coal onto the line, and crews refused to man trains for 12 months! Even to the point where National Union of Railwaymen signal box men were compulsorily laid off on sick as being mentally ill for not allowing coal trains through junctions.

When it comes to dockers, well, of course, it would have been excellent if all the dockers had downed tools and struck in solidarity with the miners, but that degree of class-consciousness and solidarity wasn't on the cards at that point. Instead the action of blocking scab coal, fuel and iron ore was sold on the basis of self-interest.

If Jack had any experience in mass industry and mass union struggles, he would know that action is frequently initiated on the basis of how it directly and materially affects you as a worker in

your industry, rather than as a class, for the class. In this case, the union dockers at Immingham had allowed non-dockers to unload scab coke on the docks. A national dock strike had been launched, which had the Thatcher government quaking, and, obviously, many dockers knew this was grist to the mill of the miners and the overall victory would be a class one, not simply a sectional one.

Thatcher knew it too, and Keith Joseph was dispatched to concede everything to dockers and reaffirm the terms of the dock labour scheme - ie, that only registered union dockers would move freight on the ports. This threw the giant ball of fortune back into the court of the weakest dock labour force in Britain.

Ron Todd went down to Immingham with the president of the Aslef union (which was imposing the coke blockade by rail) to plead with the dockers to hold their water. He spelt out to the furious mob that they had the fate of the miners, the dockers and the rest of the working class in their hands. He was pelted with iron bolts and Aslef president (and Communist Party member) Bill Ronskey was knocked off the platform, while Ron was struck in the forehead by a bolt and had his head split open. He carried on appealing to them to stand their ground, with blood running down his face and onto his shirt. So, unless you know something that I don't, other than that workers don't always do what they should do, I can't see why any of those leaders from those unions should come in for criticism of the kind Jack gave them.

What happened, of course, was that the so-called union dockers at Immingham then started to unload the scab iron and coke themselves, thus staying within the terms of the dock labour scheme, and whipping away the ground on which the strike had been called. Obviously, if the dockers had simply marched out in support of the miners nationwide without any direct self-interest, that would have been hallelujah time, but the workers didn't want to play it that way. Not for the first time in commenting on this strike, Jack supposes workers will simply do as they are told, and if they aren't so told then it is a failure of leadership - as if the views of the workers are always progressive and rooted in a clear class perspective. Would that were so.

Sometimes, you just have to piss with the dick you've got, as they say in Yorkshire. The criticism of Scargill seems to be that he didn't lead an all-out attack on the capitalist system *per se* and the strike was confined to pits and coal rather than calling a mass general strike for the overthrow of capitalism and imposition of a soviet socialist system. Well, yes and no. We were fighting a defensive strike to stand still, to conserve what we had and where we were, as a backstop to any further inroads in the terms and conditions of the miners in particular and the working class as a whole. But the reality of that fight and the forces represented within it, and the aims that stood behind the stated aims, were a different quality of conflict and Jack surely knows that now, if not then.

It was because the miners represented more than a trade union challenge to a Tory government, offered a different set of values and principles and had faith in an entirely different basis on which to construct society that we were taken out, and systematically wiped out, in two mass assaults and numerous small skirmishes. Just Hatfield remains, and they are determined it should go too, just as we are determined that it should not.

One remaining outpost of the NUM isn't going to storm Whitehall or overthrow the system, but the fact that we are still there offers inspiration and vision to the working class movement as a whole, and the entire political establishment. The Liberal Democrats, Conservatives and Labour Party know it too.

David Douglass
South Shields

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 April 26, 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 2, chapter 1 (continued): 'The circuit of money capital'. Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Introduction to anthropology
Tuesday April 28, 6.30pm: 'Behind every good man: women's production and reproduction among the Hadza of Tanzania'. Speaker: Colette Berbesque. Cock Tavern, 23 Phoenix Road, London NW1. Talks are free, but small donations welcome. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: <http://radicalanthropologygroup.org>.

Painted ladies

Friday April 14, from 6pm daily, until Sunday April 26: Exhibition, Lime Wharf, Vyner Street, London E2. Examining forced transformation to a social space. Organised by Lime Wharf: <http://limewharf.org>.

Children behind bars

Thursday April 23, 7pm: Meeting, Five Leaves Bookshop, 14a Long Row, Nottingham NG1. Stop the abuse and neglect in young offender institutions and secure training centres. Speaker: Carolyne Willow. Free admission. Organised by Five Leaves Bookshop: www.fiveleavesbookshop.co.uk.

Reclaim the future

Thursday April 23, 7pm: Anti-austerity event, Karibu Education Centre, 7 Gresham Road, Brixton, London SW9. Speakers include: Ken Loach, Kingsley Abrams, Simon Hardy, Kate Hudson. Organised by Lambeth Left Unity: lambethleftunity@gmail.com.

Save lifelong learning

Saturday April 25, 12.30pm: National demonstration and march on parliament. Assemble Kings College, The Strand, London WC2. Organised by UCU Left: www.facebook.com/UCULeft.

No to austerity

Saturday April 25, 10.30am: March and rally. Assemble Market Place, Derby DE1. Organised by Derby Trades Council: <http://derbyareatradesunioncouncil.blogspot.co.uk>.

Migrant lives matter

Saturday April 25, 1pm: Protest, European Commission headquarters, 32 Smith Square, London SW1 (nearest tubes: Westminster, St James's Park). Refugees fleeing war and repression are being left to drown. Organised by No to Xenophobia: www.noxenophobia.org.

Ask the candidates

Monday April 27, 7.30pm: Hustings on Palestine, Friends Meeting House, 12 Jesus Lane, Cambridge CB5. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.palestinecampaign.org.

No UK interference in the Middle East

Monday April 27, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Friends Meeting House, Jesus Lane, Cambridge CB5. Organised by Cambridge Stop the War Coalition: www.facebook.com/pages/Cambridge-Stop-The-War-Coalition/301007410088989

Britain's weapons of mass destruction

Tuesday April 28, 7pm: Meeting, Vauxhall Centre, Johnson Place, Vauxhall Street, Norwich NR2. Speakers: Kate Hudson and Chris Cole. Organised by Norwich Stop the War Coalition: <http://norwichstopwar.org.uk>.

Workers' Memorial Day

Tuesday April 28, various times: Labour movement events are taking place up and down the country. Organised by TUC: www.tuc.org.uk/workersmemorialday.

No to Islamophobia, no to war

Thursday April 30, 7pm: National rally, Waterlilly conference centre, 69-89 Mile End Road, London E1. Speakers include: Lutfur Rahman, Baljeet Ghale, Ken Livingstone, Kate Hudson. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk.

Palestine solidarity

Sunday May 3, 1pm to 7pm: Palestine Awareness Day, Small Heath Park, Birmingham B10. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.palestinecampaign.org.

Socialist films

Sunday May 10, 11am: Screening, Bolivar Hall, 54 Grafton Way, London W1. Roman Chalbaud's *El caracazo* (Venezuela, 110 minutes). Followed by discussion. Organised by London Socialist Film Co-op: www.socialistfilm.blogspot.com.

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.

MIGRATION

Victims of capitalism

The needless death of hundreds of refugees puts the left to the test, says Tina Becker

Leaders of European Union countries are meeting in an emergency summit on April 23 to deal with the “refugees crisis” that has been sparked by the capsizing of a small fishing boat packed full of refugees in the Mediterranean Sea, which collided with another vessel, killing an estimated 800 people. More than 1,400 refugees have drowned in just one week.

There is no need to hold our breath in the hope that the EU will produce policies that will get even close to ‘solving’ the crisis. Least of all should we expect that the EU leaders will take responsibility for the fact that the system of capitalism is producing millions of refugees, who would rather risk death than rot away in countries ravaged by war, persecution or just plain and simple poverty.

This summit is mainly about money. Italy has been demanding for some time that other EU countries step in to “share the burden” of dealing with the increasing number of refugees who are trying to make it to Europe. In October 2014, the Italian government simply stopped its naval rescue operations, which were replaced by a much smaller EU force with about a third of the vessels, staff and, crucially, at a third of the cost (not supported by the British government, incidentally). But, so far this year, 1,700 people are known to have drowned on their precarious journey across the Mediterranean. The International Organisation for Migration estimates that 30,000 people might lose their lives attempting the same journey in 2015.¹ In comparison, in 2014 ‘only’ 3,000 people drowned.

But death and misery is, of course, factored into the calculations - the risk is supposed to act as a deterrent. But clearly things are getting out of hand. The EU summit is therefore also supposed to show that ‘something is being done’. Politicians are not just standing by, as hundreds of people drown, you see. EU leaders want to look like responsible guardians of their borders, not callous money-pinchers who shrug their shoulders at the sight of yet another dead baby.

If pressed, many of them would probably sympathise with the outrage that a column by the deeply alienated Katie Hopkins in *The Sun* has caused, which was pretty nasty even by her standards:

Make no mistake, these migrants are like cockroaches. They might look a bit ‘Bob Geldof’s Ethiopia circa 1984’, but they are built to survive a nuclear bomb ... Some of our towns are festering sores, plagued by swarms of migrants and asylum-seekers, shelling out benefits like Monopoly money.²

Incidentally, 250,000 people have signed a well-meaning, but rather pointless appeal to Rupert Murdoch to have her removed as a columnist - this is, after all, how the woman makes her living, no doubt to the delight of her bosses.³

Perhaps less controversial will be Hopkins’ call for “gunships” to stop people crossing the Mediterranean. For example, Australia’s prime minister, Tony Abbott (a much-cherished ally of David Cameron and co), has used the opportunity to advocate the “very successful” policy adopted by his own government: a military-led operation to turn back boats carrying asylum-seekers before they reach Australia. For the last 18 months, there have been “virtually no asylum-seeker boat arrivals and no reported deaths at sea”. Abbott has urged the EU to copy the policy, as “it’s the only way to save lives”.⁴ Or,



Horrendous overcrowding

more precisely, it is the only way to stop people dying on your own doorstep, in front of the cameras.

And the EU’s proposed “emergency measures” do in fact show that these are exactly the kind of plans our bourgeois politicians have in mind: while the German government demands a “fairer” distribution of the refugees who make it to Europe, the main focus on the summit is on “prevention”. Prevention of refugees coming close to Europe, that is - not prevention of the causes of mass migration, naturally. The proposed measures include an increase in the financial resources of Frontex, the agency that protects EU borders. According to the BBC, “there will also be a new campaign to destroy traffickers’ boats” and, of course, more targeting of the “people smugglers”.

It goes without saying that human traffickers are a pretty nasty kind of business people - the kind who make a sizable profit out of human misery: “A fishing vessel of the type that sank yesterday might cost \$10,000 (£6,700). But hundreds of passengers paying a minimum of £1,000, provides a handsome earning multiple - a return on investment of almost 6,000%,” calculates *The Guardian*.⁵ But they are simply a symptom and, like all good business people, are merely exploiting a gap in the market.

Also, it is unlikely that any of the real string-pullers will ever get caught. In the latest tragedy the authorities have jumped on Mohammed Ali Malek, the 27-year-old Tunisian captain and one of 28 survivors of the capsized fishing trawler. Despite the fact that the accident seems to have been caused by a mixture of his “steering mistakes” and the panic that led hundreds of refugees to clamber onto one side of the boat, causing it to capsize, Malek will face charges for “reckless multiple homicide”.⁶ But clearly he is not the person who organised the operation.

Open borders

Despite such rank hypocrisy, it is still somewhat surprising that the UK Independence Party’s Nigel Farage was the first bourgeois politician to come out with something at least halfway sensible:

It was the European response that caused this problem in the first

place - the fanaticism of Sarkozy and Cameron to bomb Libya. They have completely destabilised Libya, to turn it into a country with much savagery, to turn it into a place where for Christians the place is now virtually impossible. We ought to be honest and say we have directly caused this problem.⁷

But Farage is no more concerned about the plight of would-be migrants than the more mainstream politicians. Clearly, he is mostly concerned about preventing deeper European cooperation and a strengthening of EU ties and is using the occasion to have a go at the current government.

