

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



# weekly worker



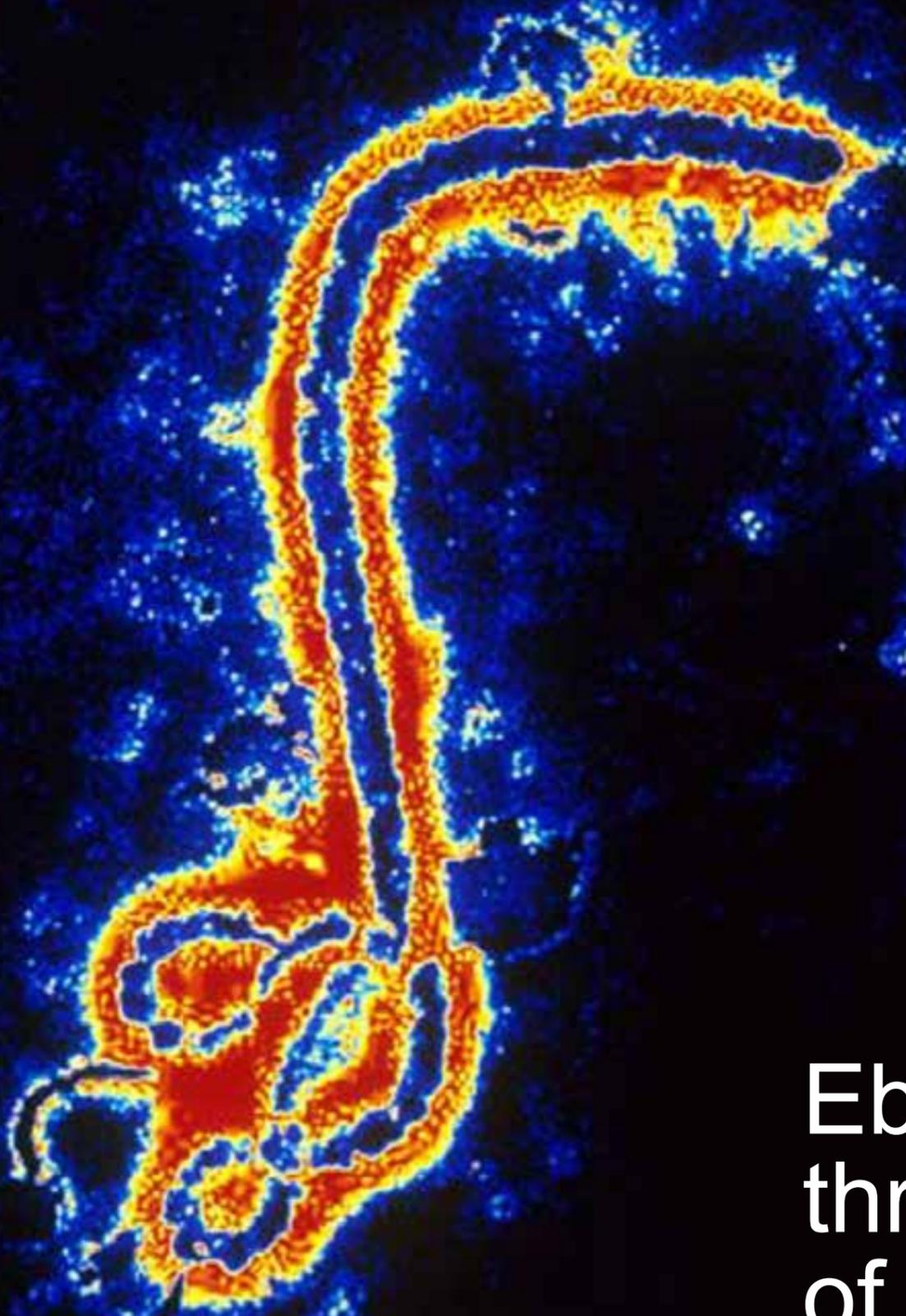
**Left Unity: a more sober and realistic attitude towards immediate expectations**

- October's strikes
- Economic downturn
- Revolutionary strategy
- Miners 1984-85

No 1030 Thursday October 16 2014

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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**Ebola:  
threat  
of social  
breakdown**

# LETTERS



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

## Secretive

It is fine being the critical organisation of the left, but when, oh, when will the CPGB open itself to criticism and analysis?

From Wikipedia we learn that the CPGB is possibly 50-strong and falling. If this is wrong, let the CPGB become transparent and publish membership figures, recruitment figures and paper sales.

The CPGB involvement in Left Unity becomes increasingly small-circle, as LU becomes less engaged. So why does the CPGB think LU is the way forward over the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition?

The CPGB made much of its boycott of the Scottish independence referendum. How many did you win to your position?

The CPGB has adopted an ambiguous position in regard to the UK Independence Party. Do you think some Ukip policies are progressive?

You have a "Provisional Central Committee". Who elects this CC? How open is the election (no mention in the *Weekly Worker*)?

Is the CPGB like the Masons? That is, how do people join?

All is seemingly open via the *Weekly Worker*, but you do not publish 'Party notes' like the SWP. Why not? Could it be that the CPGB is the most secret organisation on the left in Britain?

In search of answers.

**Rupert Mallin**  
email

## Communalism?

Perhaps some very gullible readers of the *Weekly Worker* may be taken in by Ian Donovan's crude nonsense: "... the likes of ... Moshé Machover promote, along with a sometimes very left-sounding anti-Zionism, their own alternative 'left' [Jewish] identity politics and communalism" (Letters, October 9).

So, to make my real position clear, let me quote from my article, 'Hebrew versus Jewish identity' (*Weekly Worker* May 16 2013):

"In some progressive circles in the Jewish diaspora there are attempts to promote an alternative Jewish identity - secular and non-Zionist, in some cases pointedly anti-Zionist. I assume that this is motivated partly by nostalgia

for the murderously extinguished progressive and proletarian tradition of east European Jewry, and partly by outrage at Israel's pretension to speak and act for all Jews and thus implicate them in its misdeeds.

"It is not my business to tell those who pursue such an alternative identity how to define themselves. It is entirely up to them. Even nostalgia is a legitimate sentiment (although, alas, it is no longer what it used to be ...). And a progressive Jewish identity deployed against Zionist propaganda certainly plays a positive role.

"But I believe that diasporic Jewish secular identity does not have a long-term future, because it lacks an objective basis."

**Moshé Machover**  
email

## Threefold

In response to Andrew Northall, I would contend that the *Weekly Worker* of course wishes to promote and popularise "the names, ideas, words and arguments of those socialists 100 years ago who actively opposed World War I" (Letters, October 9). We do not want to *silence* such voices and such ideas, but to deepen our understanding of them. The motivation behind our series on social-imperialism, as explained in the overviews of the translated material and in my article introducing the series ('The SPD left's dirty secret', July 26), is threefold.

First, to actually try and provide more of a rounded historical context to the debates and controversies which raged within the workers' movement over the nature of World War I and the tasks of socialists. By understanding how those like Paul Lensch, Konrad Haenisch, Heinrich Cunow and Alexander Parvus - all of whom were significant figures in social democracy - framed their arguments on imperialism, capitalist development, the nation-state, democracy and so on, we gain a much greater sense of the ideas of their erstwhile comrades, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, as well as others from different trends in the movement. This context has unfortunately been lost, because the ideas of the heroic anti-imperialist fighters we correctly look to and draw on are often dealt with in isolation, which has led to some strange assertions (ie, Karl Kautsky was *pro-war* in 1914!) To better understand somebody's ideas

it is also useful to look at those of their opponents.

Second, if like comrade Northall we see the Russian Revolution as the greatest anti-imperialist act of World War I, then it is important to try and get to grips with the phenomenon of Bolshevism, away from cold war caricature and recycled opinions. As Lars T Lih in particular has stressed, the dominant cold war narrative - that Lenin went away and radically revised his pre-1914 outlook at the outbreak of the war and completely broke with the so-called 'Marxist centre' - is misleading. The social-imperialist material obviously sheds light on this relationship too.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, some of the theoretical dead ends pursued by the German left social-imperialists are errors that have been a constant thorn in the side of left thought. The Lensch-Haenisch-Cunow group's conflation of nationalisation and wartime rationing/state planning with 'socialisation'; its downplaying of the necessity of democracy in socialism; and its absolute insistence that the left must, in order to 'do something', attempt to choose 'the lesser evil' in imperialist conflicts - all blight the left today (one need only think of the situation in Ukraine and the left's response to it).

Moreover, it is a little bit odd for comrade Northall to have found my translation work slightly pointless and then for him to proceed to write a letter setting out some of his thoughts on and reactions to the material. Maybe it was not so pointless, after all.

**Ben Lewis**  
Sheffield

## Red-brown Trots

My July article on Polish nationalism has elicited a most bizarre, but insightful, response ('Christ of nations in London' *Weekly Worker* July 3). In a Usenet discussion group, I am dubbed a "loquacious Polak immigrant spokesman", who is attempting to "outflank the 'red' cultural Marxists of the SWP front outfit, UAF". Apparently, my crime was to suggest that "these New World Order invaders" - ie, Polish migrant workers - "have many reasons for being what they are, and that this is reinforced by any actions against 'immigrants', from Ukip to UAF". Finally, it is suggested that "all of the Polish garbage ought to be made to return to their miserable homeland and make something of their heritage".

Because of the language - and because some contributors deemed Ukip to be insufficiently anti-immigrant - I initially believed I was reading a conversation between BNP members. Much to my surprise, it turned out that the forum is inhabited by a rare red-brown species of Trotskyist. Among them, a specimen named VN Gelis, who has authored books such as *How the IMF broke Greece: role of the fake left*. The latter was reviewed by David Douglass for the *Weekly Worker*, and indeed, comrade Douglas noted Gelis's highlighting of "mass illegal immigration" with some unease ('Defence of the nation-state', December 8 2011).

A cursory Google search reveals that the industrious Gelis has also written articles for No2EU - most recently for its *Exit Europe* pamphlet published before the 2014 European elections. Furthermore, he edits the Kindle journal, *Greek Patriotic Left*, and has protested against "Jewish mythology about the holocaust", while posting material from the French holocaust denier, Robert Faurisson, in various newsgroups.

Why do the views of a handful of 'Trotskyist' conspiracy cranks matter? Because they illustrate how bigotry

and chauvinism are often the result of mistaken conclusions and bad politics rather than of a racist psychological disposition. Gelis runs a blog entirely dedicated to proving that the classical Marxists were opposed to immigration and the free movement of labour. All that he succeeds in demonstrating is that Marx and Engels were aware of the squalor and degradation that characterised the Irish diaspora in 19th-century Britain, and that their presence was exploited by capitalists to drive British wages down.

The conclusion drawn by Gelis and his brethren is that migration must be stopped in order to protect the 'indigenous working class': a short-termist outlook - also implicit in the No2EU platform - which hopes to improve the conditions of a tiny section of a global slave class. These sectional politics do not point beyond their desired immediate outcome. They are, in essence, no different to the politics of the German Workers Party - a proto-Nazi organisation in Austria-Hungary that organised ethnic German labourers and trade unionists against their Slavic competitors. Objectively, they express the interests of the labour bureaucracy.

These interests stand in contrast to the interests of communists, which are synonymous with those of the working class as a whole. We argue not for migrants to leave, but for across-the-board pay increases and the levelling up of wages across Europe. More critically, we advocate the international political organisation of the working class: firstly, to extort concessions from the ruling class that we have currently no hope in hell of achieving. Secondly, with a view to the working class becoming the global ruling class of the future. Thirdly and ultimately, towards its self-abolition as a class. No doubt, a 'globalist' agenda in the eyes of VN Gelis, but then we proudly stand on the politics of authentic Marxism - a 'globalist' outlook if there ever was one.