Capitalism produces - and must produce - war after war and unimaginable economic hardship for billions of people. Mass migration can only increase under these conditions. And who can blame people for trying to flee a life of misery and war? As we say in the CPGB *Draft programme*,

As a matter of principle communists are for the free movement of people and against all measures preventing them entering or leaving countries. Simultaneously, we seek to end poverty, lack of opportunity, war and persecution everywhere.

The CPGB believes that people have a right to live and work wherever on the planet they choose.⁸

It is to the credit of Left Unity that at its 2014 policy conference an overwhelming majority supported the call for open borders and the abolition of all immigration controls. What a shame then that the official LU statement put out by national speaker Felicity Dowling on April 19 falls way short - it does not even mention LU’s policy. Even if she was one of the few people at conference who voted against it, as an elected officer she should clearly be bound by what was agreed. This is her text in full:

Left Unity mourns the deaths of the hundreds of migrants who have died this weekend and the many thousands who have drowned over the year. We need to call this what it is: the use of drowning as border control. Governments, including the British government, knew that this

would happen when they stopped their funding for search-and-rescue operations. People are dying in the sea because of the main parties’ toxic politics on immigration. The death of each person matters and cries out for justice. The governments of Europe must fund effective rescue operations, and asylum systems. We will be working together with campaigns across Europe, Africa and the Middle East to stop any more deaths.⁹

As I write, there is nothing to be found on the issue on the website of the main leftwing electoral challenge at this year’s general election, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition. Unfortunately though, we know that the comrades have only recently rejected the call for open borders.

At Tusc’s conference in January, the Socialist Party in England and Wales used its numerical strength to argue and vote *against* an amendment to change its current position from opposition to “all racist immigration controls” to opposition to “all immigration controls”. In doing so, the comrades displayed a worrying opportunism. For example, a black SPEW comrade thought that the word “racist” should be retained, because “We won’t be taken seriously if we say ‘no border controls’ - imagine if thousands of people came from, say, Sri Lanka. It would cut us off from the working class.”¹⁰

Of course, the demand for open borders is not particularly popular, mainly because of the vicious, scare-mongering campaigns conducted by all major parties, the media and the likes of Katie Hopkins.

But does that mean we should shy away from saying what needs to be said? Does that mean we should close our eyes to the human suffering on much of the planet, because, well, what can we do? They can’t all come here, can they? The reformist plea for non-racist immigration controls plays directly into the hands of our exploiters. It concedes the right of the state to bar workers from entering Britain and strengthens the hand of those who are responsible for creating the ‘migrant crisis’ in the first place. Socialists should call for open borders, while at the same time explaining that, without the overthrow of capitalism

and the socialist transformation of the whole of the world, there will always be millions of economic refugees and asylum-seekers.

Also, one might ask Tusc if the EU border controls that have led to these deaths are amongst the “racist” ones it opposes. Or are they of the non-racist type? Clearly, most of the victims were black. But the same border controls also stop poor whites from Ukraine, Russia and Belarus settling in the EU.

The comrades think they might have gotten away with a mealy-mouthed position that protects their right and left flank, but they are wrong. At the Tusc conference, a SPEW comrade argued: “If we don’t keep ‘racist’, the press will get hold of that and use it as a stick to beat us with.” Not surprisingly, the press (where it can be bothered) is beating the left with any stick it can find - for example with precisely its *lack* of a progressive policy on immigration, which puts its pretty close to some unsavoury allies. For example, the *London Review of Books* interviewed all general election candidates in Grimsby, including Val O’Flynn, a SPEW member standing for Tusc:

We talked for a while about Tusc, its desire for a socialist transformation of society and its policy of quitting the EU - “nothing more than a pro-business, neoliberal organisation”. I could see, when she talked about immigration, what a gaping space there was on the radical left for Ukip to enter. The open door immigration policy, she said, “suited the capitalist because it increases the labour force, it has a downward effect on wages, and immigrants are much easier to exploit. Immigrants come over here partly because of the faults of capitalism in their own countries. What is a minimum wage here is a good wage compared to what it would be at home. That brings the wages down for the rest of us.”¹¹

This extract clearly demonstrates why Tusc’s opportunistic tightrope walks simply do not cut it. For a start, despite what comrade O’Flynn said, Tusc has no official position on the EU, because its federal, non-party structure allows a supporting organisation (in this case the RMT union) to veto decisions. Maybe comrade O’Flynn was talking as a member of SPEW, but clearly the journalist thought that this was Tusc policy. And who can blame him, really? Standing in a general election without an official policy on the EU is pretty crass.

And, by refusing to come out against all immigration controls, comrade O’Flynn’s comments on migrants allowed this bourgeois journalist to interpret them as a leftwing version of Ukip’s anti-immigration policies. Cutting political corners in order to attract more votes or avoid awkward discussions with working class people clearly does not work ●

Notes

1. www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-32399433.
2. *The Sun* April 17.
3. www.change.org/p/the-sun-newspaper-remove-katie-hopkins-as-a-columnist?source_location=trending_petitions_home_page&algorithm=curated_trending.
4. *Daily Mail* online, April 21 2015.
5. *The Guardian* April 20 2015.
6. www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-32399433.
7. www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/nigel-farage/11548171/Nigel-Farage-David-Cameron-directly-caused-Libyan-migrant-crisis.html.
8. www.cpgb.org.uk/home/about-the-cpgb/draft-programme/3.-immediate-demands.
9. http://leftunity.org/migrant-boat-disaster-governments-must-end-drowning-as-border-control.
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SOUTH AFRICA

Contradictions laid bare

There are two sides to South Africa's 'vibrant emerging market economy'. Peter Manson points to the underlying causes of the xenophobia

As readers will know, a wave of xenophobia has been sweeping South Africa for the last two or three weeks and, as I write, seven people have been killed - three South Africans and four foreign nationals. Thousands of migrants have been displaced, fearing for their lives, in a series of attacks that followed the remarks made by the "king of the Zulu nation", Goodwill Zwelithini, in March.

His majesty started by railing against those "lazy" South Africans who "do not want to work" - in fact some people "do not want to plough the fields", would you believe. No wonder foreigners think, "Let us exploit the nation of idiots". And, of course, those foreigners, who "dirty our streets", are "everywhere". According to Zwelithini, they should "pack their belongings and go back to their countries".

Within a few days the xenophobic attacks had begun in and around Durban in Kwazulu-Natal (previously known as Zululand) and later spread to other urban centres, not least Johannesburg. But, of course, the king's words had been "misinterpreted" - this great leader, who yearns for "peace" above all else, was apparently referring only to illegal immigrants.¹

And there are certainly hundreds of thousands of those among the estimated five million migrants out of a total population of around 50 million. Mass immigration, particularly over the two decades since the ending of apartheid, has been one of the results of an economy that is not only larger, but expanding more rapidly, than those of other countries on the continent. These migrants come mainly from elsewhere in Africa, of course - not only neighbouring countries, such as Zimbabwe and Botswana, but also from as far as Somalia and Ethiopia. In addition there are those from the Indian subcontinent and China.

Many of them end up in the various poverty-stricken townships scattered all across South Africa, where shacks sometimes stretch for as far as the eye can see alongside the box-like houses of the 'formal settlements'. Three years ago the number of shacks in the country was estimated to be 1.1 million (over 9% of households, probably some five million people), according to research published by the Housing Development Agency. It is generally agreed that the number of shacks has only marginally decreased since the end of apartheid.²

Meanwhile, the Gini coefficient, which measures social inequality, has risen from 6.4% to 6.9% over the last 10 years, making South Africa officially the most unequal country in the world. And the (considerably understated) unemployment figures stand at over 25% - and double that for youth.

In other words, there are two sides to the story of South Africa's "vibrant emerging market economy".³ It continues to attract investment, but it goes without saying that this is not directed towards production to satisfy the needs of the masses; rather it thrives on an enormous supply of cheap labour, disciplined by an equally enormous reserve army of unemployed. Nevertheless, the thousands of migrants who continue to pour in are willing to take their chance - anything to escape the hopelessness of life in their country of origin.

Peace-keeping

Every South African organisation, from the presidency to the trade unions, has expressed dismay at the wave of xenophobia. Jacob Zuma was so alarmed, he cancelled his state visit



Durban: anti-migrant violence

to Indonesia, so as to focus on the urgent problem in the shape of failing social control. For a start, he "called upon all churches to lead the nation in praying for peace and friendship",⁴ before announcing that dedicated courts were to be set up to hold snap trials of those accused of xenophobic violence. Later he decided to call in the army to patrol hot spots in Durban and Johannesburg. Of course, we all know how South African state forces excel in 'peace-keeping' - everyone remembers the restraint shown by the police in Marikana, in August 2012, for example.⁵

For Zuma, "The attacks violate all the values that South Africa embodies." He added: "No amount of frustration or anger can ever justify the attacks on foreign nationals and the looting of their shops." After all, many migrants were legal and were helping to "boost the economy" through their hard work and skills. While "South Africa remains a country that welcomes foreign nationals who contribute to the economic growth of the country and the continent",⁶ it was true that "lax border controls" were a problem, said Zuma, and he is determined to promote "orderly migration". But he did at least remind citizens that the struggle against apartheid was facilitated by the help of other countries, who took in and provided facilities for liberation fighters: "We went to those countries without valid papers."

As well as issuing its own statement, the ruling African National Congress was the first organisation named in the joint declaration put out by what used to be called the tripartite alliance, which consisted of the ANC itself, the South African Communist Party and the Congress of South African Trade Unions. But now there is a fourth organisation: the much less weighty South African National Civic Organisation.

Anyway, the four organisations drafted a statement that bore all the hallmarks of the SACP. This too referred to the solidarity of other Africans during the apartheid era: "We will never, for a single moment, forget this support. It is a living evidence of what a united African

people can achieve to defeat their common enemy." Turning to the underlying causes of the xenophobia, the declaration reminded South Africans of the ANC's pledges: "The alliance and the ANC-led government has made a commitment to eradicate poverty and unemployment, and reduce inequality through radical economic transformation and other programmes." That "radical economic transformation" will be driven by another platitudinous aim: "Business interests should be subordinated to those of the people, especially the working class and the poor." Interestingly, however, the statement continued: "In this regard, the free movement of people is very critical to the integration of the region."⁷

But in its own reaction, in the form of an article by second deputy general secretary Solly Mapaila, the SACP itself seemed to view this question as something to be implemented in the distant future: "The complete decolonisation of Africa actually requires that one day we must transcend the borders set by the colonial partitioning of our continent ..." In the meantime, "it is important to ensure that all immigrants are documented".

The rest of the article was a combination of militant-sounding phrases and abject reformism. For instance,

Fundamentally, the causes are international. Multilateral institutions must therefore also discuss the social problems created by the dominant world system they are presiding on - that is, capitalism ... Those institutions must themselves become transformed, as is the system they are presiding on - which must ultimately be replaced in a world revolution.⁸

However, for the time being, what is needed is firm state intervention:

The massive amounts of capital acquired from our economy and which are not being reinvested back, especially in productive activity to create employment, must be unlocked ... The government has an important

role to play in this ... including prescribed asset requirements to ensure and direct investment in productive economic activity.

What about the Economic Freedom Fighters of Julius Malema, which has been aptly described as "black nationalist" by this paper? The important word in that phrase is the first one: *black* nationalist. In other words, for Malema and the EFF, what matters is black or African unity. So at EFF events, the chant has been, "Down with xenophobia, down!" "Forward, United States of Africa, forward!" At a rally in Alexandra township, Johannesburg, Malema yelled: "These borders are not our borders. These borders are imposed on us by the colonisers."

But, despite his left-sounding militancy, Malema's cross-class politics was revealed in the way he attempted to exonerate Goodwill Zwelithini: "I have come here to plead with you. There is no Zulu king telling you to kill people. The king has never said that. He is just speaking against criminals."

Racism?