Yet there is hope even for creatures such as Gelis. His most recent blog entry, dating back to April, reproduces comrade Ben Lewis's translation of the resolution adopted by the 1907 Stuttgart Congress of the Second International, which contains consistently Marxist demands *vis-à-vis* the migrant worker question ('Reactionary by nature', April 4). These policies are progressive because, by recognising that the working class is international, they point to a future beyond the prison complex that is the system of nation-states.

I am in no position to say whether this serves as a fig leaf for the otherwise reactionary direction of Gelis's 'research'. The fact that it stands as the last entry in his blog - the final word on Marxism and migration, so to speak - is encouraging.

**Maciej Zurowski**  
London

## Sales room

At the recent Hackney Left Unity AGM broadness was emphasised to the exclusion of what the majority in the room actually thought.

Again and again, motions from the Communist Platform were argued against because they were not 'saleable' to those outside of the room. References to capitalism and the working class put the fear of god into what I would call left atheists - those who disavow what the LU leadership call 'dead Russians'. A perfectly reasonable motion to get rid of MI5 was voted down. A motion on the environment was rejected because it had the word 'capitalism' in the preamble. One comrade said that this is a broad party and we don't want any of this Leninist party nonsense. This

displays a total disregard of history, and a lack of understanding of how we can learn from the past.

Currently, as I understand it, the membership of Left Unity stands at around 2,000 members. It has remained stagnant for about the past six months, and it is not even certain if the majority of members actually care about what happens to the party. You might expect the members to be mobilised for demonstrations, but this was not the case at the Stop the War demonstration two weeks ago, where Andrew Burgin was alone in handing out leaflets to promote Left Unity. Where were the others?

Hackney has about 30-40 paying members, but the numbers at the AGM were about the same as had been attending for the past year, even though they were supplemented by members from Tower Hamlets. The future of LU appears uncertain, and like left unity projects of the past, it may have a limited shelf life. However, there are earnest comrades who are trying to make it work, and they should be supported.

The general election should give us an idea about the popularity of this latest left project, and whether it has a future.

**Simon Wells**  
Hackney

## Minimum wage

It's October, so it must be that time of year when I do my annual analysis of the adult workers index - the total number of female escorts advertising on *Adult Work*, the UK's premier website for putting escorts in touch with potential clients. Surprisingly, the number of women with profiles on *Adult Work* has decreased by 14% from just over 23,000 a year ago to around 19,500 today.

There are four things to note. First, there are fewer adverts from women who are working as escorts full-time, but more adverts from women working as escorts part-time. This probably reflects the fall in male disposable income since 2007 and the increase in the number of women trying to supplement their income through the tax-free income available through escorting.

Second, the number of adverts from single women aged 18-30 is around 12,500. The number aged 31 to 50 is around 6,300. The number aged 51-plus is around 700. In all age groups, these women are probably unable to get a full-time job or are unwilling to work in minimum-wage, zero-hours contract jobs.

Third, the average hourly rate charged by escorts outside Greater London has remained steady, in the range of £80 to £100. This compares favourably with the hourly rates being charged by female solicitors outside Greater London. There also continues to be an increase in escorts offering discounts and 'special offers'.

Fourth, the increase in women working as escorts part-time reflects the general increase in insecure part-time jobs in the economy, including self-employment.

**John Smithee**  
Cambridgeshire

## Proud

I wanted to say thank you for such a fantastic review of *Pride* ('Moving and inspiring', September 25).

Mark Ashton and I went to catering college together, and escaped Northern Ireland to a better life in London (I was also a stalwart of Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners). I'm so proud that his legacy is now finally being recognised and I can hear him squealing with delight at all the attention.

**Monty Montgomery**  
Perth, Australia

## Fighting fund

### Blossoming

October's fighting fund has been boosted by two substantial donations to the *Weekly Worker* - from GT (£120) and FO (£100). GT writes: "On occasions the paper disappoints ..." - I'm sure it does; after all, no-one's perfect - "... but these are outweighed by the times that it's spot on!" He concludes: "Never a rose without a thorn, but many a thorn without a rose."

Very poetic, comrade, and - more importantly - very generous too!

All the other donations bar one came in the shape of standing orders, totalling £125 - thank you, AD (£40), EW (£25), TB (£25), DW (£20) and AN (£10). The "bar one" was MD, who gave us a fiver via PayPal.

By the way, MD was one of the 1,324 online readers in the UK last week, according to our stats site. But, strangely, the UK comes second to the United States (1,445)

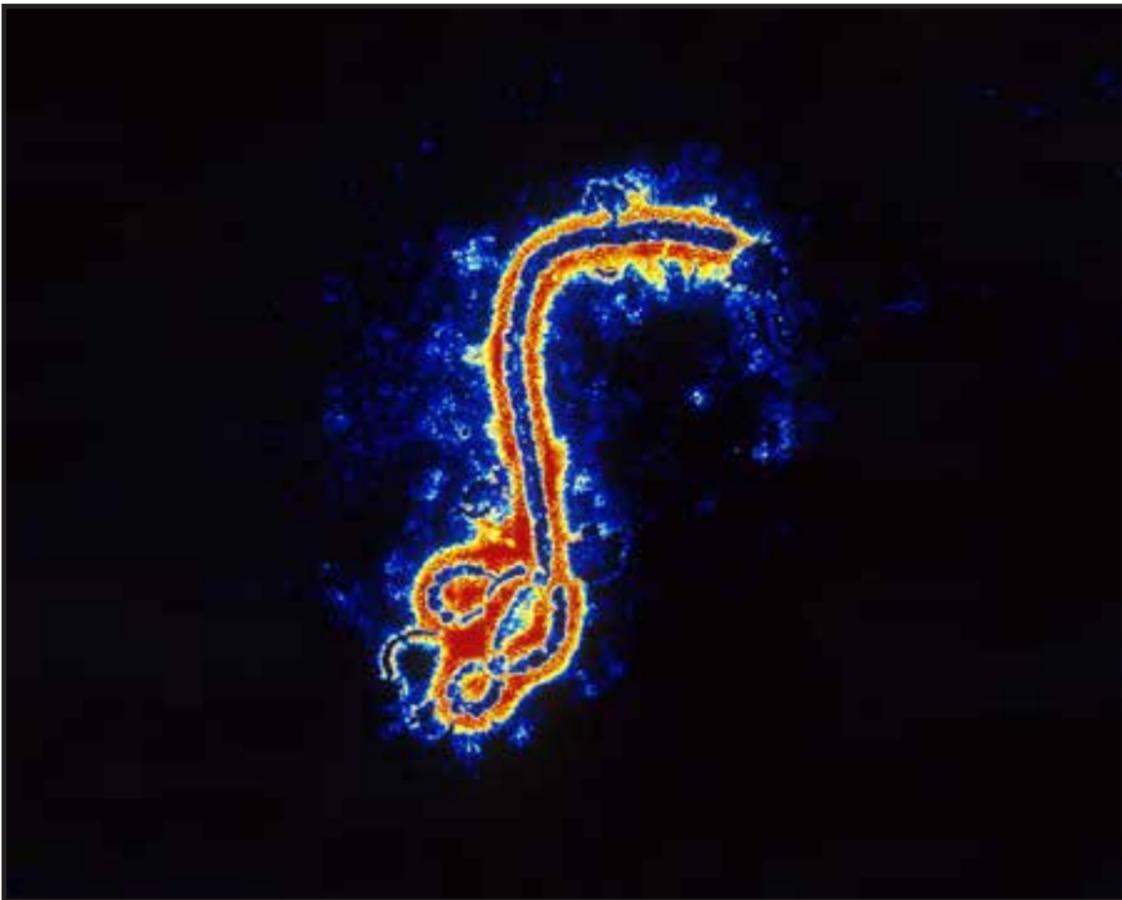
in that regard - always allowing for the fact that these stats may not, as I pointed out last week, be entirely accurate, of course.

Anyway, the £345 we received over the last seven days takes the running total for the month to £739. But, don't forget, we need £1,500, so we're not quite halfway there yet, although we are halfway through the month. That means we could do with a few more like GT - comrades who are sometimes disappointed, but, more often than not, regard the *Weekly Worker* as a blossoming rose (with very few thorns). If you agree, then please feel free to contribute to the ongoing task of ensuring that our paper continues to come out each and every week ●

**Robbie Rix**

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

# EBOLA



Deadly, but preventable

## Threat of social breakdown

At the time of writing there have been 12,000 reported Ebola deaths in west Africa - 40% of those occurring since September, according to the World Health Organisation. The WHO has estimated that there could currently be 20,000 infections, and the US Centers for Disease Control says that as a worst-case scenario there could be as many as 1.4 million people infected by the end of January. The main countries affected are, of course, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, three of the 12 least developed countries in the world and home to over 22 million people. There is a real risk of total economic and social collapse.

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), the humanitarian charity, has been at the forefront of tackling the virus for the past six months, with around 3,000 staff on the ground. However, it is struggling to cope with the numbers of people infected, including around 200 clinicians. It has now effectively admitted defeat and has called on military forces to help combat the spread of the disease. Peter Piot, the Belgian director of the London School of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene and the scientist who first identified the Ebola virus in 1976, has himself called for a "quasi-military intervention."

Trials for drugs and vaccines are not expected to be ready before December, when the results of tests are known. And it will be six months after that before we know whether those drugs and vaccines are actually effective. Even then there are not the facilities to produce the vaccines in the quantities required. Given the limited supply, there is also the question of prioritisation: which groups of people and areas should be tackled first?

It is not as though the 'international community' has not known about the outbreak, which began in spring of this year. MSF has criticised the WHO for being slow to respond. However, WHO's funding from individual states has stagnated in the past quarter of a century and since the financial crisis voluntary donations have tumbled. As such the WHO was not best placed to lead from the front. Added to that are other crises - Iraq, Syria, Palestine and elsewhere.

In truth, this terrible disease

could have been tackled when first discovered in 1976, and a potential disaster averted. Since then there have been far too many unnecessary fatalities across equatorial Africa, with mortality rates amongst those infected rising from 60% to 70% in the present crisis. However, private drugs corporations were never going to commit to the necessary large-scale investment needed to defeat the virus, given the previous relative infrequency of the disease and the poverty of those populations now most in need.

The latest outbreak of Ebola cannot be attributed to one cause, but several exacerbating factors - a so-called "perfect storm", as Peter Piot puts it, of interconnected factors, such as political, socioeconomic and environmental failings. A major host for the virus, tropical fruit bats, have migrated, in view of climate change and forest logging. Driven into heavily populated areas, the bats are ending up in greater numbers as bushmeat, passing on their infection to humans.

The natural inclination is for family members or friends of those affected to care for them, which results in the further spread of the infection. The simple and basic medical equipment needed to handle infected people is criminally lacking. And when the person dies, traditional burial practices have to be bypassed in order to dispose of the body safely, but that may not always be the case.

Finally there are the three countries where the infection is currently raging, all three poverty-stricken. Guinea is ruled by a military junta, while both Liberia and Sierra Leone have recently emerged from bloody civil wars. Furthermore they have to cope with Lassa fever, yellow fever, malaria and other diseases within chronically underfunded healthcare systems. Per capita spending on health and doctor-patient ratios are a fraction of those in western Europe.