Throughout the South African media, the term overwhelmingly used to describe the current anti-migrant violence is, as readers will no doubt have observed, 'xenophobia' - although I have come across the totally inaccurate 'Afrophobia' too. It is worth making that point, because, if such incidents were to occur in Britain, I am certain that large sections of the left would come up with a different, and even more inaccurate, label: ie, 'racism'.

The Socialist Workers Party is the prime culprit here, with its continual levelling of the term against Nigel Farage and the UK Independence Party in particular. In reality Ukip is merely more consistent and more extreme in its *nationalistic* (or indeed xenophobic) opposition to immigration than the mainstream parties. However, in its tangential comment on the violence, *Socialist Worker* fell into line, when it quoted one of its own South African comrades: "There is a solution to the problem of *xenophobia*, poverty, unemployment and extreme inequalities - it is socialism ... Workers own no

country, workers of the world unite!"⁹

I say 'tangential', because the article in question is a report of the April 16-17 Conference for Socialism hosted by the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa), which has been expelled from Cosatu for turning against the ANC and SACP, and calling for the establishment of a new workers' party. The aim of the conference was: "Begin to contribute to laying a foundation for exploring the possibility of securing the greatest unity of socialist forces in South Africa, for the struggle for a socialist South Africa."¹⁰

It is clear from the phrasing that Numsa is in no rush, but that did not stop the SWP's co-thinker in South Africa from describing the event as a "historic conference" - even though there were only "around 150 delegates" present. "But there were weaknesses," the comrade continues. "The most important was the absence of two major players who have been central to the new radicalism in South Africa - Julius Malema's new Economic Freedom Fighters party and the platinum miners."

What? The EFF's absence is a "weakness"? I don't think so ●

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Notes

1. The relevant extract from his speech can be heard on the website of *The Times* of Johannesburg: www.timeslive.co.za/local/2015/04/16/listen-to-exactly-what-king-goodwill-zwelithini-said-about-foreigners. There are English subtitles for those whose Zulu is not so good.
2. www.thehda.co.za/uploads/images/HDA_Informal_settlements_status_South_Africa.pdf.
3. www.southafrica-newyork.net/consulate/why%20invest%20in%20south%20africa.html.
4. Media statement from the presidency, April 18 2015.
5. The official Marikana commission investigating the events leading to the shooting dead of 34 striking miners by Zuma's police finally handed its report to the president on March 31. He is still sitting on it.
6. Government media statement, April 19 2015.
7. www.cosatu.org.za/show.php?ID=10308.
8. www.politicsweb.co.za/news-and-analysis/xenophobia-govt-must-lay-down-the-law-to-the-exploit.
9. My emphasis, *Socialist Worker* April 25 2015.
10. www.numsa.org.za/article/reminder-media-invitation-numsa-to-host-conference-for-socialism-from-16-17-april-2015-birchwood-hotel-and-or-tambo-conference-centre.

DEBATE

1917: arresting the police

Lenin's programme found vindication

Jack Conrad argues that, far from being disproved by 1917, the established strategy of the Bolsheviks was continued and enriched

It is good that Jim Creegan has challenged what he calls the “myth-debunking” of Lars T Lih by presenting his own views on Bolshevism, its programme and the test of 1917.¹ Comrade Creegan, of course, defends the standard account told and retold by the followers of Leon Trotsky over many decades. An excuse for me - another non-expert, but also, like comrade Creegan, a committed revolutionary - to once again give my take on what is a well-gnawed but still important dispute.

Though the classic telling is Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* (1930), there are many variations on the theme: eg, Isaac Deutscher, Tony Cliff, Alan Woods, etc. However, basically the thesis boils down to the same message - before 1917 the Bolsheviks had a deeply flawed programme. Indeed the entire school is determined to paint Lenin as an advocate of the ‘theory of stages’ - nowadays a cardinal sin for any self-respecting Trotskyite. First stage: the anti-tsarist revolution; to be followed by elections to a constituent assembly, bourgeois rule and an extended period of capitalist development. Second stage: the socialist revolution. In actual fact, this theory of *artificial* stages was advocated by the Mensheviks.

Their approach stemmed from a crude, evolutionist schema and inevitably resulted in tailism politically. According to the Mensheviks, the overthrow of tsarism had to be crowned by the class rule of the bourgeoisie and a western-style parliamentary government. Nevertheless, in step with the subsequent growth of capitalism, the working class grows too. Eventually this class eclipses and finally replaces the peasantry in population terms. Only then does socialism become feasible.

If the forthcoming revolution against tsarism was bourgeois, then, agreed the Mensheviks in a conference resolution of April-May 1905, the working class and its party “must not aim at seizing or sharing power in the provisional government, but must remain the party of the extreme revolutionary opposition”.² So, for mainstream

Menshevik thinking, the immediate role of the working class was to critically push, or lift, the bourgeois parties into their predetermined position as leaders of the anti-tsarist revolution. Participating in a revolutionary government therefore had to be avoided. Why? Firstly, if the working class succumbed to the temptation of power, it would cause the bourgeoisie to “recoil from the revolution and diminish its sweep”.³ Secondly, without an already established European socialism, the working class party in Russia would be unable to meet the economic demands of its social base. Failure to deliver far-going changes would eventually produce demoralisation, confusion and disorganisation.

Anyway, given that the anti-tsarist revolution proved successful, the workers’ party should, argued the Mensheviks, exit centre stage, so as to allow the bourgeoisie to assume power. Obeying the ‘laws of history’, the workers’ party then patiently waits in the wings until capitalism had carried out its preordained historic mission of developing the means of production. Hence, for the Mensheviks there had to be two, necessarily distinct revolutions.

Of course, tsarism ignominiously collapsed in February 1917, there was dual power ... however, the soviets were dominated by Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries. Together these two parties did their best to support a hastily put together provisional government that was determined to thwart popular demands for land, bread and peace.

Supposedly this eminently predictable behaviour by the *Mensheviks and Right SRs* exposed the “bankruptcy” of the ‘old Bolshevik’ formula.⁴ Hence Lenin, we are seriously told, was forced to fundamentally rethink. To all intents and purposes, or so the story goes, he embraced Trotsky's version of permanent revolution, a strategic plan first outlined in *Results and prospects* (1906).

After firing off the articles now known as the *April theses* Lenin finally managed to return to Russia. He travelled, along with his second-in-command, Grigory Zinoviev, and

a whole bevy of other political exiles, in the famous sealed train provided by imperial Germany. Having finally arrived at the Finland station, Lenin began his on-the-spot campaign to reorientate the Bolsheviks. Supposedly, in terms of their immediate goal, he wanted a shift to “a proletarian dictatorship” (Jim Creegan). In other words, rule by a minority. There was some old Bolshevik opposition, most notably from a right-moving Lev Kamenev, but three weeks later, in the decisive vote at the 7th Conference of the party, Lenin won a clear majority. Trotsky finally joins the Bolsheviks in July 1917 ... and, though many years later he loses out in his fight against Stalin, it is he, Trotsky, who writes the most influential history of these events.

Democratic revolution

Let us take the argument forward by going back to the theoretical foundations of the Bolshevik programme. From the outset, in the 1880s, all Marxists in Russia (eg, Georgi Plekhanov, Vera Zasulich and Pavel Axelrod) were agreed, contra the anarchists and narodiks, that the country was not yet ripe for socialism - if by that one means leaving behind commodity production and ushering in the communist principle of “From each according to their ability, to each according to their need”. The autocratic state, the lack of capitalist development, the domination of the economy by a woefully backward peasant agriculture - all explain why Lenin and the Bolsheviks described the almost universally expected anti-tsarist revolution not as socialist, but democratic or bourgeois.

“Only the most ignorant people can ignore the bourgeois nature of the democratic revolution which is now taking place,” writes the Lenin of 1905.⁵ Note that, taking off from where the narodniks had left off, not least in terms of ignorance, the Socialist Revolutionary Party, formed in 1902, advocated a programme that included the “expropriation of capitalist property

and the reorganisation of production and the entire social system on socialist foundations.”⁶ Yet, though attracting a considerable popular base, above all in rural areas, the SRs placed their hopes not, as might be expected nowadays, on waging a protracted guerrilla struggle, but on individual terrorism and the assassination of tsarist officials.

While not including socialist measures in their minimum programme, Lenin and the Bolsheviks were resolutely opposed to handing power to the bourgeoisie, as the Mensheviks proposed. The bourgeoisie in Russia was both cowardly and treacherous. Despite occasional leftish flourishes, their parties sought a compromise with tsarism, not a people's revolution. Eg, the Cadet Party, the flag-bearer of the bourgeoisie, committed itself to a constitutional monarchy. Russia therefore had no Cromwell, no Washington, no Robespierre. The only force capable of scoring a *decisive* victory over tsarism and pushing through the most radical changes objective circumstances permitted was the proletariat, in alliance with the peasant masses.

Naturally, because Russia was overwhelmingly a peasant country, the Bolsheviks paid particular attention to their agrarian programme. In fact, peasant interests set the limit on how far the revolution could go. Landlord power could certainly be destroyed and the land nationalised and given, according to their wishes, to the peasants. This ‘black redistribution’ was, of course, not a socialist measure for Lenin. It would though serve to uproot Russia's semi-feudal social relationship and allow capitalism in the countryside to develop along an “American path”.

As an aside, Trotsky's programme was *not* limited by the interests of the peasants. While a hegemonic working class could take the peasantry along with it in the overthrow of tsarism, an irreversible split between these two popular classes was bound to occur. The peasants were, for Trotsky, “absolutely incapable of taking an independent political role”.⁷ They would gravitate either towards the rule of the proletariat or the rule of the bourgeoisie. And,

because working class political domination is incompatible with “its economic enslavement”, Trotsky reasoned, the workers’ party would be “obliged to take the path of socialist policy” ... even if that risked a bloody “civil war” with the peasantry.⁸

Thankfully by the summer of 1917 Trotsky had undergone a Leninist conversion. If one reads him when he was the leader of the Left Opposition, it is obvious, despite accusations to the contrary, that he was painfully aware of the vital importance of keeping the peasantry onside. Eg, in the late 1920s he roundly condemned Stalin's drive to forcibly collectivise agriculture.

Time

The fact of the matter is that the Bolsheviks were determined that the anti-tsarist revolution would see the fulfilment of the party's *entire* minimum programme - a democratic republic, the election of judges, free universal education, abolition of the police and standing army, a popular militia, separation of church and state, extensive democratic rights, decisive economic reforms, such as workers' commissions to inspect factories, an eight-hour day, etc. That package could only be delivered by establishing a *provisional* revolutionary government which embodied the interests of the great mass of the population. Lenin used a famous algebraic formulation to capture the essence of the majoritarian regime envisaged by the Bolsheviks: the democratic dictatorship (ie, in Marxist terms, rule) of the proletariat and peasantry. Eg, in the language of late 1917 a coalition government of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (Bolsheviks) and the Left Socialist Revolutionaries.

Such a hybrid regime could not abolish classes and bring full liberation for the working class. That was impossible. Economically Russia would have to progress capitalistically - albeit under the armed rule of the working class and peasant masses. That meant the continuation of wage-labour, albeit with workers taking over abandoned factories, the nationalisation of the

central bank, etc.⁹

How long was the provisional revolutionary government going to last? Comrade Creegan reckons that prior to 1917 Lenin envisaged it being nothing more than a “short-lived episode”.¹⁰ After “a series of radical measures” there would, he says, be elections that would see the bourgeoisie come to power with the support of peasant votes.¹¹ A thoroughly one-sided version of the Bolshevik programme. Given that the provisional revolutionary government was going to be committed to the *full* minimum programme of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, we can actually imagine it lasting for a period of perhaps 10, 15 or 20 years. Comrade Creegan can call that a “short-lived episode” - it certainly is if we consider history in the *longue durée*. But the real question is what was to follow the provisional revolutionary government. Yes, Lenin admitted the possibility that the first national elections might see the return of the workers’ party to being a party of extreme opposition. It is also true, however, that Lenin extensively wrote about the revolution being *uninterrupted*.