Awareness of the dangers from Ebola has been very late in coming. The latest outbreak was only seriously noted by the international media in July, when two American volunteers contracted the disease. Only in August did the WHO declare a "public health emergency of international concern". And this is when the developed capitalist world started to think

about self-protection. However, the response so far has consisted of mere tinkering. For example, health secretary Jeremy Hunt's introduction of airport temperature tests for incoming passengers are next to useless. Ebola can be suspected if a traveller declares they have arrived from an infected area. However, there are many febrile diseases including malaria, typhus and yellow fever. And, given that the incubation period is two to 21 days, symptoms (including a high temperature) will not manifest themselves immediately.

To see what sort of healthcare system we need, we should go back to the founding of MSF in 1971, when a group of young doctors were thrown out of the international committee of the Red Cross for criticising the atrocities they saw during the Biafran war. One of those founders was Bernard Kouchner, who had been expelled from the French Communist Party in 1966 for criticising the Stalinist leadership.

These volunteers sought to treat those in need without the prior authorisation of the Nigerian government, which was ruthlessly suppressing the attempted secession of Biafra. Médecins Sans Frontières - which, of course, means 'Doctors Without Borders' - aimed to bring medical supplies to those at the sharp end of such brutal conflicts, whereas the official medical agencies refused to enter war zones or even seriously criticise the relevant authorities. While it is staffed by volunteers, who put their lives at risk in areas where medical services and structures have collapsed, it cannot be said that MSF is an ideal organisation. It is first and foremost a charity, driven by various forms of reformist and liberal politics.

Everyone knows that what is required is not only the necessary funding for healthcare, but a massive development of the infrastructure of the affected countries, plus education, training and relief from poverty for the overwhelming majority. If such a situation existed, the high risk involved in treating Ebola-infected patients would be much reduced and it would be very likely that the spread of the disease would be halted ●

Simon Wells

# 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 October 19: no forum.

Sunday October 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 1, appendix: 'Results of the immediate process of production' (continued). Organised by CPGB: [www.cpgb.org.uk](http://www.cpgb.org.uk).

## Radical Anthropology Group

Introduction to anthropology

Tuesday October 21, 6.30pm: 'The stars and the stones: An introduction to archaeoastronomy'. Speaker: Fabio Silva. Cock Tavern, 23 Phoenix Road, London NW1. Talks are free, but small donations are welcome. Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: <http://radicalanthropologygroup.org>.

## Doing politics differently

Thursday October 16, 6.30pm: Public meeting, Franklin-Wilkins Building, Stamford Street, Kings College Waterloo Campus, London SE1. With Dr Eduardo Maura (Podemos), Marina Prentoulis (Syriza), Ken Loach, Tariq Ali and Kate Hudson. Organised by Left Unity: <http://leftunity.org>.

## Vanishing for the vote

Thursday October 16, 6.30pm: Talk, Five Leaves Bookshop, 14a Long Row, Nottingham NG1. The suffragettes' campaign to avoid the 1911 census. Speaker: Jill Liddington. Organised by Five Leaves Book Shop: [www.fiveleavesbookshop.co.uk](http://www.fiveleavesbookshop.co.uk).

## Iraq and imperialism today

Thursday October 16, 7pm: Meeting, Old Bath House Community Centre, 205 Stratford Road, Wolverton. Speaker: Yasmine Mather, Iranian communist and member of Left Unity national council. Organised by Milton Keynes Left Unity: [www.leftunitymk.blogspot.co.uk](http://www.leftunitymk.blogspot.co.uk).

## Britain needs a pay rise

Saturday October 18, 11am: Demonstration. Assemble Victoria Embankment, London WC2, for march to Hyde Park rally. Organised by Trades Union Congress: <http://britainneedsapayrise.org>.

## A just Scotland

Saturday October 18, 10am: Demonstration. Assemble Glasgow Green, Greendykes Street, Glasgow G1, for march to George Square rally. Organised by Scottish Trades Union Congress: [www.ajustscotland.org](http://www.ajustscotland.org).

## In honour of Eleanor

Tuesday October 21, 7.30pm: Meeting, Bishopsgate Institute, 230 Bishopsgate, London EC2. Rachel Holmes introduces her new book on Eleanor Marx. Entry £9 (£7 concessions). Hosted by the Bishopsgate Institute: [www.bishopsgate.org.uk](http://www.bishopsgate.org.uk).

## Workers' cooperatives

Thursday October 23, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Govanhill Baths Community Trust, 99 Calder Street, Glasgow G42. Speaker: Joe Craig. Organised by Left Unity Glasgow South: <http://leftunity.org>.

## Class Wargames

Friday October 24, 5pm until late: Book launch party, Red Gallery, 1-3 Rivington Street, London EC2. Richard Barbrook's *Class Wargames: ludic subversion against spectacular capitalism*. Collective games playing, screening of Ilze Black's *The game of war*, talks and music. Organised by Class Wargames: [www.classwargames.net](http://www.classwargames.net).

## 100 years of war

Saturday October 25, 12 noon to 5pm: Conference, Bishopsgate Institute, 230 Bishopsgate, London EC2. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk](http://www.stopwar.org.uk).

## North East People's Assembly

Saturday November 1, 11am: Anti-austerity event, Northern Stage, Barras Bridge, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1. Speeches, discussions and workshops, plus performance. Organised by People's Assembly: [www.facebook.com/events/606667399410102](http://www.facebook.com/events/606667399410102).

## From world war to world revolution

Saturday November 1, 1pm: Meeting, Red Shed, 18 Vicarage St, Wakefield, West Yorkshire WF1, with Stephen Wood and author Dave Sherry. Free admission and light buffet. Organised by Wakefield Socialist History Group: [alanharperstewart@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:alanharperstewart@hotmail.co.uk).

## The British establishment

Thursday November 6, 7.30pm: Meeting, Bishopsgate Institute, 230 Bishopsgate, London EC2. Speaker: Owen Jones. Entry £9 (£7 concessions). Hosted by the Bishopsgate Institute: [www.bishopsgate.org.uk](http://www.bishopsgate.org.uk).

## Labour Representation Committee

Saturday November 8, 10am to 5pm: Annual general meeting, Friends House, small hall, Euston Road, London NW1. Organised by Labour Representation Committee: [www.l-r-c.org.uk](http://www.l-r-c.org.uk).

## CPGB wills

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

**STRIKES**

# Show of defiance

Peter Manson calls for fresh thinking to reinvigorate the unions

As readers will know, there were only two, not three, days of strike action this week. The October 14 walkouts by local government unions (see opposite) and RMT tubeworkers were called off, while the Association of Colleges obtained an injunction against the University and College Union, which prevented it from striking on the same day.

Nevertheless, the action called for October 13 (by NHS workers) and October 15 (civil service PCS members) went ahead in a show of defiance. The more effective of the two - certainly in terms of public support - was the four-hour strike called by nine unions in the NHS on the Monday. These included not just the largest and best known unions like Unison, Unite and the GMB, but the Royal College of Midwives - the first time the RCM had ever called a strike, of course. Then there were the British Association of Occupational Therapists, and the Hospital Consultants and Specialists Association - and even Managers in Partnership ("the UK's only trade union organisation specifically for managers in health services").

All the unions involved were responding to the overtly provocative action of the government and its Conservative health secretary, Jeremy Hunt, who has refused to implement the miserly one percent pay increase for all staff that was recommended by the official NHS Pay Review Body. Hunt insisted that the rise would not apply to those who were due an automatic incremental increase, following the completion of the requisite number of years' service. But more than half of all NHS workers are still climbing the incremental scale.

This calculated insult followed successive meagre pay rises since 2010, when the coalition government took office, which means that all healthworkers are now far worse off than four years ago because of inflation. What is more, many

clinical staff work long shifts and perform routine unpaid overtime when the care of their patients demands it.

## Public-private

Reflecting the broad public support felt for NHS staff, even *The Daily Telegraph* commented in an editorial: "We can sympathise with the workers who object to such parsimony, when MPs are set to receive a nine percent increase" (October 14). However, the editorial points out that private-sector pay had previously been falling much more dramatically than in the public sector, but, thankfully, the "gap has subsequently started to close", thanks to the efforts of the coalition government to bring down public-sector pay.

For the bourgeoisie, it is important that salaries paid by the state - which is obviously the largest and most important employer - do not exceed the going rate for capitalist companies by too much (if at all). That might have a knock-on effect for workers in the private sector - especially those with particular skills, who might be tempted to the 'greener pastures' of the NHS, etc.

The excuse given to justify this real-term pay-cutting is that NHS spending must be "brought under control" - otherwise we will have to keep pouring more and more money into it indefinitely. For example, the extra one percent increase paid to everyone would have cost an extra £600 million and, according to Hunt, such a sum would "force hospitals to lay off 14,000 nurses".

Even within the existing 'balance the books' austerity consensus, this is pathetic - £600 million is a truly paltry sum (the NHS already spends that amount on private management consultants, while senior managers on over £100,000 account for a further £800 million). But the NHS is supposed to be finding £20 billion in "efficiency savings" by 2015.

So, in parallel with this frontal assault on wages, there is the forthcoming attempt to stop workers showing their disgust by walking out, even in the form of a token four-hour strike. After all, such action by clinical staff is, in the words of cabinet office minister Francis Maude, just "irresponsible". Maude promised that it will also be illegal under Conservative plans to ban

strikes that fail to win the consent of 50% of those entitled to vote in a ballot. If the current turnout in such ballots are anything to go by, it is difficult to see how any strike would be permitted under the new legislation. For example, only 9.5% of Unison healthworkers voted to strike in the October 13 action.

So what is the Labour response to these attacks? A deathly silence, at least from the leadership. Even the *Daily Mirror* called on Ed Miliband to back the NHS strikes, but he would not be drawn. Unsurprisingly, union leaders made critical noises. The *Morning Star* reported Unite general secretary Len McCluskey's speech to healthworkers outside a London hospital. After commending their action, he stated: "We also have a strong message for the Labour Party: if they get elected next year they have to invest in the NHS and the staff."

But in the very next paragraph, the *Star* went on to quote Sue Richards of Keep Our NHS Public, who warned of "the grave threat to the health service if the Tories win a majority at the next election". In other words, Miliband may be tight-lipped (and tight-fisted), but the Labour Party just cannot be as bad as the Tories. And I expect that at the end of the day that will be the position of McCluskey too, for all his occasional noises about withdrawing support from Labour.

It will certainly be the position of the Labour left, including the Labour Representation Committee, whose November 8 annual conference is expected to recommend an unconditional vote for Labour next May. The argument being that at least we will be able to exert some pressure on Labour and dilute its attacks. But this is totally illusory. If we cannot make Miliband moderate his stance now - not even to make some kind of gesture in favour of the NHS strike - how will that change once Labour has won a general election?

By contrast, we believe that there should be no blank

cheque for Labour candidates. They will earn our vote only if they undertake to enact a minimum platform of pro-working class demands. And we should positively support a Labour government only if it attempts to enact a socialist programme. Such conditions on our support are essential in the fight to win the Labour Party for the working class.

## Check-off

The humiliating one-percent pay offer to civil servants was also the main grievance behind the October 15 strike of the Public and Commercial Services union. But there was another reason for the PCS action. As *Socialist Worker* put it, the "Tories also want to withdraw check-off collection of union subscriptions - an attempt to undermine workplace organisation" (October 14).