There was a crucial international dimension. The revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry in Russia could not survive long in isolation. It would, it had to, “rouse Europe” and the socialist proletariat of Europe to carry through the “socialist revolution”.¹² The United Socialist States of Europe would then, in turn, help Russia move in the direction of socialism (which requires definite material conditions in terms of the development of the productive forces). And a revolution uniting Europe and half of Asia had a realistic chance of rapidly spreading to every corner of the globe.

Inevitably, yes, there would, within Russia, be a differentiation between the proletarianised rural masses and the emerging class of capitalist farmers. But *not* necessarily, as argued by comrade Creegan, a specifically socialist revolution: ie, the violent overthrow of the state. Put another way, for the Bolsheviks there would not necessarily be a democratic or bourgeois stage and then a socialist stage at the level of regime. Democratic and socialist tasks are categorically distinct, premised as they are on different material, social and political conditions. But particular features can evolve. The revolution could, given favourable internal and external conditions, proceed *uninterruptedly* from democratic to socialist tasks through the proletariat fighting not only from below, but from above: ie, from a salient of state power. The revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat thereby *peacefully grows over* into the dictatorship (rule) of the proletariat. As the size, organisation and consciousness of the urban and rural working class grew, so would the strength of the workers’ party. The necessity of a coalition government would at some point disappear. The tasks of the maximum programme then come onto the agenda.

So, given all this, why does comrade Creegan present Lenin’s theory as little more than a slightly better version of the Menshevik schema? As evidenced in the pages of this paper, he is a thoughtful and talented writer. Maybe this is yet another case of the tradition of Trotsky’s epigones still weighing “like a nightmare” on the brains of the living.¹³ After all, in general, the orthodox Trotskyist sects combine a mind-numbing bureaucratic centralism with a Bakuninite reliance on general strikism. The mass-membership Bolshevik Party with its minimum-maximum programme, numerous open debates, hard hitting polemical press, *duma* representatives and stress on the democratic republic is, to say the least, an inconvenient truth when attempting to justify what is programmatic regression.

Lenin defended and elaborated his programme for the democratic revolution as being the shortest - in fact, the only viable - route to socialism in *Two tactics*

of social democracy (1905).¹⁴ A seminal pamphlet that armed the Bolsheviks with the political weapons they needed, first to lead the “whole people” for a republic, and then lead “all the toilers and exploited” for socialism.¹⁵ By any objective assessment Lenin and the Bolsheviks therefore had their own version of permanent revolution.

Lenin vs Trotsky

Comrade Creegan insists on a categorical distinction between the dictatorship of the proletariat and socialism. My own take on this question, based on reading Marx, Kautsky, Lenin, Trotsky, Preobrazhensky, etc, is that socialism is better used as the name for the period of transition from capitalism to communism. A transition to the transition *can* begin, I believe, with a state form of the type ushered in by the October revolution of 1917. Anyhow, leaving that terminological dispute aside, for the life of me I cannot see any fundamental difference between the soviet republic of workers, peasants and soldiers and the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry. One is surely the concrete realisation of what had previously only been anticipated.

All in all, to any objective observer Trotsky’s differences with Lenin were clear. Lenin wanted a majoritarian regime. Trotsky wanted a minority regime that would lead the majority. Different, but not that different. True, in *Results and prospects* and in Lenin’s so-called replies there was a fierce polemic between the two men. However, factional interests often produced more heat than light. Eg, Trotsky dismissed out of hand any suggestion of a “special form of the proletarian dictatorship in the bourgeois revolution”. He was, at the time, intent on rubbishing and equating both the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks. On the other hand, Lenin attacked Trotsky for “underestimating” the importance of the peasantry by raising the slogan, “Not a tsar’s government, but a workers’ government”.

Not least, on the basis of this slogan, Trotsky is no doubt right when he says that Lenin had “never read my basic work”. That slogan was proclaimed, not by Trotsky, but his friend and collaborator, Alexander Parvus. “Never did Lenin anywhere analyse or quote,” says Trotsky, “even in passing, *Results and prospects*”.¹⁶ Moreover, he goes on to cite the “solidarity” that existed between himself and the Bolsheviks during and immediately after the 1905 revolution. And for those who demonise the term ‘stage’ and belittle Lenin because of it, Trotsky’s boasts that he “formulated the tasks of the successive stages of the revolution in exactly the same manner as Lenin”.¹⁷ This should provide food for thought for those who permit themselves the luxury of thinking. The same can be said for Trotsky’s proud affirmation about how “Lenin’s formula” closely “approximated” to his own “formula of permanent revolution”.¹⁸ Despite that, comrade Creegan claims that Trotsky’s theory was far superior to Lenin’s democratic dictatorship. Perhaps that is, once again, evidence of the dead weight of past generations.

Arguably, the idea of Lenin carrying through a “complete break” with the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry was hatched by Trotsky himself ... after Lenin’s death in 1924. No doubt he was desperate to counter the campaign against ‘Trotskyism’ launched by the triumvirate of Stalin, Kamenev and Zinoviev. By pretending, in effect, that Lenin had become a Trotskyite in April 1917, Trotsky could enhance his own standing and at the same time target the negative role played by his three rivals. After all, just two weeks before it happened, Kamenev and Zinoviev publicly condemned Bolshevik plans for an insurrection. Their

conciliatory letter was gleefully published in *Novaya Zhizn* (the paper of the Menshevik Internationalists). Seizure of power by one party, the Bolsheviks, could only but split the worker-peasant camp and lead to needless bloodshed. Unwilling to take responsibility for the earth-shattering revolution of October 25, they resigned from the Bolshevik central committee.

Add to this the dispute over China in the mid- to late 1920s. Stalin and Bukharin advocated a bloc of four classes - workers, peasants, the intelligentsia and the national bourgeoisie. This class collaboration - the political subordination of the Communist Party of China to the Kuomintang - was, of course, excused under the orthodox ‘democratic dictatorship’ rubric. Opportunism is seldom honest.

Trotsky damned the anti-Bolshevik deviations of his factional opponents and detailed the fundamental solidarity between himself and Lenin prior to 1917. Nonetheless, Trotsky directly - and, at least in my view, incorrectly - dismissed Lenin’s formula, the ‘democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry’. He even claims Lenin’s authority for this. In his *The lessons of October* Trotsky maintained that in 1917 Lenin “came out furiously against the old slogan of the ‘democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry’”.¹⁹ In fact, Lenin attacked not so much the ‘revolutionary dictatorship’ formula, but rather those who misused it, those tempted to strike a rotten compromise deal with the Menshevik and SR ‘revolutionary defencists’.

April theses

The provisional government that came to power in March 1917 acted in the interests not of the proletariat and peasantry, but of the bourgeoisie. *Ipsa facto* Lenin concluded that the proletariat and peasantry (in the form of the soviets) had “placed power in the hands of the bourgeoisie”. And, though Alexander Kerensky’s ministry contained many who had hunted by the tsarist secret police - Skobeliev, Tseretelli, Chernov, Avksentiev, Savinkov, Nikitin, etc - no Marxist will find Lenin’s designation at all strange. Programme, policy and current practice determines class content.

The provisional government continued Russia’s involvement in the imperialist slaughter of World War I, prevaricated over peasant demands for land redistribution and fearfully delayed convening a constituent assembly. In short, the proletariat and peasantry, crucially through their soviets, had “placed power in the hands of the bourgeoisie”. Nevertheless, there was dual power.

What was Lenin’s approach during this “first stage of the revolution”? Did he junk his old call for the replacement of tsarism by a workers’ and peasants’ republic? Yes, of course he did ... in the same way as Trotsky junked his ‘Not a tsar’s government, but a government of the people’, and the followers of Parvus junked his ‘Not a tsar’s government, but a workers’ government’. Nor were the Mensheviks, the SRs or anyone else on the left unaware that one of their key demands had been realised. The Romanovs had fallen. Tsarism was no more. Russia had become a republic.

Common sense, let alone Marxism, requires recognition of such a development. If Trotsky had not made a “complete break” from his ‘Not a tsar’s government’ slogan his close friends would have been well advised to seek out suitable psychological treatment for the poor fellow. Ditto Lenin’s friends, or anyone else’s for that matter.

Obviously the demand to overthrow the tsar was totally obsolete. Future progress lay in combating the “honest” popular illusions in the provisional

government and raising sights. The Bolsheviks were a minority in the soviets. Their task was to become the majority by agitating for the seizure of landlord estates, the abolition of the police, the army and the bureaucracy, etc.

This would prepare the “second stage of the revolution” and with it the transfer of all power into “the hands of the proletariat and the poorest sections of the peasants”. The “only possible form of revolutionary government” was a “republic of Soviets of Workers’, Agricultural Labourers’ and Peasants’ Deputies”.²⁰

Lenin made no claims that the party’s “immediate task” was to “introduce” socialism. Only that production and distribution had to be put under workers’ control to prevent an economic catastrophe.

Do these formulations and the perspective of a workers’ and peasants’ republic indicate an abandonment or a *development* of Lenin’s theory in light of new and unexpected circumstances? I make no excuse for turning to Lenin himself for an answer.

In the article, ‘The dual power’, he writes the following:

The highly remarkable feature of our revolution is that it has brought about a *dual power*. This fact must be grasped first and foremost: unless it is understood, we cannot advance. We must know how to supplement and amend old ‘formulas’ - for example, those of Bolshevism - for, while they have been found to be correct on the whole, their concrete realisation *has turned out to be* different. *Nobody* previously thought, or could have thought, of a dual power.²¹

Yes, Lenin got into a dispute with the ‘old Bolsheviks’. Many of those leaders who had first-hand knowledge of the situation in Russia thought that Lenin had failed to fully grasp the actual state of play because of his exile in Switzerland. Kamenev put it like this in *Pravda*:

As for comrade Lenin’s general scheme, it appears unacceptable, inasmuch as it proceeds from the assumption that the bourgeois democratic revolution is *completed*, and builds on the immediate transformation of this revolution into a socialist revolution.

Kamenev was not urging support for the provisional government. No, he was urging the need to win the support of the peasantry and thus prepare the conditions for revolution. The peasant movement could not be “skipped”. The idea of playing at the seizure of power by the workers’ party without the support of the peasantry was not Marxism, he said, but Blanquism. Power had to be exercised by the majority. And Lenin, in some of his writings, seemed to be implying that the peasantry had gone over to social chauvinism and defence of the fatherland. Therefore, perhaps he had concluded that the peasantry had become a hopeless cause.

While Lenin insisted that he had no intention of immediately demanding socialism, he swore that he was saying no such thing.²² Obviously there were misconceptions on both sides ... but unity was quickly recemented. In the case of the peasantry, Kamenev was clearly right and Lenin wrong. Subsequently, Lenin talks of the differences between himself and Kamenev being “not very great”. He also joins with Kamenev in opposing the leftist slogan of ‘Down with the provisional government’ as raised by the Petrograd committee of the party. A slogan which comrade Creegan seems sympathetic to. The situation was not yet ready for the overthrow of the provisional government in April-May 1917. Hence, together with Kamenev,

Lenin insisted that the “correct slogan” was “Long live the soviet of workers’ and soldiers’ deputies”.²³

Things were certainly exceedingly complex. Firstly, though state power had been transferred, that did not fully meet the immediate programmatic aims of the Bolsheviks. The old Romanov order had been overthrown. To that extent, argued Lenin, the programme had been fulfilled. But the ‘revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants’ in the form of the soviets had voluntarily ceded power to the bourgeoisie.

Events had “clothed” the old slogan. The soviets were real. The Bolsheviks, or those whom Lenin was now calling the communists, had to deal with the concrete situation, where, instead of coming to power, this ‘revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry’ existed side by side with, and subordinate to, a weak government of the bourgeoisie (ie, the provisional government). Only once the Bolsheviks won a majority could they finish with dual power and complete the revolution.

The dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry had therefore become interwoven with the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. The Russian Revolution had gone further than the classical bourgeois revolutions of England 1645 or France 1789, but in Lenin’s words “has not yet reached a ‘pure’ dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry”.²⁴ There can be dual power but no dual-power state (whether it be a monarchy, a theocracy or a democratic republic). One or the other had to die. Either the revolution was going to be completed under the hegemony of the proletariat or popular power would be killed off by counterrevolution.

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

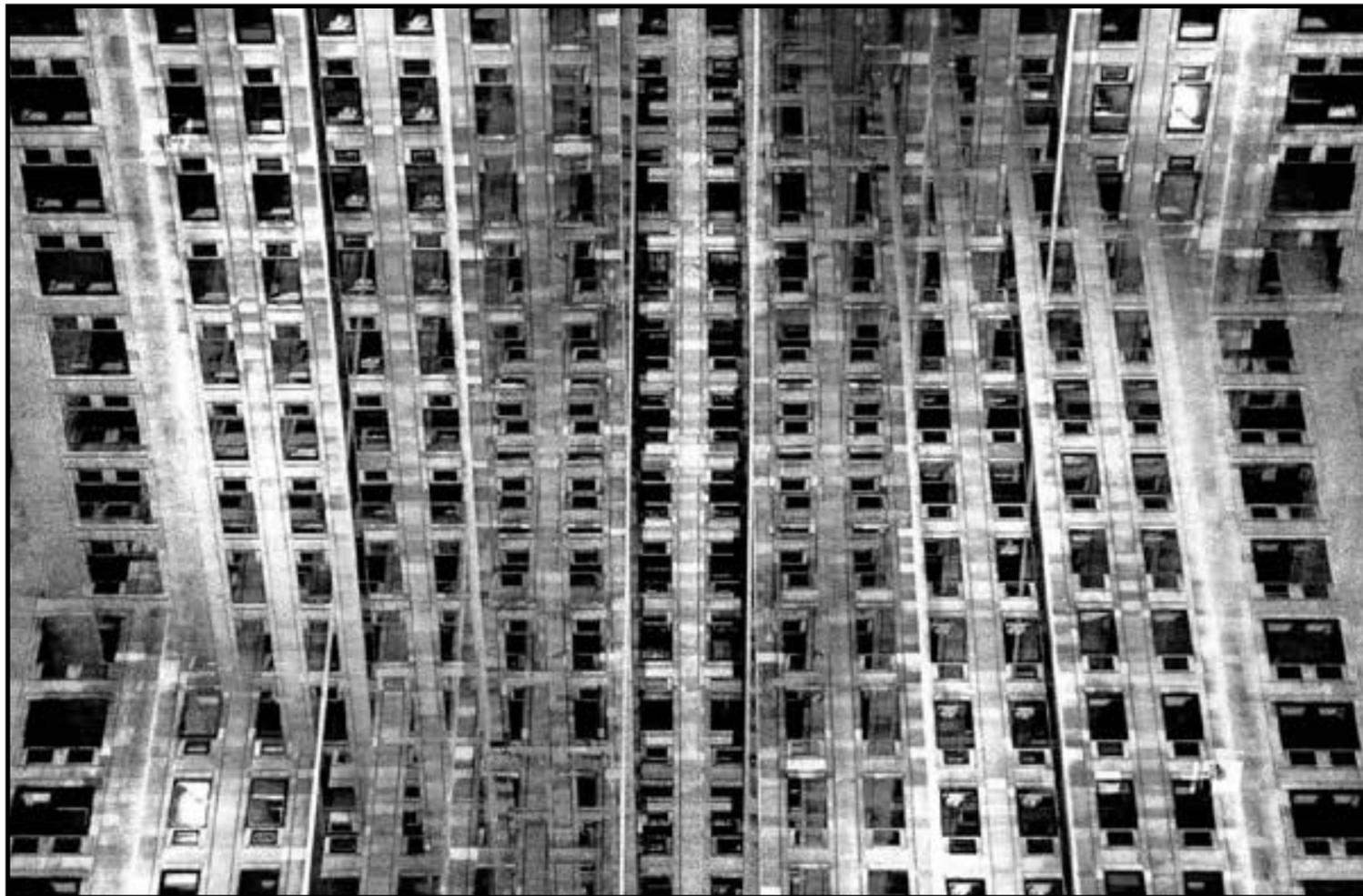
Notes

1. See LT Lih, ‘The Bolsheviks were fully armed’ *Weekly Worker* February 26 2015; Letters, March 5, March 25; and J Creegan, ‘April in Petrograd’ *Weekly Worker* April 16 2015.
2. Quoted in T Cliff *Lenin* Vol 1, London 1975, p197.
3. Quoted in *ibid*.
4. *Ibid* p128.
5. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 9, Moscow 1977, pp28-29.
6. <https://community.dur.ac.uk/a.k.harrington/srprog.html>.
7. Quoted in T Cliff *Lenin* Vol 1, London 1975, p202.
8. See LT Lih, ‘Democratic revolution in permanenz’ *Science and Society* October 2012.
9. See VI Lenin *CW* Vol 8, Moscow 1977, p208.
10. J Creegan, ‘April in Petrograd’ *Weekly Worker* April 16 2015.
11. *Ibid*.
12. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 9, Moscow 1977, p82.
13. K Marx and F Engels *CW* Vol 11, London 1978, p103.
14. See VI Lenin *CW* Vol 9, Moscow 1977, pp15-130.
15. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 9, Moscow 1977, pp114.
16. L Trotsky *The permanent revolution* New York 1978, p166.
17. *Ibid* p168.
18. *Ibid* p198.
19. L Trotsky *The challenge of the Left Opposition (1923-25)* New York 1980, p209.
20. *Ibid* p23.
21. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 24, Moscow 1977, p38.
22. *Ibid* p48.
23. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 24, Moscow 1977, p244-45.
24. *Ibid* p61.

HOUSING

A simulacrum of Thatcherism

Paul Demarty is unimpressed by David Cameron's housing policy, and calls for serious thinking on the left



Soulless conditions

The left, in its broadest sense, has reacted to David Cameron's flagship policy platform - the extension of 'right to buy' to cover housing association homes as well as state housing proper - with anger and disgust: hardly an unreasonable reaction.

Perhaps more appropriate, however, would be grim laughter. For how many times does anyone who dares to think even that trade unions are in some sense a Good Thing get accused of wanting to take Britain 'back to the 1970s'? Even Ed Miliband gets accused of '1970s-style socialism' every week or two. And yet, and yet - here we have a Conservative prime minister quite unabashedly playing to past glories, to rapturous enthusiasm from the very same quarters. Back to the 70s, bad; back to the 80s, good. Hope that's clear.

A striking feature of Cameron's scheme is that it is, on the face of it, quite illegal. Housing association homes are, by definition, owned by housing associations, not the central state or councils. Thus they are private property, protected under the European Convention on Human Rights. This clause usually does not play out in our favour, of course; but, having already privatised substantial parts of the social housing stock, the government can no more legally force its owners to sell those assets than it can expropriate the financial industry.

There is also the small matter of charities law, which stipulates that charities may not sell their assets at significantly below market value; and again, on the face of it, this policy looks like just such an attempt to force housing associations to breach their legal obligations. Given all this, not to mention the basically mortal threat that the new 'right to buy' poses, it is hardly surprising that housing associations do intend to challenge it in the courts, should it ever navigate its way through the hung parliament most observers expect come the May

7 general election.

Nostalgia factor

Exactly how Cameron and co would defend their bright idea under such circumstances is unclear. It is one thing to go off on wild rants about the ECHR if the issue of the day is the personal rights of some notorious jihadist; quite another thing to suddenly find out that the sanctity of private property is some fatuous Brussels *diktat*. Nonetheless, it remains within the powers of the government to throw enormous piles of money at the problem, an activity for which the *soi-disant* austerians, Cameron and George Osborne, have recently discovered an unseemly enthusiasm.

Concretely, we suppose it would work like this - Joe Bloggs decides to buy his association home. He pays a heavily discounted price. The rest of the discount is made up by the government (thus the association does not sell at below market price), with a little extra. Enough associations might be swayed by the short-term benefits - especially if boards of trustees are suddenly packed with braying Tories - to make the policy fly.

Still, it is a long shot politically - given the tumult likely after the votes are counted next month - and a long shot legally. It even turns out that, in 2013, then housing minister Kris Hopkins derided the idea as a "liability to the public purse". So what exactly is the point of putting it front and centre? Why, precisely the nostalgia factor: what we have here is a kind of simulacrum of Thatcherism, distinguishable from the real thing only in that the actual legacy of Thatcherism makes it untenable, unreal.

If it does come off, meanwhile, we have a nice big stride in what has been the objective of Tory housing policy since Thatcher's day at least - in essence, returning the political economy of housing to the state it was in during the 19th century. For the working masses, the opportunity

to rent from private landlords in a situation of extreme insecurity; for a layer of the petty bourgeoisie, the opportunity to own their own home; for a layer of the upper middle classes, a substantial private income from renting to the aforementioned poor folks; and, for developers, the right to pursue enormous profits at the expense of everyone else. Trebles all round!

If further proof were needed, there is the accompanying pledge to force councils to sell off their most valuable real estate, recycling the profits into creating more 'affordable housing'. The latter clause gives it a progressive fig-leaf that will fool nobody who knows the first thing about 'affordable housing': how that is commonly set at 80% of the average market price, which in cities like London and Oxford amounts to a definition of 'affordable', shall we say, somewhat at variance with that of the latter city's famous English dictionary. Not that it matters: the law around this is utterly unworkable, and the well-remunerated lawyers of well-remunerated property developers do a good job traducing their 'affordable housing' obligations.

The result is the same: taking a basic human need, and rendering it simultaneously a matter of acute insecurity for the subordinate classes in society, and a source of immense profit for a section of the bourgeoisie. The toxic legacy of the defeat of the working class in the battles of the 1980s - defeats that, in this country, go collectively under the name of Thatcherism - inches us back towards the squalor of housing as it once was, and indeed as it has been throughout most of the history of the capitalist system.

Back to the 70s

This happens against the background of bourgeois parties' insistence on competing to promise the highest rate of house building in the run-up to elections. Presumably the council sell-

off wheeze is designed to back up the Tories' own starry-eyed projections (we note that, in 2010, the Tories pledged to restore house building to its pre-crash levels, but missed the target by about 80% of the rise required).

This spectacle cannot but remind us of the glory days of Butskellism, when Harold Macmillan's Tories famously pledged to build more *council* homes than the Labour Party. It is worth examining the post-war era, for no other reason than that it presents a peculiar interregnum in the history of capitalism: faced with Soviet tanks on the banks of the Elbe and energetic working class activity on the home front, European and to a lesser extent American society was transformed with the creation of the so-called 'welfare states'.

Housing policy was a central battleground in this process, due in no small part to the brute devastation of the war. In this country, council housing reflected the political imperatives of the age: a plausible option not only for workers, but for middle class tenants, council estates were socially mixed and in many ways an unspoken 'default' means of obtaining shelter.

Stephen Moss, writing in *The Guardian* (April 17), has a very rose-tinted view of this era, having grown up on a south Wales council estate:

The estate, which would these days be labelled "sink", was stable and generally content (almost everyone had a decent job in the local steelworks, which helped); the large greens in front of each block were communal, well tended and great for games of football, rugby and cricket, often involving 20 children or more.

In truth, there was a *reason* so many council tenants were seduced by Thatcher's right to buy: like the other 'socialistic' tendencies of post-war capitalism, council housing was organised in an alienating, thoroughly bureaucratic manner. The management

of the estate was an unaccountable set of petty Bonapartes; blocks of flats were thrown up with scant regard either for aesthetics, tenants' needs or in some cases basic structural integrity (hence disasters like Ronan Point).