Ironically, when the check-off system - whereby employers deduct dues from members' wages and forward them to the trade union - was proposed by Labour and union leaders in the 1970s, that too was described by much of the left as "an attempt to undermine workplace organisation". And indeed it was. It was part of an attempt to weaken the country's 500,000 shop stewards in favour of the union bureaucracy - it was often local workplace representatives who were responsible for collecting union subs. The leadership contended that shop stewards had too much power compared with the official union structure, and the Labour leadership thought it could both strengthen the bureaucracy and reduce "wildcat strikes" by attempting to disempower shop stewards.

Of course, a change in the system of collecting union dues cannot "undermine workplace organisation" in and of itself. Workplace reps can organise, represent and win the trust of their members with or without the dues-collecting routine. But it was clearly part and parcel of a systematic attack on workers' self-organisation. Today, however, the power of the shop steward has long since been

diminished. So it is not just militant activists, but the trade unions themselves, that are in the Tories' sights. Unless it meets with a principled response, the abolition of check-off in government departments will surely lead to a further drop in PCS membership and see a diminution in the influence of both the bureaucracy and local activists.

But that ought not to lead us to a knee-jerk 'defend our check-off'-type response, understandable though that is. Surely we should think more boldly. Union bureaucrats, local representatives and much of the left are happy to leave the deduction of union dues in the hands of the employers, but in reality it is that very fact that ought to make us wary of such an arrangement - why on earth should we entrust our money to the class enemy?

Just as shop stewards had under the old system turned the chore of dues-collecting to their advantage - through using the opportunity it provided to engage with all members - so PCS militants should try to turn the latest Tory move on its head. They should launch a massive campaign for members to pay their subscriptions directly to the union - either in cash via the local representative or by standing order. Such a campaign, if run imaginatively, could be transformed into a huge recruitment drive and lead to a reinvigoration of both the union as a whole and rank-and-file organisation.

Every worker, in every department, every office, should be individually approached. Take the opportunity to win them to a vision of empowerment through self-organisation, of transforming the union into a potent, genuinely fighting body ●

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Rebuild our strength



Not helped by the left

# Carry on regardless

As the employers stood firm in the local government dispute, not unexpectedly the union leaders buckled. But the left has no answers, writes **Will Pragnell**

**W**ell, it did not take much for the union tops to postpone local government strike action on October 14. Indeed it was not even a firm offer - merely a "proposal" that Unison had previously rejected, but has now been dressed up as an improvement.

In the face of this there have been some rather stupid comments by sections of the left, to the effect that the union leaders sold out, while the mass of the membership was chomping at the bit. For example, a member of the Socialist Party in England and Wales, identified only as "a Unison local government member", asserts that there had been "a determined two-week campaign by the bureaucracy to extinguish a fighting mood over pay".<sup>1</sup> As for the Socialist Workers Party, it stated: "It was wrong to call the strike off .... We should demand the strikes are reinstated and coordinated with other public-sector unions where possible."<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, however, the reality is that it has been very difficult to build up any enthusiasm for strike action despite the wishful thinking of large parts of the left.

There is now to be a double consultation on the revised proposal. Unison, Unite and the GMB will put it to their members next week, while the Local Government Association will consult its affiliates. The prospect for a bad deal is high, but there are reasons other than pay to reject this proposal despite our weak position. There are rumours that the bureaucracy has conceded in principle various proposals that will not feature in the consultation with union members.

Proposals that fit in entirely with the employers' workforce strategy, but grant the unions something they desperately want: their feet under the negotiating table.

There have been accusations of deliberate misinformation on the part of Unison's Heather Wakefield in the run-up to the proposed strike. She had claimed that Unite had pulled out of the October 14 action, while the GMB was wavering, and it was thought that delegates at Unison regional briefings would be presented with a motion to suspend the strike. However, at the October 9 London briefing the Wakefield statement was withdrawn and delegates were informed that Unite and GMB were definitely on board and so all three unions would be out. A majority of London delegates wanted the strike to go ahead and thought they could deliver some kind of successful action in the capital, even if some thought it would be weaker than the July 10 strike. It seems that, even whilst the London meeting was taking place, a postponement of the strike was being discussed with the employers. Later that same day it was announced that the strike was off.<sup>3</sup>

Despite our own weak position and only the remote prospect of achieving any movement on pay, I felt that the Tuesday action should have gone ahead. It was part of a coordinated campaign across large sections of the public service that culminates with the TUC demonstration on October 18. It would also have acted as a morale boost for NHS strikers, including members of unions calling industrial action for the first time, who had

taken part in a four-hour action on the Monday.

As things stand, the employers have completely outmanoeuvred the unions and are clearly confident of achieving everything they want - for no more than they originally offered and probably less than they budgeted for. They look to be on target for a win, win, win. However, as usual, the left seems incapable of acknowledging the strength of the employers and their strategic and tactical superiority. Neither do they acknowledge the parlous state of our organisations and the widespread belief that we are not in a position to defend past gains. Instead the left just seems to hope that workers' lack of confidence will be overcome if only we got a fighting lead from the union tops. Eschewing a proper analysis that might reveal the employers' strengths and our own weaknesses, it blames it all on the bureaucracy.

The offensive against the working class has progressed over the last 25 years without let-up. Objectively the conditions for a fightback ought to be good, but the strike-happy left routinely and repetitively commits the same errors and is consequently ignored by the vast majority of workers. They just do not buy the aimless, ultra-enthusiastic posturing that proffers a fantasy rather than a sober assessment of what is and is not possible, given both the subjective and objective conditions. Workers want and need the truth, not patronising nonsense.

The left, as epitomised by the two largest organisations, the SWP and SPEW, have an excuse for a strategy.

It is this: enthuse and embolden the workers with good-news stories about action - any action, but preferably a strike - because they will then learn in struggle and come to accept the leadership of the 'revolutionaries'. This elitist approach leads these organisations to vastly exaggerate and put a gloss on everything, effectively to trick the workers into taking action and, hopefully, recruiting some of them. The bullshit has been thoroughly internalised so that many rank-and-file members of the SWP and SPEW actually believe the crap that they come out with.

I remember a disastrous local strike action a few years back, when 90% of workers crossed the picket line. An unmitigated disaster, yet it was described by one leftwing blogger as "well supported", "fantastic" and "a great success". She even posted a photo of about 12 forlorn demonstrators standing outside the town hall as proof positive that we had all done very well indeed.

In a subsequent 'assessment' of that strike SWP and SPEW members were unable to keep up the pretence when confronted with undeniable facts, but they quickly resorted to that other excuse: "We recruited 50 members to the union," they proudly said - only to be told that we also lost an equal number as a direct consequence of the foolish action. Did they learn anything? Unfortunately no. We still get the same over-enthusiastic, unrealistic, puerile nonsense.

Facts may be uncomfortable, but you need them to plan anything useful. There is a disconnect between the unions and their members. You

can see it in ballots, inquorate and poorly attended meetings, insufficient stewards and health and safety reps, and in a host of other areas. Representative democracy barely exists and the left is entrenched within a hollowed-out shell of an organisation. They take the easy road, accommodating to that weakness and lack of democracy which substitutes for workers' self-organisation, whilst exhorting the union tops to do better and blaming them when they don't.

It is important to understand the nature of the current situation. We are under relentless attack from all angles, in every area of life. All the forces of the state and most of the employers are determined to weaken, sideline and neuter the unions. On our side the unions have resorted to the provision of largely useless 'services' and quick fixes through amalgamations, while a declining, ever fragmenting left seems incapable of learning anything.

There will be a turn-around, but only if we make it happen. We are not yet sufficiently organised and equipped to mount a counteroffensive. Notwithstanding the odd, isolated victory here and there, the current strategy has to be defensive: maintaining, organising and cohering forces, so that we are able to mount a counteroffensive when we are ready. We have to overcome the disconnect and that means being honest and forthright •

## Notes

1. [www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/19481](http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/19481).
2. *Socialist Worker* October 14.
3. The proposal is available at [www.unison.org.uk/nje-14-51](http://www.unison.org.uk/nje-14-51).

**ECONOMY**

# Going nowhere fast

As Germany slides toward recession, writes **Eddie Ford**, indefinite stagnation seems to be on the cards for the euro zone - which is bad news for George Osborne

With the media's attention focused on the Middle East and elsewhere, you could almost overlook the fact that the euro zone is still in crisis and seems in danger of entering a deflationary spiral. This has fuelled increasing speculation about the 'Japanisation' of the euro zone economy: wobbling in and out of recession and an inflation rate that registers below zero and therefore an incentive not to buy.

No wonder then that the October 10-12 International Monetary Fund-World Bank meeting was dominated by gloomy talk of a generalised economic slowdown. Yet again, both bodies lowered their forecasts for global growth next year. Olivier Blanchard, the IMF's chief economist, said the recovery was "weak and uneven" and predicted 3.3% growth - 0.4 points lower than anticipated in the spring. In fact, the IMF is feeling especially downbeat - saying in its latest economic outlook that the euro zone now faces a "four in 10" chance of re-entering recession within 12 months, along with a 30% chance of outright deflation.

However, the IMF's fears run even deeper. Blanchard admitted it was "entirely possible" that the developed countries will *never* return to their pre-crisis growth levels: a big chunk of economic production has been permanently lost. We are now entering a period of *secular* stagnation - ie, there has been a *structural* decline in potential growth rates. And the achievement of even these lower rates of expansion - one of the more optimistic scenarios - would require interest rates to be maintained at historically low levels over a lengthy period, and that brings its own problems, of course.

Yes, rock-bottom interest rates, combined with quantitative easing, has generated copious amounts of cheap money. But it has not done what was intended, which was to reawaken the animal spirit in capital and hence encourage investment - that in turn would power economic growth. Rather, delighted speculators have had casino chips stuffed into their hands. Or, in the words of the IMF's financial counsellor, José Viñals, we are facing a "global imbalance" - with "not enough economic risk-taking in support of growth", but instead "increasing excesses in financial risk-taking" that are "posing stability challenges".

The euro zone now seems stuck in a vicious loop. As the financial markets expect only extremely limited interest rate rises, there has been a massive turn to speculation. Consequently, there has been a steady blurring of the line between 'safe' and 'risky' investments and, completely contrary to plan - though with its own remorseless logic - investors have been ploughing money into all manner of shady schemes, just like they did before 2007.

Obviously, central bankers know this only too well, but feel powerless to do anything about it - hiking up interest rates would just tank the economy in next to no time. In which case, just cross your fingers and hope, Micawber style, that everything somehow turns out for the best. A near perfect recipe for never-ending crisis, in other words.

## Turbulent

Naturally, the bleak assessments coming out of the IMF prompted a big sell-off in the financial markets. After peaking in September, the FTSE 100 index marked its third successive daily



**George Osborne: gloomy**

drop by falling 1.4%. At the same time, Germany's Dax dropped 2.4% and France's Cac went down 1.6%.

Finland, meanwhile, was stripped of its 'gold-plated' triple-A credit rating on October 10 by Standard & Poor on the fairly logical grounds that the country could suffer "protracted stagnation", thanks mainly to its double "exposure" to the euro zone and the ailing Russian economy - after all, exports to Russia account for about 4% of Finland's total economic output.<sup>1</sup> On the warpath, S&P also cut its outlook on France from 'stable' to 'negative' and warned that it ran the risk of a further downgrade of its current credit status, reduced only last November from AA+ to AA. Fitch followed suit four days later - both agencies expect the French economy to "deteriorate" beyond 2014 (leaving only Germany and Luxembourg for the time being with a pristine triple-A score).