Nonetheless, Moss paints an eloquent picture of the consequences:

Some of the new buyers had the money to maintain their properties; others didn't. The big collective greens were enclosed, so each house could have a large front garden, in which they would keep motorbikes, cars, caravans and other bric-a-brac ... Worst of all was what happened to the people who couldn't afford to take up the incentives to buy, or didn't want the hassles of home ownership. They ceased to live in council housing. They suddenly found they were living in social housing - we should ban that wretched term - and stigmatised as a result.

It was not the enormous expansion of council housing in the post-war era that gave rise to the 'sink estate', but Thatcher's 'property-owning democracy'. Coupled with a determined war on the organisations of the working class and assaults on the powers of local government, which today give Cameron's plans a terrifying plausibility, the result was a division between those carried along with the rise in private home ownership and those left behind.

We arrive at the peculiar situation of the present day: as we have said, on course for a return to housing conditions (adjusting for technological progress) of the 19th century, only not this time purely by the natural course of the system, but by determined initiative of the state.

The left, then, is right to raise a complaint or two at Cameron's plans. Yet we cannot retreat into our own nostalgia: just as sink estates follow from Thatcherism, so Thatcherism follows from the stultifying, authoritarian forms of the post-war settlement. A clutch of determined capitalist class warriors is not enough to achieve the current bonanza for developers and buy-to-let rentiers; there must be the possibility of dividing their more numerous opponents.

Too often, the leftwing response is merely to get involved in the numbers game - multiplying the number of new homes on offer from Labour and the Tories by some factor or another, and slapping (as per the post-war era) the word 'council' between 'new' and 'homes'.

Left Unity is a somewhat encouraging exception: yes, its housing policy is rather *too* sprawling, composed as it is from several sources (a paragraph on the specific housing needs of LGBTQ people adds nothing, and is there only because it happened to be somebody's hobby horse *circa* a year ago), but by the same token it is at least comprehensive, taking into account also the criminal underuse of existing real estate, the need for recreational facilities and generally a landscape in which human life, properly so called, can take place.

Communists seek a wholesale transformation of society: a goal that must surely entail a transformation of the human relationship with the built environment. The amiable isolation of the suburban bungalow, and the grimmer isolation of the abandoned council estate: both must disappear, in direct contradiction to Cameron's facile plans ●

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GREECE

Robbing Peter to pay Alexis

Athens is running out of money fast, writes Eddie Ford. But will Alexis Tsipras capitulate?

Everything indicates that the Greek crisis is approaching some sort of endgame.

Euro zone finance ministers will be meeting on April 24 in Riga, but almost no-one expects that a deal will be struck between Athens and the European Commission-International Monetary Fund-European Central Bank - once the 'troika' now the 'institutions'. Yanis Varoufakis, the so-called "erratic Marxist" and Greek finance minister, has stated that there is "clear convergence" between the various parties and expressed optimism that a "pact" would be reached sometime soon. Sentiments repeated by the head of the Euro group, Jeroen Dijsselbloem, who said he expected Athens and its creditors to "forge a new agreement" in the coming weeks.

But the chances of securing such a deal, desirable or not, do not look good. Greece is drowning in debt after two bailouts in 2010 and 2012 totalling €240 billion. Making things even harder for the Athens government, last week credit agency Standard & Poor's downgraded its rating to CCC+, with a "negative outlook" - slipping further into junk status. Naturally, S&P cited the "lack of progress" in Athens' negotiations with its euro zone partners.

As sure as night follows day, with the situation becoming increasingly perilous for the Syriza-led government, interest rates on Greek government bonds have started to soar again at the prospect of Greece defaulting on its loans - or possibly crashing out of the euro zone altogether ('Grexit'). At the time of writing, the interest on short-term government bonds due in July 2017 hit another high of 29%, and as for 10-year bond yields - the real benchmark - they stood at 13.6%, way over the 7% danger zone that saw Portugal and Ireland begging for a bailout.¹ Meanwhile, the yields on 10-year German government bonds fell to a record low of 0.05%, obviously reflecting their safe-haven status among investors. Significantly, the yields on shorter dated German bonds have turned *negative*, effectively meaning that people are paying the German government for the 'privilege' of parking money with it. How the good times roll.

Even though the beleaguered Syriza-led government somehow managed to make a €450 million repayment to the IMF earlier this month, the institutions are piling on the pressure - the mountain will definitely not come to Mohammed. Hence the head of the IMF, Christine Lagarde, emphasised once again that there would be no leeway when it comes to the debt - "payment delays have not been granted by the board in 30 years". The Greek government, she told the *Financial Times*, must "set aside politics" and bring the promised economic reforms to "fruition", if it wants to unlock the final tranche of €7.2 billion in bailout funds held up since last August - the "honeymoon" period with its creditors was "rapidly coming to a close" (April 19).

More bluntly, Larry Fink, head of US investment management giant BlackRock, this week told a conference in Singapore that if Greece does not capitulate then the euro zone leaders "have no choice but to be firm" and "kick Greece out". What really worries him, like those leaders - especially the Germans - is the thought of the institutions backing off and making concessions to Greece in order to keep it in the club.² If concessions are made to Greece, he argued, Spain will demand them and then Portugal, and so forth - the nightmare scenario. But if concessions are refused, and Greece as the "weakest link" leaves the euro



Crisis coming to a head

zone, then other members of the club will quickly realise that resistance is futile and fall into line.

Desperate

If no deal is done, Athens is likely to run out of money within a month - leaving it unable to pay state pensions and public-sector salaries, let alone meet foreign debt repayments. The IMF expects a €186 million instalment on May 6 and only six days later wants an even bigger payment of €707 million. Then a really big crunch looms in July and August, when €6.7 billion of bonds held by the ECB mature and have to be paid. As things stand right now, it is a mystery as to how Athens will meet these obligations.

Getting desperate, Tsipras cited "extremely urgent and unforeseen needs" and issued an emergency decree on April 20 forcing state-owned enterprises (whether hospitals or local government bodies) to immediately transfer funds to the central bank in the form of short-term loans. Despite the risk of violating its fiduciary obligations, the confiscation of reserves could possibly raise as much as €2 billion for the government: perhaps just enough to meet the wage and pension bill for the month.³ However, there are only so many times you can rob Peter to pay Paul - or Alexis. Unfortunately for the Syriza government, the bills will not go away; workers will still have to be paid.

Unsurprisingly, this sudden move by the central government in Athens has outraged local mayors and officials. Authorities from municipalities across the country held an emergency meeting on April 22, with Giorgos Kaminis, the mayor of Athens, condemning the decree as "unconstitutional" and other mayors considering appealing against the order in court.

'Moscow gold' may be another possible source of funding for the cash-starved government. Tsipras recently met Vladimir Putin in Russia and, according to some reports, the Kremlin is willing to offer Athens a sweetener of up to €5.4 billion as advanced payment for a planned natural gas pipeline running through the country. The project, dubbed 'Turkish Stream', will provide "hundreds of millions of euros of transit taxes a year, just like that" - as Putin put it. The pipeline is Russia's latest attempt to build a new supply route to Europe, after Moscow was forced to abandon its \$40 billion 'South Stream' project late last year - originally designed to run through Bulgaria carrying up to 63 billion cubic metres of gas. Moscow's state-backed Gazprom now has its eyes on establishing a new gas hub on the Turkish-Greek border,

pumping its supplies through the Black Sea and bypassing Ukraine. Some Greek government officials have hailed the potential Russian cash as "turning the tide".

At this stage, it is far from clear whether the deal is done and dusted. But how far will the money actually go? Yes, the sums supposedly involved are certainly not nothing, and could help to alleviate some of the immediate financial pressures on Athens. But *every month* the Syriza government faces a €1.7 billion social security bill, on top of its commitments to pay back its lenders. At best, Kremlin cash could help cover one month's wage bills, as well as going part of the way to paying off the IMF.

So this is still small beer when weighed against the monumental problems facing the Greek government, economically and politically. Furthermore, the longer-term benefits of a Russian deal for the Greek economy are likely to be minimal - at least according to calculations from Simone Tagliapietra and Georg Zachmann at the Bruegel think tank. They calculate that Greece would only reap around €380 million annually in transit fees from Turkish Stream, while a 10% gas discount from Moscow would shrink the country's energy bill by a relatively modest €100 million a year. 'Moscow gold', or gas, will hardly plug Greece's financial black hole. Plus you have to factor in the distinct likelihood that the carrot of Russian cash will *antagonise* euro zone leaders - running the risk of further isolating Athens.

You have to seriously question whether this is something Tsipras and the Syriza leadership are prepared to countenance, given that their entire strategy seems to be based on staying *within* the euro and hoping that Germany blinks. Does Syriza have a Plan B? Wolfgang Schäuble, the hawkish German finance minister, remarked recently that the Syriza government had "destroyed" all the economic improvements achieved by Athens since 2011 and heavily implied that the euro zone could cope with a Greek default - saying the markets had "priced in" all possible outcomes to Greece's debt woes and there was no contagion risk to other euro zone sovereign borrowers. In the same vein, Mario Draghi, the ECB's president, said that the currency bloc had sufficient "buffers" in place to avoid a chain-reaction meltdown, were Greece to be forced out of the euro zone - though he did add the slightly alarming caveat that these buffers were not "necessarily designed" for a Grexit and could still send the global economy into "uncharted waters". Now say that again.

There are plenty of signs that the ECB is losing patience with Athens. According to Bloomberg, it is studying measures to rein in 'emergency liquidity assistance' to Greek banks.⁴ If the Bloomberg account is accurate, a growing minority of the ECB governing council is opposed to providing indefinite assistance.

Split

Options running out, 'Moscow gold' or not, Athens has been swirling with rumours about the introduction of a dual or parallel currency: a new drachma, so to speak. There has even been talk of printing government IOUs, which would almost certainly be the road to disaster - just as it was during the French Revolution, when the assembly proposed that the government would stimulate the economy by the issuance of a new monetary instrument called the *assignat* (literally 'assignment').⁵ The *assignat* was essentially a government IOU denominated in francs, since the revolutionary government had no gold or silver with which to back this new issue. Needless to say, though the *assignats* were in theory interest-bearing government securities, in reality they simply represented an issue of irredeemable paper money - which soon became worthless.

Anyway, if Syriza were to go down, that path it would mean economic misery for millions - just proving that things can always get worse. But not only in Greece. In fact, for all of the reassurances from Schäuble, Draghi and others, a messy Grexit could be destabilising for the remaining members of the euro zone.

No wonder that publications like the *Financial Times* have been agitating for Tsipras to ditch his leftwing and start moving to the sensible centre ground before it is too late. In other words, the *FT* and others are looking for a *split* within Syriza on the basis that this is the only way to make a bailout agreement possible. But the "ultra-left" is *underrepresented* in parliament, composing about a third of its MPs - though this is partly because some elements inside Syriza do genuinely subscribe (unfortunately) to the anarchistic belief that parliamentary work is a boring and pointless diversion from occupying the streets and organising the *next* demonstration or general strike (conversely, there are doubtless genuine careerists among Syriza's parliamentarians and the party machine as whole).

If Tsipras were able to take out his left in a surgical strike, or bloody internal civil war, then obviously Syriza would be cleaved right down

the middle. There is certainly a fight to be had, given that one Syriza MP, Yannis Micheloyiannakos, angrily denounced the government's decision to sequester local government funds as "tantamount to a coup d'etat that does not suit our character and leftwing conscience". He is not alone.

The notion is that Tsipras will perform a Ramsay MacDonald-like somersault, using the 1931 National government in Britain as his historical model, to set up a pro-EU national unity government. Taking advantage of Syriza's continued high popularity ratings of 70% plus, and the personality cult that has developed around him, the Greek prime minister would form a new coalition with the rump that is now Pasok and also To Potami (The River), the new centrist party that fought its first general election in January. Maybe Tsipras could also gather in forces from New Democracy: stories have circulated that he has already made overtures to a faction led by Kostas Karamanlis, former ND president and prime minister from 2004-09. In the words of one senior European official, Tsipras "has to decide whether he wants to be prime minister or the leader of Syriza".

However, this would be a very high-risk approach. Tsipras does appear to be very loyal to his Syriza comrades, including those on the left of the party - many of whom he has known personally for decades, having fought many battles alongside them. The odds are that he will do almost anything to avoid a rupture with them, taking negotiations with the troika right up to the wire - and maybe beyond. There is also the obvious point that hooking up with thoroughly discredited, if not hated, political parties associated with austerity and the old regime is a sure way to take the shine off his halo.

Of course, another way for the bourgeoisie to get what it wants is through the more direct means of destabilisation. For instance, the *FT* ran a *favourable* story about an anti-government demonstration by gold miners outside parliament on April 16 - apparently against the government's decision to suspend the Canadian-owned mine's operating licences on environmental grounds (April 17). Funnily enough, the *FT* does not normally approve of striking miners. The paper even quotes a *geologist*, Dimitris Ballas, describing the government action as "unfair and illegal" - before loftily observing that, if the Greek people "feel mistreated or misgoverned", they will "turn against the political upstarts of Syriza, just as they turned against the traditional parties of left and right, whose misrule pushed Greece to the abyss".

This story has a whiff of manipulation. Who organised and paid for the demonstration - not the mine owners, Eldorado Gold, by any chance? You cannot help but be reminded of the prolonged lorry drivers' strike in Chile, that was funded by the CIA and presaged the 1973 military coup led by general Augusto Pinochet.●

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Notes

1. www.bloomberg.com/quote/gggb10yr:ind.
2. http://seekingalpha.com/article/3080896-larry-fink-thinks-the-market-is-wrong-on-greece.
3. www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-04-21/greek-officials-said-to-see-decree-giving-time-for-april-deal.
4. www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-04-21/ecb-said-to-study-curbs-on-greek-bank-support-as-unease-grows-i8qy1abe.
5. http://voluntarysociety.org/conditioning/federalreserve/pugsley.html.
6. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/ontoday/hi/dates/stories/september/11/newsid_3199000/3199155.stm.

REVIEW

Ferdinand Lassalle: "hero"

Before the great betrayal of August

Ralf Hoffrogge *Sozialismus und Arbeiterbewegung in Deutschland: von den Anfängen bis 1914*
Schmetterling Verlag, 2011, €10, pp216¹

This book attempts to provide an overview of German social struggles from the peasant wars of 1524-25 to the outbreak of World War I in 1914. There is a particular focus on the ties between socialism and the labour movement.

Ralf Hoffrogge, a historian at the University of Potsdam, has provided a real service with this contribution to a field that has declined in terms of its impact, both within the academy and society at large. For Hoffrogge, the cause of this lies in the "epochal turn" (p7) after 1991. Until then, he argues, terms such as 'socialism' and 'workers' movement' had been fundamental to political thought in Germany, with the western Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the eastern Socialist Unity Party (SED) seeking to legitimise their respective political practices in what became a protracted conflict between the "social state" and

"state socialism" (*ibid*).

Hoffrogge is conscious that this ideological conflict has shaped the framework of labour historiography. He critically examines this framework and pursues new historiographical avenues, which may lead to a deeper understanding beyond the ideological strictures imposed by the cold war. His study achieves this by incorporating several post-1991 labour history perspectives. In particular global labour history² and world systems theory. Through this he reinterrogates the origins of capitalism and challenges the "stereotype" that the workers' movement was based on the "white, male factory worker", who was completely aloof from, or even hostile to, issues of race, gender and sexuality (p12). The development of the working class women's movement and its relations with the SPD, leading social democratic parliamentarian August Bebel's role in the struggle for

gay rights, attitudes towards colonialism and Marxist thinking on anti-Semitism are all discussed.

Hoffrogge's book is largely successful in conceptualising innovative ways of thinking about labour history. When it comes to the SPD from 1891 to 1914, however, the case it makes is very much in the mould of cold war historiography and would have benefited from engagement with some of the recent literature on the SPD in general and that party's leading theoretician, Karl Kautsky, in particular.³

Hoffrogge's incorporation of world systems theory - particularly its main contention that capitalism developed contemporaneously with the development of the world market in the 16th century - counters the dominant paradigm in labour history. This sees 19th century Britain and France as models for capitalism (the former in terms of industrialisation and the clash between labour and capital, the

latter in terms of political democracy and the rule of the bourgeoisie), and directly feeds into seeing 1848 as the formative date for the German working class movement.

Hoffrogge contends, however, that this dating is flawed both geographically (in that it ignores the international context of both the market and of the labouring journeymen and craftsmen before 1848) and temporally (in that it overlooks the history of early capitalist development in Europe and the fierce economic struggles it ushered in). Indeed, to locate the origins of the German workers' movement in the 19th century is, for him, to banish from the historical record those who refused to accept the social changes wrought by the emergence of industrial capitalism, which was devastating their previous modes of existence.

For Hoffrogge, therefore, 1848 is significant, but in a different respect

from how it is commonly interpreted: only at this point did 'worker' become a cross-regional protest identity across what would later become Germany. He nonetheless stresses that this emergence of a worker self-understanding should not be conflated with the *origins* of the workers' movement itself, which he examines in chapter 2 ('Machine breakers and the communism of the craftsmen: the pre-industrial workers' movement in Germany').

Socialism

Hoffrogge's underlying argument is that the *material entity* of the German workers' movement, which gradually emerged from these pre-industrial beginnings and in time formed itself into associations, unions and parties, only became a social force in its interaction with the *guiding idea* of a society of freedom and equality: socialism. The

What we fight for

workers' movement and socialism were initially separate phenomena, but in the 19th century found their way to each other to form a "historically powerful unity" (p11).

Hoffrogge defines socialism by distinguishing between the utopian schema with little or no resonance amongst the mass of the population and an idea that fought its way into the workers' attempts to organise against their exploitation. Having traced the socialist ideal back to Sparta and the golden age of Greece, he proceeds to discuss "early socialism" (which encompasses earlier utopian-influenced writing, such as Thomas More's *Utopia* of 1516) and charts the fate of this concept through the French radicalism of François-Noël Babeuf, comte de Saint Simon and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. He concludes with Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels and their aim of giving socialism a scientific (*wissenschaftlich*) basis in their *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, which they were commissioned to write for the Communist League in 1847.

The outcomes of the merger of socialism and the workers' movement are discussed in chapter 3 ('The separation of liberalism and socialism 1848-75'), which provides a highly informative summary of the first German workers' organisations and the legacy of figures such as Stephan Born (the General German Working Class Brotherhood), Ferdinand Lassalle (the General German Working Class Association, often known as the Lassalleans), Karl Marx (the Cologne Workers' Association, "a mass organisation of five to seven thousand members" - p54) and August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht (leaders of the pro-Marxist Eisenachers). All, in their various ways, can be seen as links between socialism and the working class movement.

Yet how can labour history account for the different political and ideological perspectives between these organisations and figures, not least the later struggle between the Lassalleans and the Eisenachers? Hoffrogge approaches these questions in a fresh manner too. Official communist historical output, fully in line with what Peter Thompson has dubbed its "Stalino-Hegelian"⁴ teleological approach, locates the breakthrough of Marxism in the German workers' movement in the Eisenachers' 'victory' over contending Lassallean ideas. Further, the German Democratic Republic's official history of the German workers' movement rather painfully attempted to trace a supposedly unbroken programmatic red thread through the Communist League of Marx and Engels, the Eisenacher organisation of 1869, the founding manifesto of the Communist Party of Germany in 1918 and the "principles and aims of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany of 1946 and its programme of socialism in 1963".⁵

Gotha and Eisenach

Such an approach overlooks the dynamic tension both within the Marxist tradition as it developed over time and between Marxism and competing political outlooks in the workers' movement. Hoffrogge usefully turns this narrative on its head by highlighting the *commonalities* between the Eisenacher and Lassallean organisations and by demonstrating just how pivotal Lassalle was in the rupture between liberalism and socialism in working class educational associations and cooperatives.

Yet what of the political differences between the two groups? For Hoffrogge, a major bone of contention between them revolved around Lassalle's conception of the state as the ideal expression of the general good and collective will, which almost led to Lassalle's rapprochement with Otto von Bismarck. Marx and Engels, by contrast, contended that the state should be conquered: not so that it

would be preserved, but rather sublated (*aufgehoben*). Hoffrogge argues that for Marx and Engels this had to happen "not through elections, but through revolution" (p65, my emphasis). However, Hoffrogge's creation of a dichotomy between elections and revolution in the thought of Marx and Engels ignores their later writings in particular. For instance, in the 1880 Programme of the Parti Ouvrier, which they jointly wrote with Paul Lafargue and Jules Guesde, it is proclaimed that "universal suffrage ... will thus be transformed from the instrument of deception that it has been until now into an instrument of emancipation".⁶

The eventual party-political fusion of Lassalle's followers and the Eisenachers in Gotha in 1875 brought about the Socialist Workers' Party of Germany (SAPD), with 38,000 members. Hoffrogge is critical of Marx's comments on the Gotha programme, which were a protest against his supporters in Germany for granting too many concessions to Lassallean ideas in the pursuit of unity. While Hoffrogge sees much that is of worth in the text, he is convinced that Marx is suffering from hurt feelings because the SAPD made Lassalle "the hero", not Marx (p71).

Hoffrogge underlines how the emergence of the SAPD was a watershed moment, which significantly strengthened the influence of socialist ideas within the German empire. The manner in which this state reacted to the astonishing rise of social democracy is the subject of chapter 4 ('Carrots and sticks: social democracy between prohibition and integration 1871-90'). Usefully, this chapter also develops a 'history from below' perspective by specifying how the party was able to have an impact on the everyday lives of ordinary people. It discusses the thriving alcohol and pub culture within the German working class, with the pubs forming a hub of political organisation, not least during the Anti-Socialist Laws (1878-90), when social democracy was effectively banned. Working class women, however, as Hoffrogge points out, were largely excluded from this aspect of social life.

Already with an eye on the later drift towards reformism on the part of social democracy, Hoffrogge notes that the first signs of "a growing tendency to legalism" and an unwillingness to "discuss social-revolutionary theses" (p87) could even be found during the period of the party's illegality. To illustrate the point, he refers to the party's expulsion of the increasingly anarchist-inclined Johann Most and Wilhelm Hasselmann, who had both urged the German working class to follow in the footsteps of tsar Alexander II's assassins by launching a similar attack on the German kaiser.

In this instance, Hoffrogge is clearly wrong. The expulsions should not be seen as evidence of legalism, but rather as a rejection of terrorism and putschism. Indeed, the eschewal of such methods was a defining feature of European social democracy as a whole. Hoffrogge nonetheless highlights a genuine dilemma faced by any organisation that aspires to work within the existing state, but which also seeks to overcome it: which tactics should be pursued in the interests of fundamental change? Where is the line to be drawn between accommodation to the state in the name of political expediency, and the potential isolation of radical opposition to it?

Legalism and attentism

After the legalisation of social democracy's activity in 1890, these questions repeatedly provoked factional discord and strife within the party. In what way did they prefigure what the historian Carl Emil Schorske deemed "the great schism" and the SPD's acceptance of the German empire's 'fortress peace' (*Burgfrieden*)

at the outbreak of World War I? Chapter 5 ('The strongest of all parties? Social democracy 1890-1914') grapples with this problem, which has dominated German labour historiography more than any other.

Unfortunately, Hoffrogge depends on the very cold war historical orthodoxy he is attempting to transcend. Specifically, Dieter Groh's influential argument, outlined in his 1973 *Negative Integration und revolutionärer Attentismus: die deutsche Sozialdemokratie am Vorabend des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Negative integration and revolutionary attentism: German Social Democracy on the eve of the First World War), that the leadership of the SPD was characterised by political passivity and strategic 'attentism' ('wait and see') and was concerned more with the preservation and expansion of its own organisation than with socialist revolution. Hoffrogge's arguments also draw heavily on critics of the SPD from the right, such as the French socialist Jean Jaurès, and from the left, such as Rosa Luxemburg, both of whom were highly critical of the SPD's alleged inaction. Yet Hoffrogge's emphasis on attentism leads him to assert that at its height the SPD, a party with hundreds of publications and newspapers, "did not preside over any strategy or tactics" (p160) beyond concentrating on elections. This claim ignores the array of SPD activities, initiatives and campaigns and also implies that producing newspapers or standing in elections is somehow not genuinely radical political activity.