Showing the turbulent state of the markets, the Vix volatility index or 'fear gauge', jumped 8% to its highest level since December 2012. As a result of such statistics, US investors took fright - nothing they hate more than uncertainty - and started liquidating their European holdings at a fast rate. Indeed, last week saw the biggest weekly outflow in two months. According to Lipper data,<sup>2</sup> total European assets dropped from nearly \$50 billion in June to \$40 billion - a significant wipe-out. Accordingly, as sure as night follows day, US government bond yields slid to fresh lows - reflecting this growing investor unease over signs of a deepening slowdown in Europe (yields fall as prices rise).

Nor is it just the euro zone slowly going down the tube, of course. The Brics (Brazil, Russia, India, China and, laughably, South Africa) are visibly slowing down, even though we were constantly told by silly commentators that they represented our future - if not salvation.<sup>3</sup> For instance, Brazil has

entered a severe slump, its central bank now predicting GDP growth of only 0.7% this year; and Russia is being hammered by the continuing fall in oil prices. Things were already bad enough for the Russian economy, given that in April S&P slashed Russia's rating to just one notch above 'junk' status, as investors - quite sensibly from their own viewpoint - continued to take money out of the country amid tensions over the situation in Ukraine: the Russian economy is now expected to grow at no more than 0.5% during 2014.<sup>4</sup> Even China is suffering from a relative slowdown. Additionally, a pair of official surveys showed that China's manufacturing sector held up in September, but remained "subdued" - possibly an indication that the economy is struggling, despite the recent introduction of a whole raft of governmental policies designed to encourage activity.

## Fragile

One obvious sign that the euro zone is going nowhere fast is the worsening performance of the German economy - the supposed powerhouse of Europe. Hit badly by the Russia/Ukraine crisis, its economy shrank by 0.2% in the second quarter, so a second consecutive contraction in GDP in the third quarter would tip it into recession, setting off alarm bells. The German government is expected to lower its estimates for GDP growth to 1.2% for both 2014 and 2015, from 1.8% for this year and 2% for next year - and the IMF has downgraded its growth forecasts for 2014 from 1.9% to 1.4% and for 2015 from 1.7% to 1.5%. More alarmingly still, German exports in August suffered the biggest monthly fall in more than five and a half years - down 5.8% compared to July, and much sharper than the 4% widely forecast by economists. The statistics also showed that *imports* fell unexpectedly too in the same month, sliding down 1.3%, even though a

1% rise was widely expected - so you could call it a double whammy.

Rather dramatically, Carsten Brzeski, chief economist for the ING group, described the current situation in Germany as a "horror story" and worried that the "magnitude of the fall" brings back memories of the 2007-08 financial crisis - the country would need a "small miracle" in September to avoid recession. Responding, a bullish Wolfgang Schäuble, the German finance minister, insisted that there was no recession in Germany but rather a "weakening of growth" - although it is worth noting that the yield on government 10-year bonds has actually tumbled to a record low of 0.837%.<sup>5</sup> Paradoxically, but for eminently understandable reasons (just like when the US government was downgraded three years ago), investors took the economic bad news from Germany as a prediction for the global economy as a whole and started looking for a safe haven - most settled for the US, naturally, but a not insignificant number obviously decided to 'relocate' whatever remaining assets they had in countries like Italy or France to ... yes, Germany, which for all its current economic woes looks politically and financially *stable*.

But, as we all know, if Germany gets a cold then the rest of Europe gets pneumonia. Any hope of a recovery in Greece, Spain, Italy, etc is dependent on German growth. The same is also true, of course, for Britain, seeing that half its exports go to the euro zone and if that is stagnating then George Osborne's 'plan A' is going to stall as well - so there is absolutely no chance of Britain exporting itself into a glorious recovery before the 2015 general election. Even Osborne, famous for his economic illiteracy, has been forced to partially admit that this is a possibility. Speaking at the recent Washington summit, he stated that Britain cannot be "immune" from the European slowdown, which has already

had an "impact" on UK manufacturing and exports - "more measures" were needed to get through the "financial turbulence" that possibly lies ahead. However, he declared, Britain needs to send a "clear message" to the world that it has a "stable economy" and is going to "weather those storms" - it was "not going to deviate" from its plan to cut business taxes and make the UK a place to invest. He also said "slower growth" had been "taken into account" by the Office for Budget Responsibility, which is forecasting growth of around 0.6% per quarter, compared with the 0.9% seen in recent months. In other words, despite all the pain, a growth rate of about 2% is the *best it is going to get* - nowhere near what Osborne promised in 2010 or even two years ago.

Everywhere we see evidence for the extraordinarily fragile nature of the British economy. On October 13 the US and UK engaged in a financial 'war game' to test the robustness of the financial system if a major bank on either side of the Atlantic goes bust. Short answer? *No*: the state would have to step in promptly to avert catastrophe. Interestingly, unlike with the domestic 'war games' conducted before the financial crash, Osborne 'pledged' to publicise the results - we are still waiting ●

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## Notes

1. [www.channelnewsasia.com/news/business/international/finland-loses-top-triple/1409056.html](http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/business/international/finland-loses-top-triple/1409056.html)
2. Which covers over 213,000 share classes and more than 117,000 funds located in over 60 countries and is a mutual fund rating system that uses investor-centred criteria such as capital preservation, expense and consistent return.
3. If that was not enough, the same person who created the 'BRIC' acronym - Jim O'Neill of Goldman Sachs - also coined the term, MINT: ie, Mexico, Indonesia, Nigeria and Turkey (<http://tinyurl.com/m515z8b>).
4. [www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-27159423](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-27159423).
5. <http://online.wsj.com/articles/u-s-government-bonds-stronger-on-continued-eurozone-weakness-1413294619>.

GERMANY

# Models and humanitarian myths

Die Linke is plumbing ever greater opportunist depths, writes Ben Lewis

The twists and turns, the international alliances and intrigues in the unfolding human tragedy that is the Islamic State's barbaric siege of Kobanê pose many challenges to both bourgeois and working class political ideas. Hence we have the spectacle of US bombing in support of People's Defence Units, officially branded a "terrorist organisation", supplying arms to the useless Free Syria Army and urging Turkey to intervene. Of course, the FSA has been selling arms to Isis and the first people the Turkish army would attack would be the Kurds. The left too is showing all the signs of strategic incoherence.

The *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain is now calling for the 'den of thieves' that is the United Nations to provide aid, including military aid, to the Kurds<sup>1</sup> and - as this paper has reported<sup>2</sup> - 12 MPs from the Danish Red-Green Alliance, some of whom are comrades from the Fourth International (Socialist Resistance on these shores) recently voted in favour of sending a Danish airforce Hercules to Iraq. And there is one formation, still much beloved by some Left Unity comrades, which is to all intents and purposes gone over to drum-banging pro-imperialism: the German Left Party, Die Linke.

## More intervention!

A shocking statement headed 'Save Kobanê'<sup>3</sup> was recently issued by 14 leading Left Party members. 12 of them belong to the party's Bundestag fraction and one happens to be a certain Stefan Liebich, Die Linke's representative on the parliamentary foreign affairs committee. The statement is not directed at the forces of the world working class movement to generate solidarity, but at the German government for not sufficiently lining up behind the US-led intervention: after all, the German government is only sending weapons to the Peshmerga (something that leading MP Gregor Gysi was quick off the mark to agitate for), but is not getting involved in the bombing raids. The statement declares: "The correct call for an expansion of humanitarian assistance to the victims and those affected by the war in Iraq and Syria, which the Left Party supports, is not enough to stop the IS terrorist militia."

In other words, Die Linke has bought into the myth of 'humanitarian intervention' hook, line and sinker. It is quite remarkable, in the face of so many disastrous self-styled 'humanitarian' misadventures in the recent past, that this nonsense still has any purchase at all. Yet it must be said that Die Linke's attitude on controversial questions such as imperialist intervention and the role of Israeli expansionism has been increasingly wanting in the recent past.<sup>4</sup> The seeds of such rotten anti-working class politics have been germinating for quite some time.

Take the party's 'Erfurt programme', agreed back in 2011. In light of the recent statement by Die Linke, it should serve as a stark reminder that fudged platitudes and hollow pledges at the expense of clear principles fundamentally facilitate the growth of rightwing, pro-capitalist politics. While the programme pledges that the party would never join a government that "carries out wars or allows combat missions of the German army abroad" (cough!) or "presses ahead with armaments and militarisation", it also bemoans the "violence and wars" that are often carried out in violation of the United Nations charter, calling for measures which can "reform" and "strengthen" this institution. This was



Bodo Ramelow: 'responsible'

even followed by an utterly bizarre call for a 'Willy Brandt corps' (Brandt was the chancellor of Germany from 1969-74) of German doctors and technicians to help in humanitarian causes abroad. But now it seems that leading party figures would like these volunteers to carry a lot more by way of weaponry.

The 'statement of the 14' even goes as far as to call on the UN to "now finally unite together behind secretary general Ban Ki Moon and meet without delay to discuss and decide a joint response under the UN charter for the maintenance of international security". Further: "It is the responsibility and duty of the security council 'to take effective collective measures to prevent and overcome the threats to peace, to suppress acts of aggression and other breaches of the peace'" - almost textbook sabre-rattling rhetoric in the name of 'peace'.

If the left in the party is to combat these latest moves, it cannot do so by appealing in the name of the party's programme. The whole damn document was essentially designed to hold the door open to such manoeuvres. As of yet, however, what remains of the left in the party seems to have been largely keeping quiet.<sup>5</sup>

Interestingly, the CPB and Die Linke appear to share a common illusion: the 'humanitarian' or democratic credentials of the United Nations,<sup>6</sup> a common notion in the anti-war movement (one need only think of the late Tony Benn's views on this matter). As the Middle East descends further into catastrophe, these illusions in the UN and 'humanitarian interventions' are likely to become more common. Fortunately, though, as far as I can see, there are no motions in this vein that have been submitted to Left Unity's forthcoming policy conference in November.

## Running capitalism

Another cryptically formulated section of Die Linke's programme revolves around the question of government participation both nationally and at state level. And - *quelle surprise* - the party's record on this matter is also a disaster. Die Linke, or its mainly East German forerunner, the Party of Democratic Socialism, has participated in local so-called 'red-

red' coalitions with the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) at state level in Berlin, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Brandenburg. None of these lash-ups have exactly seen an expansion of the party's support, but precisely the opposite, as the party provides 'left' cover for cuts and attacks on the working class. Yet this experience does not prevent leading members from clamouring for further ministerial posts and more such coalitions.

Following September's state elections in Thuringia, where Die Linke won an impressive 28%, there are two possible government coalition options: an agreement between the SPD (which polled just 12%) and the Christian Democrats (which would reflect the 'grand coalition' at a national level) and a 'red-red' agreement between Die Linke and the SPD. The latter option would see Die Linke's main candidate, Bodo Ramelow, become its first ever minister-president at state level, much to the excitement of the party's careerist types. The outcome now depends on a referendum being conducted amongst the SPD membership locally, which will choose the preferred partner.

Those like Ramelow have been pulling out all the stops to appear as a 'responsible' partner for the SPD and, of course, for German capitalism. Even before the election Ramelow was playing footsie with the SPD, insisting that there were no "knock-out criteria" for coalition talks with the SPD and that *all* "political issues at a state level could be solved through negotiations". In 2009, the party had wanted to talk openly about - you guessed it - "foreign interventions on the part of the German army". Ramelow even made clear that he was willing to compromise with the despised Office for the Protection of the Constitution, which Die Linke has actually pledged to abolish.<sup>7</sup>

As we have noted above, in nearby Brandenburg Die Linke was actually one of the incumbent parties, having entered into a 'red-red' coalition in 2009. Predictably, its share of the vote fell, from 27.2% to 18.6%, but the 'red-red' coalition will now continue for another term. The SPD appears more than happy with the work of its partner, particularly now that it is in a much weaker position electorally. Of course, such coalitions serve to strengthen what is the goal of many in Die Linke, and has been for some

time: national government alongside the SPD.