Accordingly, Hoffrogge views the *mass strike* and *direct actionist* line of the SPD left around Rosa Luxemburg as offering more of a strategic connection between theory and practice than the "economism" (p202) of those in the party's centre around Karl Kautsky. Indeed, to the extent that Hoffrogge analyses the writings and speeches of the latter in particular, he interprets Kautsky's ideas as being much closer to the revisionist right wing of the SPD, which sought to restrict itself to reforming the German empire democratically, than to the revolutionary wing, which foregrounded the struggle for the extension of democracy precisely in order to facilitate revolutionary upheaval.⁷

This leads Hoffrogge to make claims about the exceptional, far-sighted nature of Luxemburg's Marxism. For example, he argues that Luxemburg was the "most decisive opponent"⁸ of revisionist socialism and of the watering-down of the SPD's radical programme. He believes that her

"vehement defence of the 'final goal' of the socialist movement, which she saw as coming to a head in the seizure of political power" (p151), marks her out as an unrivalled thinker ●

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Notes

1. This review first appeared in *Critique* No71, April 2015.
2. For an overview of the emergence of global labour history and its endeavour to compose an international history of labour which extends beyond the core of the capitalist system to its periphery (crucially, beyond Europe and North America), cf KH Roth, 'Ein Enzyklopädist des kritischen Denkens: Marcel van der Linden, der heterodoxe Marxismus und die Global Labour History' *Sozial.Geschichte Online* 9 2012, pp202-09, 232-39.
3. For a remarkable study of Kautsky's influence on Bolshevism, see LT Lih *Lenin rediscovered: 'What is to be done?' in context* Chicago2008. Particularly in terms of a critique of the dominant cold war view of Kautsky as a purportedly passive, fatalist and evolutionist thinker (a recurring theme in Hoffrogge's account), cf RB Day and D Gaido (eds) *Witnesses to permanent revolution: the documentary record* Chicago 2011; and P Blackledge, 'Karl Kautsky and Marxist historiography' *Science and Society* Vol 70, No3, 2006.
4. P Thompson *The crisis of the German left: the PDS, Stalinism and the global economy* New York 2005, p17.
5. Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim Zentralkomitee der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands (ed) *Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung* Vol 1, p283. This is clearly an exercise in foundation myth-making, not history. Quite apart from Stalinism's overhaul of the programmatic basis of the socialist movement, it is worth remembering that in her speech on programme at the founding congress of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) in 1918, Rosa Luxemburg was clear that the approach she was proposing for the young KPD represented a modification of, or a departure from, that of Marx and Engels. For a brief discussion of this, cf Ben Lewis, 'Rosa and the republic' *Weekly Worker* October 10 2013.
6. 'The programme of the Parti Ouvrier': www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/05/parti-ouvrier.htm.
7. As Kautsky put it in 1909, "We are revolutionists, and this not simply in the sense that the steam engine is a revolutionist. The social transformation for which we are striving can be attained only through a political revolution, by means of the conquest of political power by the fighting proletariat. The only form of the state in which socialism can be realised is that of a republic, and a thoroughly democratic republic at that" (K Kautsky *The road to power*: www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1909/power/ch05.htm).
8. Not only is this incorrect (Alexander Parvus was first off the mark in the controversy), but it is also a misleading depiction of the intellectual relations between Kautsky and other thinkers: at this point, at least, it was Kautsky who was the main defender of the SPD's Erfurt programme and from whom Rosa Luxemburg, Clara Zetkin and other thinkers largely took their cue. Cf Rosa Luxemburg's 1899 'Kautskys Buch wider Bernstein' (http://marxists.org/deutsch/archiv/luxemburg/1899/09/wideridrx.htm), which praised Kautsky's role in the struggle against the revisionism of his old friend, Eduard Bernstein. For Zetkin's similar praise, cf C Zetkin, 'Wider die sozialdemokratische Theorie und Taktik' *Die Gleichheit* No8 (April 12 1899), reprinted in C Zetkin *Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften* Vol 1 (Berlin1957), pp149-56.

Fighting fund

May Day success?

With just a week to go to raise the £1,750 we need for our April fighting fund, we are on £1,149, meaning we still need £601 by 12 noon on May 1. What a brilliant May Day achievement it would be to hit the target for the first time since we increased it to the new figure last autumn.

Doing his best to ensure that we get there from now on is comrade PD, who not only sent a PayPal donation of £25, but also tells us he has set up a standing order for £20 a month - the first payment will also be on May Day! Excellent, comrade - thanks for that.

KL (£10) was another one who used PayPal (he and PD were among 4,453 online readers last week), while comrades SF (£40) and GT (£10) both sent in useful cheques and JM handed over £50

at the last Communist Platform meeting (the first in what is to be a regular payment). But, as usual, the biggest chunk of all came in the shape of standing orders, totalling no less than £325 - among the donors comrades MM, SK, SEP and PM deserve a special mention.

Anyway, I'm sure all our readers will agree that it will be nicely symbolic if we edge past our target on May 1. And you can make it happen. Why not send in your contribution or, better still, follow PD's example and set up a standing order too! I hope to hear from you ●

Robbie Rix

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

weekly worker

**Constitutional
conference
agreed**

How not to organise

LU's unworkable constitution is to be revisited. Sarah McDonald reports on this and other decisions taken by the national council

The first meeting of Left Unity's new national council took place in Birmingham on Saturday April 18, with 40 out of the 60 newly elected NC members present, plus two observers and one rather cramped agenda.

Minutes and matters arising was to set the pace of the day's discussions. Allocated a generous 20 minutes on the timetable, it took somewhere closer to twice that, including congratulations offered to the drafters of LU's manifesto. Following on from this, Kate Hudson introduced the next item: matters for endorsement from the executive committee minutes. Again, this session overran, some items having been passed back and forth from NC to EC, to NC again (the trouble with such large and unwieldy committees being that they often cannot take a decisive position).

There was some discussion surrounding a motion from West London on the role of culture in politics, asking LU to give prominence to the arts within its political activities. Some comrades, while agreeing with the sentiment, commented that it was overly prescriptive. The EC had referred this motion to the NC, recommending support, though realistically 'actioning' such a motion at NC level is inappropriate. If West London wants LU to set up a samba band to play at the next big demo, they should go off and do so. Who would object? Similarly, a motion from Stockport calling for anti-austerity to be a branch priority was (correctly) regarded as well-meaning, but overly prescriptive. Most other motions passed to the NC from the EC for endorsement were agreed in principle (although there was some disagreement about the practice of agreeing motions in principle!).

The first real point of disagreement concerned the composition of the executive. The existing EC operates a rotational attendance (regional delegates taking it in turn to attend to reduce workload, travel, etc). This practice leads to the composition of the EC being completely different at each meeting, and so it is profoundly hampered in its ability to make decisions and carry out actions. The motion from Kate Hudson and Pete Green called for the NC to elect the EC from "categories listed in the constitution" (ie, regional delegates should elect a person from each region). There was a supplementary from Kate Hudson, that the EC should be able to meet between NC meetings to make day-to-day policy and organisational decisions, as necessary (which any NC member would be welcome to attend).

The main motion was voted on, taken with the suggested options: either the regional delegates elect their reps, endorsed by and recallable by the NC, or the NC directly elects the EC. The latter was carried with the unfortunate caveat that the regions could have one alternate delegate, so those attending the EC will still vary, although not as much as previously. This is an improvement, but the reality is that,



Sense of strategy urgently needed

because the composition of the EC is dictated by the existing constitution, with its gender, geographic, etc clauses, it is far too big to function effectively. What is needed is a much smaller EC, that meets regularly, communicates in the interim and can and will offer political leadership. In the end there was no controversy over who was elected. Everyone who wanted to be on the EC is on the EC. It is worth noting that neither of the Communist Platform's two nationally elected NC members put themselves forward.

Election strategy?

By the time comrades broke for lunch, only three items had been covered (including minutes and matters arising) and it was clear that chunks of the agenda would never be reached. Yet, the timetabled 45-minute discussion on 'Election campaigning and forward planning' did not get any more pacy.

The first section, 'Election campaigning', was introduced by Tom Walker, who was worried that the session would get sidetracked into a discussion on the Greens. But there was no such injection of politics. Instead there was considerable tedium

in the form of anecdotes about branch canvassing, running stalls, etc. All very worthy, but perhaps not the best use of NC time.

Terry Conway made the assertion that not enough women had put themselves forward as LU candidates for May 7, while Matthew Jones reported back on the situation in Scotland, where Labour is facing a virtual wipe-out. Comrade Jones did say that the Scottish National Party was "vulnerable to the left", which, given the state of the left in Scotland (much worse than even in Britain as a whole), is interesting.

There was the general feeling, especially from London delegates, that Vauxhall has been given priority by LU members in terms of activism, because Simon Hardy is the only solely LU candidate in London (ie, not standing jointly with the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition). Comrade Hardy (who was not present due to campaigning) had proposed that LU has a post-election conference to review the situation and presumably go for something more modest.

After various musings over election campaigning in the localities, the TV

leaders' debates, Tusc and Kingsley Abrams' dog (!) an hour and a half had simply flown by and it was time for the second part of the same agenda item: 'Future planning' (remember, the whole general election discussion had been scheduled to last just 45 minutes). This sub-item was introduced by Liz Davies and consisted of a discussion around standing in the 2016 elections for the Greater London Authority, Scottish parliament and Welsh assembly. Comrade Davies was quite correct in asserting that we should have taken a decision as to whether we pursue this by now. The NC agreed that, in principle, we ought to stand candidates for all three bodies and that the appropriate regional committees should discuss the practicalities.

What is positive about this is that it represents some (albeit small) idea of a strategy decided at national level regarding standing in elections. By contrast LU's policy in relation to the general election has been non-existent - branches were left to decide whether to stand a candidate, with no national approach to who, where or why, and quite a few managed to balls it up (including my LU branch in Hackney). If the NC's decision to stand in next

year's elections goes ahead, it should not simply lead and coordinate the election campaign, but should decide what strategically we want to gain from it. In other words, does it seek to build left unity in general? Does it seek to build Left Unity specifically? Does it want to promote local activism and community campaigns? What will be our approach to Labour lefts? Etc, etc.

The last item was the motion, originating with the Communist Platform, calling for a constitutional conference in 2015. When drafting this motion, we in the CP were unsure about the level of support we would garner, but we were acutely aware that many others, apart from ourselves, consider the constitution totally unfit for purpose. Yasmine Mather moved the motion, highlighting how the current document hampers our work. She commented that, while on paper aspects of the constitution ensure gender equality, in reality they do no such thing and many stipulations are, in practice, bypassed - otherwise we would be unable to function at all.

There was only limited discussion, due to time considerations. Len Arthur, representing Wales, found the whole idea of a constitutional conference tedious, like "navel staring" - he felt the 'safe spaces' debate at the last conference was a total bore. He asked for concrete examples as to why we deem the current constitution unworkable. As fortune would have it, I was called to speak next and provided him with a few (not least one or two from earlier in the day regarding the composition of the EC and the timetable of elections to the NC). It was proposed that one day of the two-day conference scheduled for the end of October be given over to the constitution and this was overwhelmingly carried.

It is unlikely that this conference will see the LU adopt the kind of constitution that we in the Communist Platform favour, but at least we will be beginning a rethink on how Left Unity ought to organise.

The two motions regarding safe spaces were not taken, as the mover, Felicity Dowling, was busy campaigning for the general election, where she is a candidate in Liverpool. It was agreed to take all remaining motions at the next meeting. The youth and student caucus constitution also fell off the agenda ●

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