## Doing politics differently?

Die Linke, as this paper has documented since its foundation in 2007, has always been a car crash waiting to happen. Yet the odd thing is the extent to which many on the left in Britain saw it as some kind of 'left of Labour' model to aspire to on these shores. It figured in the motivations of those who were behind the foundation of Left Unity in Britain. Take the party's national secretary, Kate Hudson, for example. Writing in 2012 about the formation of post-1991 leftwing formations, she stated that the one kind of regroupment that "has actually had a positive impact on economic and social struggles and advanced the working class over the past 20 years" is represented by "those parties that formed the new European left and which had two particularly significant characteristics". She continues:

Whether or not they retained the name 'communist', they certainly retained a commitment to Marxist politics, to an anti-capitalist perspective, taking account of the realities of European and world politics at the end of the 20th century. Many also showed a considerable capacity for open political debate and renewal, drawing on and opening up to feminism, environmental and anti-racist politics.

But, most unusually, in many cases these parties either initiated or participated in a realignment of left forces, often working with organisations that would previously have been regarded as politically hostile. This included allying with or even merging with the electorally insignificant, but very active, new left organisations - often based on a Trotskyist political orientation - which had expanded dramatically after 1968. Such groups participated in Spain's United Left, merged with the left wing of the Italian Communist Party to found the Party of Communist Refoundation, were included in the electoral lists of Germany's Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS)

and eventually joined its successor party, Die Linke, and were invited to participate in common actions and debates initiated by the French Communist Party.<sup>8</sup>

Would comrade Hudson still, in 2014, argue that Die Linke is exhibiting a "commitment to Marxist politics" or "an anti-capitalist perspective" in its calls for 'humanitarian' United Nations intervention and by administering capitalism at a local state level?

Left Unity aspires to "doing politics differently" and is indeed organising a speaker tour alongside the new Spanish left organization, Podemos, and Syriza from Greece to get this basic point across. There might already be a sense in which Die Linke is falling away as an organisation to be emulated. Yet the reality is that both Syriza and Podemos face some of the same thorny strategic questions as Die Linke (in Syriza's case, the not exactly insignificant matter of forming a government with the aim of reforming capitalism). This underlines how, if we really want to do things differently, then we must start from solid, principled foundations - matters which cannot be fudged or brushed aside with that old chestnut of 'scaring off the voters' or 'getting out there and doing something'.

Hence the importance of the November 8-9 LU conference putting principle first: particularly when it comes to questions of war, imperialism and our attitude towards the capitalist state apparatus. In this sense, the fudge and rhetoric of Die Linke *should* be a model, albeit in a negative sense. Ultimately, rotten compromises and hollow platitudes can only produce rotten politics ●

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## Notes

1. See editorial, September 4 2014: [www.morningstaronline.co.uk/a-2367-Riyadh-roots-of-Isis-horror#.VD6iZfdWpe](http://www.morningstaronline.co.uk/a-2367-Riyadh-roots-of-Isis-horror#.VD6iZfdWpe).
2. 'Going soft on the intervention' *Weekly Worker* October 2 2014.
3. [www.wsws.org/en/articles/2014/10/10/left-o10.html](http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2014/10/10/left-o10.html). The useful reportage is, as one might expect, rather hindered by the Northite understanding of the "bourgeoisification" of trade unions and leftwing parties, which is rather schematically imposed on events. It is nonsense to claim, as the article does, that "with its call for war, the Left Party is showing its true colours. Like all other parliamentary parties, it is a *rightwing bourgeois party* that aggressively represents the interests of German imperialism" (my emphasis). The sad fact is that Die Linke is a self-proclaimed 'broad left' formation, which is characterised by the kind of compromised politics that are becoming an all too common feature of 'Marxist' politics today.
4. Quite how this all fits into the almost inexorable rise of vapidly Zionist, 'anti-German' ideas within the party is not entirely clear to me, and also beyond the scope of this piece. For a discussion of the rise of 'anti-Deutsch' politics within Die Linke's youth movement in particular, see 'Not part of the left' *Weekly Worker* October 4 2012.
5. There are a few exceptions. Showing the poisonous atmosphere in the party, when Die Linke MP Christine Buchholz - a member of Marx 21 and still close to the Socialist Workers Party - posted a photo of herself on Facebook with a sign reading, "Solidarity with the resistance in Kobanê" and opposing imperialist intervention, she was accused of being an "Isis supporter" and other such things. Nonetheless, it must be noted that both Buchholz and Marx 21 have been far quieter and less oppositional when it comes to questions of government participation or Die Linke's increasingly dubious stance towards Israel.
6. Comrade Mike Macnair has argued that a 'law-governed world order' based on the UN charter "fundamentally misunderstands the nature of law as a social institution and, as a result, international law". As such the call for a law-governed world order is not an alternative to the havoc wreaked upon the world by US-led imperialism: it is merely another form of the same thing ("The war and the law" *Weekly Worker* September 25 2003).
7. Quotes from [www.otz.de/startseite/detail/-/specific/Ramelow-bestreitet-Geheimverhandlung-365183426](http://www.otz.de/startseite/detail/-/specific/Ramelow-bestreitet-Geheimverhandlung-365183426).
8. K Hudson, 'Political life after the Communist Party': <http://leftunity.org/political-life-after-the-communist-party>.

## STRATEGY

# Democratic revolution and the contradiction of capital

What is meant by a 'democratic republic'? Chris Cutrone critiques Mike Macnair's *Revolutionary strategy*

**M**ike Macnair's *Revolutionary strategy* (London 2008) is a wide-ranging, comprehensive and very thorough treatment of the problem of revolutionary politics and the struggle for socialism. His focus is the question of political party and it is perhaps the most substantial attempt recently to address this problem.

Macnair's initial motivation was engagement with the debates in and around the French Fourth International Trotskyist Ligue Communist Révolutionnaire prior to its forming the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste electoral party in 2009. The other major context for the discussion was the Iraq anti-war movement and UK Respect electoral party, which was formed around this in 2004, with the Socialist Workers Party driving the process. This raised issues not only of political party, democracy and the state, but also united fronts among socially and politically heterogeneous groups and the issue of imperialism.

One key contribution by Macnair to the latter discussion is to raise and call attention to the difference between Bukharin's and Lenin's writings on imperialism, in which the former attributed the failure of (metropolitan) workers' organisation around imperialism to a specifically *political* compromise with the (national) state, whereas Lenin had, in his famous 1916 pamphlet, characterised this in terms of compromised "economic" interest. So with imperialism the question is the political party and the state.

Macnair observes that there are at least two principal phases of the party question: from the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries; and beginning in the middle of the 19th century. He relates these phases to the development of the problem of the state. He offers that constitutional government involves the development of the "party state" and that revolutionary politics takes its leave of such a "party state" (which includes multiple parties all supporting the constitutional regime). Furthermore, Macnair locates this problem properly as one of the nation-state within the greater economic and political system of capitalism. By conflating the issue of government with "rule of law", however, Macnair mistakes the contradiction of the modern state and its politics in capitalism.

Elsewhere, Macnair has criticised sectarian Marxism for "theoretical overkill" in a "philosophy trap".<sup>1</sup> But he might thus mistake effect for cause: 'philosophical' questions might be the expression of a trap in which one is nonetheless caught; and Marxist 'theory' might go beyond today's practical political concerns. Philosophy may not be the trap in which we are caught, but rather an expression of our attempts - merely - to think our way out of it. The mismatch of Marxism today at the level of 'theoretical' or 'philosophical' issues might point to a *historical* disparity or inadequacy: we may have fallen below past thresholds and horizons of Marxism. The issue of political party may be one that we would need to re-attain rather than immediately confront in the present. Hence, 'strategy' in terms of Marxism may not be the political issue now that it once was. This means that, where past Marxists might appear to be in error, it may actually be *our* fault - or a fault in the present situation. How



**Conflict and contradiction**

can the history of Marxism help us address this?

## New politics

The key to this issue can be found in Macnair's own distinction of the new phenomenon of party politics in the late 19th century, after the revolutions of 1848 and in the era of what Marx called "Bonapartism" - the pattern set by Louis Bonaparte, who became Napoleon III in the French Second Empire, with its emulation by Bismarck in the Prussian empire, as well as Disraeli's Tories in the UK, among other examples. While Macnair finds some precedent for this in the 18th century UK and its political crises, as well as in the course of the Great French Revolution 1789-1815, especially regarding Napoleon Bonaparte, the difference of the late 19th century party-politics from prior historical precedence is important to specify. For Macnair it is the world system of capitalism and its undermining of democracy.

It is important to recall Marx's formulation, in the *18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, that (neo-) Bonapartism was the historical condition in which the bourgeoisie could "no longer" and the proletariat "not yet" rule politically the modern society of capitalism.<sup>2</sup> Bonapartism was the symptom of this crisis of capitalism and hence of the need for socialism revealed by the unprecedented failure of revolution in 1848 - by contrast with 1830, as well as 1789 and 1776, and the Dutch Revolt and English civil war of the 17th century. The bourgeoisie's 'ruling' character was not a legal-constitutional system of government descended from the 17th century political and social revolutions in Holland and England so much as it was a form of civil society: a revolutionary system of bourgeois social relations that was supposed to subordinate the

state. What requires explanation is the 19th century slipping of the state from adequate social control, and its 'rising above' the contending political groups and social classes, as a power in itself. Even if Bonapartism in Marx's late 19th century sense was the expression of a potential inherent in the forms of bourgeois politics emerging much earlier, there is still the question of why it was not realised so until after 1848. There is also the matter of why Marx characterised Louis Napoleon as a "lesser" and "farical" phenomenon of post-1848 history by contrast with Napoleon Bonaparte's "tragedy" in the Great Revolution.<sup>3</sup> It was not the mere fact of repetition, but *why* and *how* history "repeated itself" - and repeated with a *difference*.

This was, according to Marx, the essential condition for politics after 1848 - the condition for political parties in capitalism. That condition was not only or primarily a matter of politics due to constitutional legal forms of bourgeois property and its social relations, but rather was for Marx the expression of the crisis of those forms as a function of the industrial revolution. There was for Marx an important contradiction between the democratic revolution and the proletarianisation of society in capitalism.

Macnair addresses this by specifying the 'proletariat' as all those in society "dependent on the total wage fund" - as opposed to those (presumably) dependent upon 'capital'. This is clearly not a matter of economics, because distinguishing between those depending on wages as opposed to capital is a political matter of differentiation: all the intermediate strata depending on both the wage fund and capital would need to be compelled to take sides in any political dispute between the prerogatives of wages versus capital. Macnair

addresses this through the struggle for democracy. But this does not pursue the contradiction far enough. For the wage fund, according to Marx, is a form of capital: it is 'variable' as opposed to 'constant capital'. So the proletarianisation of society, according to Marx, is not addressed adequately as a matter of the condition of labour, but rather the social dependence on and domination by capital. And capital for Marx is not synonymous with the private property in the means of production belonging to the capitalists, but rather the relation of wages, or the resources for the reproduction of labour-power (including the 'means of consumption'), to society as a whole. This is what makes it a *political* matter - a matter of politics in *society* - rather than merely the struggle of one group against another.

Macnair characterises the theory of Marxism specifically as one that recognises the necessity of those dependent upon the wage fund *per se* to overcome capitalism; he characterises the struggle for this as the struggle for democracy, with the adequate horizon of this as "communism" at a global scale - as opposed to "socialism", which may be confined to the internal politics of individual nation-states. Macnair points out that the working class is necessarily in the "vanguard" of such struggle for adequate social democratisation, insofar as it comes up against the condition of capitalism *negatively*, as a *problem* to be overcome. The working class is thus defined "negatively" with respect to the social conditions to be overcome, rather than "positively" according to its activity, its concrete labour in society. The goal is to change the conditions for political participation, as well as economic activity, in society.

## Class and history

Conventionally, Marxists have distinguished among political parties on their 'class basis', regarding various parties as 'representing' different class groups: 'bourgeois', 'petty bourgeois' and 'proletarian'. This is complicated by classic characterisations such as that by Lenin of the UK Labour Party as a "bourgeois workers' party". Furthermore, there has been the bedeviling question of what is included in the 'petty bourgeoisie'. But Marxists (such as Lenin) did not define politics 'sociologically', but rather *historically*: as representing not the interests of members of various groups, but rather different 'ideological' horizons of politics and for the transformation of society.

So, for instance, what made the Socialist Revolutionaries in the Russian Revolution of 1917 'represent' the peasants was not so much their positions on agrarian matters as the 'petty bourgeois' horizon of politics they shared with the peasants as petty proprietors. SRs were not necessarily themselves petty proprietors - they were like Lenin 'petty bourgeois intellectuals' - but rather had in common with the peasants a form of *discontent* with capitalism, but one 'ideologically' hemmed in by what Marxism regarded a limited horizon.

In Marx's (in)famous phrase from *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, the peasants as a group, as a 'petty bourgeois' "sack of potatoes" of smallholders, could not "represent themselves", but must

rather "be represented" - as they were, according to Marx, by Louis Bonaparte's Second Empire's succeeding the counterrevolutionary Party of Order in 1848.<sup>4</sup> Marx called attention to the issue of *how* representation functioned in the politics of capitalism. Likewise, "bourgeois" parties were not pro-capitalist as much as they sought to manage the problems of capitalism from a certain historical perspective: that of 'capital'. This was the horizon of their politics; whereas 'petty bourgeois' parties were concerned with the perspective of smaller property holdings; and 'workers' parties' that of wage-labour. To be a 'bourgeois workers' party', such as Labour in the UK, meant to represent the horizon of wage-labour in terms compatible with (especially, but not exclusively, UK 'national') capital. This was the character of ideology and political action - 'consciousness' - which was not reducible to, let alone determined by, economic interest of a particular concrete social group.

So various political parties, as well as different political forms, represented different *historical* horizons for discontents within capitalism. For Marxists, only 'proletarian socialist' politics could represent adequately the *problem* - the crisis and contradiction - of capitalism. Others ideologically obscured it. A 'bourgeois workers' party' would be a phenomenon of 'Bonapartism', insofar as 'nature abhors a vacuum' and it filled the space evacuated by the failure of bourgeois politics, while also falling short of the true historical horizon of the political tasks of proletarian socialism. It was a phenomenon of the contradiction of *capitalism* in a particular way - as were *all* political parties from a Marxist perspective.

There are great merits and significant clarity to Macnair's approach to the problem of politics in capitalism and what it would require to transcend this. The issue, though, is his taking as a norm the parliamentary system of government in the European mode and thus neglecting the US constitutional system. For at issue is the potential disparity and antagonism between legislative and executive authority, or between the law and its enforcement. The American system of 'checks and balances' was meant to uphold liberal democracy and prevent the tyranny of either the executive or the legislature (or the judicial) aspects of government. There is an important domain of political struggle already, between executive and legislative authority, and this would affect any struggle to transform politics. The question is the source of this antagonism. It is not merely formal. If the 'separation of powers' in the US constitutional system has served undemocratic ends, it is not essentially because it was *intended* to do so. The problem of adequate and proper democratic authority in society is not reducible to the issue of purported 'mob rule'. Any form of government could be perverted to serve capitalism. So the issue is indeed one of *politics* as such - the social content of or what informs any form of political authority.

## 'Party of the new type'?

Macnair notes potential deficits and inadequacies in the Third (Communist) International's endorsement of 'soviet' or 'workers' council' government,

with its attempt to overcome the difference between legislative and executive authority, which seems to reproduce the problem Macnair finds in parliamentary government. For him, executive authority eludes responsibility in the same way that capitalist private property eludes the law constitutionally.

This is the source of Macnair's conflation of liberalism and Bonapartism, as if the problem of capitalism merely played out in terms of liberalism rather than contradicting it. Liberal democracy should not be conceived as the constitutional limit on democracy demanded by capitalist private property. The "democratic republic" Macnair calls for by contrast should not be conceived as the opposite of liberal democracy. For capitalism does not only contradict the democratic republic, but also liberal democracy, leading to Bonapartism, or *illiberal* democracy.

Dick Howard, in *The specter of democracy* has usefully investigated Marx's original formulations on the problem of politics and capitalism, tracing these back to the origins of modern democracy in the American and French Revolutions of the 18th century and specifying the problem in common between (American) "republican democracy" and (French) "democratic republicanism".<sup>5</sup> Howard finds in both antinomical forms of modern democracy the danger of "anti-politics", or of society eluding adequate political expression and direction, to which either democratic authority or liberalism can lead. Howard looks to Marx as a specifically political thinker on this problem to suggest the direction that struggle against it must take. Socialism for Marx, in Howard's view, would fulfil the potential that has been otherwise limited by both republican democracy and democratic republicanism - or by both liberalism and socialism.

Macnair equates communism with democratic republicanism and thus treats it as a goal to be achieved and a norm to be realised. Moreover, he thinks that this goal can only be achieved by the practice of democratic republicanism in the present: the political party for communism must exemplify democratic republicanism in practice, as an alternative to the politics of the "party-state" in capitalism.

Marx, by contrast, addressed communism as merely the "next step" and a "one-sided negation" of capitalism rather than as the end goal of emancipation: it is not the opposite of capitalism in the sense of an undialectical antithesis, but rather an expression of it. Indeed, for Marx, communism would be the completion and fulfilment of capitalism, and not in terms of one or some aspects over others, but rather in and through its central self-contradiction, which is political as well as economic, or 'political-economic'.

What this requires is recognising the non-identity of various aspects of capitalism as bound up in and part and parcel of the process of capitalism's potential transformation into communism. For example, the non-identity of law (as legislated), its (judicial) interpretation, and (executive) enforcement, or the non-identity of civil society and the state, as expressed by the specific phenomenon of modern political parties. States are compulsory; political parties are voluntary, civil-society formations. And governments are not identical with legislatures. Politics as conditioned by capitalism could provide the *means*, but cannot already embody the *ends*, of transforming capitalism through communism. If communism is to be pursued, as Macnair argues, by the means of democratic republicanism, then we must recognise what has become of the democratic revolution in capitalism. It has not been merely

corrupted and degraded, but rather rendered self-contradictory, which is a different matter. The concrete manifestations of democracy in capitalism are not only opportunist compromises, but also struggles to assert *politics*.

## Symptomatic socialism

The history of the movement for socialism or communism generally and of Marxism in particular demonstrates the problem of capitalism through symptomatic phenomena of attempts to overcome it. This is not a history of trials and errors, but rather of discontents and exemplary forms of politics, borne of the crisis of capitalism, as it has been experienced through various phases, none of which have been superseded entirely.

Lenin and Trotsky were careful to avoid, as Trotsky put it, in *The lesson of October* (1924), the "fetishism" of the soviet or workers' council form of politics and (revolutionary) government. Rather, Marxists addressed this as an emergent phenomenon of a specific phase of history, one which they sought to advance through the proletarian socialist revolution. But, according to Lenin, in *'Leftwing' communism: an infantile disorder*, the soviet form did not mean that preceding historical forms of politics - for instance, parliaments and trade unions - had been superseded in terms of being left behind. Indeed, it was precisely the failure of the world proletarian socialist - communist - revolution of 1917-19 that necessitated a "retreat" and reconsideration of perspectives and political prognoses. Certain forms and arenas of political struggle had come and gone. But, according to Lenin and Trotsky, the political *party* for communism remained indispensable. What did they mean by this?

Lenin and Trotsky meant something other than what Rosa Luxemburg's biographer, JP Nettl, called the "inheritor party" or "state within the state" exemplified by the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) as the flagship party of the Second International.<sup>6</sup> The social democratic party was not intended by Luxemburg, Lenin or Trotsky to be the democratic republican alternative to capitalism. They did not aim to replace one constitutional party-state with another. Or at least they did not intend so beyond the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', which was meant to rapidly transition out of capitalism to socialism. Beyond that, a qualitative development was envisioned, beyond 'bourgeois right' and its forms of social relations - and of politics. 'Communism' remained the essential horizon of potential transformation.

One key distinction that Macnair elides in his account is the development of bourgeois social relations within pre-bourgeois civilisation that will not be replicated by the struggle for socialism: socialism does not develop within capitalism so much as the proletariat represents the potential negation of bourgeois social relations that has developed within capitalism. The proletariat is a phenomenon of crisis in the existing society, not the exemplar of the new society. Socialism is not meant to be a proletarian society, but rather its overcoming. Capitalism is already a proletarianised society. Hence, Bonapartism as the manifestation of the need for the proletariat to rule politically that has been abandoned by the bourgeoisie. Bonapartism is not a form of politics, but rather an indication of the *failure of politics*. Marxism investigates that failure and its historical significance. The dictatorship of the proletariat will be the 'highest' and most acute form of Bonapartism, but one that intends to immediately begin to overcome itself, or 'wither away'.

The proletariat aims to abolish itself as a class not simply by abolishing the capitalist class as its complementary opposite expression of the self-contradiction and crisis of capitalism. This is why Marx recognised the persistence of 'bourgeois right' in any 'dictatorship of the proletariat' and down into the transition to socialism in its 'first stage'. Bourgeois right would overcome itself through its crisis and self-contradiction, which the dictatorship of the proletariat would 'advance' and not immediately transcend. The dictatorship of the proletariat or '(social) democratic republic' would be the form in which the struggle to overcome capitalism would first be able to take place politically.

Macnair confuses the proletariat's struggle for self-abolition in socialism with the bourgeois - that is, modern urban plebeian - struggle for the democratic republic. He ignores the self-contradiction of this struggle in capitalism: that capitalism has reproduced itself in and through crisis, and indeed through revolution, through a process of "creative destruction" (Schumpeter), in which the bourgeois revolution has re-posed itself, but resulting in the re-proletarianisation of society: the reconstitution of wage labour under changed concrete conditions. This has taken place not only or perhaps even primarily through economic or political-economic crises and struggles, but through specifically *political* crises and struggles, through the recurrence of the democratic revolution. The proletariat cannot either make society in the image of itself or abolish itself immediately. It can only seek to lead the democratic revolution - hopefully - beyond itself.

## Liberalism and socialism

The problem with liberal democracy is that it proceeds as if the democratic revolution has been achieved already, and ignores that capitalism has undermined it. Capitalism makes the democratic revolution both necessary and impossible, in that the democratic revolution constitutes bourgeois social relations - the relations of the exchange of labour - but capitalism undermines those social relations. The democratic revolution reproduces not 'capitalism' as some stable system (which, by Marx's definition, it cannot be), but rather the *crisis* of bourgeois society in capitalism, in a *political*, and hence in a potentially *conscious*, way. The democratic revolution reconstitutes the crisis of capitalism in a manifestly political way, and this is why it can possibly point beyond it, if it is recognised as such: if the struggle for democracy is recognised properly as a manifestation of the crisis of capitalism and hence the need to go beyond bourgeois social relations, to go beyond democracy. Bourgeois forms of politics will be overcome through advancing them to their limits - in crisis.

The crisis of capitalism means that the forms of bourgeois politics are differentiated: they express the crisis and disintegration of bourgeois social relations. They also manifest the accumulation of past attempts at mediating bourgeois social relations in and through the crisis of capitalism. This is why the formal problems of politics will not go away, even if they are transformed. The issue is one of recognising this historical accumulation of political problems in capitalism, and of grasping adequately how these forms are symptomatic of the development - or lack thereof - of the politics of the struggle for socialism in and through these forms. For example, Occupy, which took place after the writing of Macnair's book, clearly is not an advance in politically effective form. But it is symptomatic of our present historical moment, and so must be grappled with as such. It must be

grasped as an endemic phenomenon, a 'necessary form of appearance' of the problem of capitalism in the present, and not treated merely as an accidental and hence avoidable error.

Macnair's preferred target of critical investigation is the 'mass strike' and related 'workers' council' or 'soviet' form. But this did not exist in isolation: its limits were not its own, but rather also an expression of the limits of labour unions and parliamentary government as well as of political parties in the early 20th century. For Macnair the early Third or Communist International becomes a blind alley, proven by its failure. But its problems cannot be thus settled and resolved so summarily or as easily as that.

If Occupy has failed it has done so without manifesting the political problem of capitalism as acutely as the soviet or workers' council form of revolutionary politics did circa 1917, precisely because Occupy did not manifest, as the soviets did, a crisis of parliamentary democracy, labour union organisation and political party formation, as the workers' council form did in the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917, the German revolution of 1918-19 and the Hungarian revolution of 1919, as well as the crisis in Italy beginning in 1919, and elsewhere in that historical moment and subsequently (eg, in the British General Strike of 1926 and the Chinese revolution of 1927). Indeed, Occupy might be regarded as an attempt to *avoid* certain problems, through what post-new leftists such as Alain Badiou have affirmed as "politics at a distance from the state", that nonetheless imposed themselves, and with a vengeance - see Egypt as the highest expression of the 'Arab spring'. Occupy evinced a mixture of liberal and anarchist discontents - a mixture of labour union and 'direct democracy' popular-assembly politics. The problem of 20th century Third (and Fourth) International politics, regarding contemporaneous and inherited forms of the mass strike (and its councils), labour unions and political parties, expressed the interrelated problems accumulated from different prior historical moments of the preceding 19th century (in 1830, 1848 and 1871, etc), all of which needed to be worked through and within, together, along with the fundamental bourgeois political form of (the struggle for) the democratic republic - which Kant among others (liberals) already recognised in the 18th century as an issue of a necessary 'world state' (or at least a world 'system of states') - not achievable within national confines.

## Redeeming history

Political forms are sustained practices; they are embodied history. Because none of the forms emerging in the capitalist era - since the early to mid-19th century - has existed without the others, they must all be considered together, as mediating (the crisis of) capitalism at various levels, rather than in opposition to one another. Furthermore, these forms do not merely instantiate the bourgeois society that must be overcome - in a reified view - but rather mediate its crisis in capitalism, and inevitably so.

History cannot be regarded as a catalogue of errors to be avoided, but must be regarded, however critically, as a resource informing the present, whether or not adequately consciously. If past historical problems repeat themselves, they do not do so literally but with a difference. The question is the significance of that difference. It cannot be regarded as itself progressive. Indeed the difference often expresses the degradation of a problem. One cannot avoid either the repetition or the difference in capitalist history. An adequate 'proletarian socialist' party would immediately

push beyond prior historical limits. That is how it could both manifest and advance the contradiction in capitalism.

History, according to Adorno (following Benjamin), is the "demand for redemption". This is because history is not an accumulation of facts, but rather a form of past action continuing in the present. Historical action was transformative and is again to be transformed in the present: we transform past action through continuing to act on it in the present. No past action continues untransformed. The question is the (re)direction and continuing transformation of that action. Thinking is a way, too, of transforming past action.

Political party is not a dead form, but rather lives in ways dependent at least in part on how we think of it. The need for political party for the left today is a demand to redeem past action in the present. We can do so more or less well, and not only as a function of quantity, but also of quality. Can we receive the task of past politics revealed by Marxism as it is ramified down to the present? Can the left sustain its action in time; can it be a form of *politics*?

Marxism never offered a wholly new or distinct form of political action, but only sought to affect - consciously - forms of politics already underway. Examples of this include: Chartism; labour unions (whether according to trade or industry); Lassalle's political party of the 'permanent campaign of the working class'; the Paris Commune; the 'mass' or 'general strike'; and 'workers' councils'. But not only these: also, the parliament or congress, as well as the sovereign executive with prerogative. These are all descended to us as forms not merely of political action and political struggle over that action, but also and especially of *revolution*, revolutionary change in society in the modern, bourgeois epoch.

One thing is certain regarding the history of the 19th and 20th centuries as legacy, now in the 21st century: since the politics of the state has not gone away, neither has the question of political party. We must accept forms of revolutionary politics as they have come down to us historically. But that does not mean inheriting the forms of state and party as given, but rather transforming them - in revolution. Capitalism is a social crisis that calls forth political action. The only questions are how and why - with what consciousness and with what goal?

If social and political crisis - revolution - has up to now given us only more capitalism, then we need to accept that - and think of how communism could be the result of revolutionary politics in capitalism. Again, as Marx and the best Marxism once did, we need to accept the task of *redeeming* history.

The difference Macnair observes, between the political party formations of the early original bourgeois era of the 17th and 18th centuries and in the crisis of capitalism manifesting circa 1848 (including prior Chartism in Britain), is key to the fundamental political question of Marxism, as well as of proletarian socialism more broadly (for instance in anarcho-syndicalism) - as symptoms of *history*. There is not a static problem, but rather a dynamic of the historical process that is moreover regressive in its repetition in difference. Marxism once sought to be conscious of the difference, and so should we ●

## Notes

1. 'The philosophy trap' *Weekly Worker* November 21 2013.
2. [www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/18th-Brumaire.pdf](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/18th-Brumaire.pdf).
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. D Howard *The specter of democracy* New York 2002.
6. JP Nettl, 'The SPD 1890-1914 as political model', 1965.

## MINERS 1984-85

# Violence and the miners

Left Unity's Salman Shaheen - one of four principal speakers - was challenged by Andrew Neil on the March 28 edition of the *Daily politics show* to say where he stood on the Communist Platform's motion for LU's policy conference the next day. What was his take on the call for "disbanding of the standing army" and the "right

of the people to bear arms"? Would he be raising his hand for this "loony" nonsense? No, reassuringly replied the comrade: "I disagree ... I will be voting against."

Well, comrade Shaheen will have a chance to make political amends at the next LU conference in mid-November, when the motion will again be on the agenda and - to help

him do the right thing - the comrade could usefully read over our coverage of the miners' Great Strike of 1984-85, featured in the forerunner of this publication, *The Leninist*. In particular, there are important lessons in one of the most important organisational innovations from that titanic confrontation - the miners' hit squads. As Alec Long makes

clear in the October 1984 article below, the miners fought back bravely against the police. But often it was police, equipped with riot helmets, batons and shields, attacking miners armed with nothing more than fists and bricks. The hit squads began to change that.

We should be clear that this is *not* a call for a generalised bloodbath. Comrade Long's

article cites an instructive incident from the 1926 General Strike. After police attacks on a picket line in Methil, Scotland, a disciplined military display by 400 strikers was enough to bring out the softer side of the filth. As the CPGB's paper of the time sardonically noted, "The police did not interfere again"<sup>1</sup> ●

Mark Fischer

## By any means necessary

**"The trade unions know that public support is alienated by violence. They know that's what being British means" - Neil Kinnock.<sup>2</sup>**

Kinnock's statements on the miners' use of violence have been a source of acute embarrassment to many honest Labour Party members, not to mention the hoards of Trotskyite entryist organisations, which are currently calling on workers to join them in the Labourite swamp. Violence, according to Kinnock, is contrary to "all the traditions of the British trade union movement" and in August he even despicably lectured 60 children of south Wales miners on how their dads were playing "Maggie's game". The other half of the 'dream ticket', Roy Hattersley,<sup>3</sup> has been, if anything, even more vociferous in denouncing "picket line violence".

The "violence" that the dirty duo find so distasteful is, of course, the retaliatory violence of the miners against the police - the fact that this strike so far has seen two miners killed, over 7,000 arrested and 2,000 injured, some seriously, really does not seem to bother the leaders of the Labour Party unduly. Similarly, Kinnock's quaintly eccentric definition of 'Britishness' seems rather selective. After all, *every* section of the Labour Party, from the so-called 'revolutionary' Militant Tendency to that "inveterate peace-monger", Foot, as Andrew Murray laughably calls him, in effect supported the bloody imperialist adventure in the Falklands/Malvinas.

More generally, the Labour Party has shown itself throughout its history to be the most enthusiastic of supporters of the violence of the British capitalist state. It was the Labour Party that sent the troops into Ireland, which brought in the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act in order to hound Irish workers and freedom fighters and which on behalf of British imperialism has waged bloody and barbarous wars against the peoples of Cyprus and Kenya, to name just two. So evidently it is not violence *per se* which worries either the Labour Party or, obviously, the Tories. What they are really terrified of and hypocritically condemn as 'unBritish' is the violence of the working class against their system - capitalism.

At the core of any state - whether it is a workers' state, as in eastern Europe, or a capitalist state - are armed bodies organised to protect certain property forms. Obviously, in the socialist countries these armed organisations, such as the police and army, protect the working class ownership of society's productive forces from the threat of capitalist counterrevolution. In capitalist society, therefore, institutions such as the police and army do not exist to protect 'people'. They were constituted and are organised today in order to protect the property and system of the ruling class. The tired old lie peddled by Labour Party hacks, and even by many in our own Communist Party, that the police's role should



Unequal battle lines

be one to 'protect the community' has been graphically exposed by the miners' strike to be a ludicrous and extremely dangerous idea. Do the police 'protect' the working class mining communities? Or do they 'protect' the black and Asian communities in, say, east London? Obviously not. The police are the sharp end of the capitalist onslaught on the democratic rights, living standards and jobs of the workers. They serve the bosses' state, of which they are an integral part.

Under 100 years ago such an assertion would have been quite uncontroversial. In his book, *Hooligan: a history of respectable fears*, Geoffrey Pearson shows how the police were vehemently hated and in some cases banished from working class areas in the period around the turn of the century. He quotes remarkably healthy figures, which show that around one in four of London's policemen were assaulted every year. Then, unlike now, there were few illusions about the 'neutrality' of the police and many working class neighbourhoods took active measures to ensure a united and cohesive front was presented to the police's alien presence. From Connolly's Irish Citizen's Army, to the hunger marches of the 30s, to today's miners' strike, workers have consistently been forced to take on the state's police. In contradiction to what Kinnock would like us to believe, working class violence directed against the representatives of the bourgeois state is most certainly part of the "traditions" of the working class movement and working class communities in general. So what should be our attitude today towards violence against the police?

Well, unlike Kinnock and his Labour traitors, communists obviously applaud working class resistance to the state's scum in blue. Yet complacency would be criminal. The readiness of the miners to reply in kind to the police's attacks has been a superb feature of this strike - but the healthy violence of the miners has remained for the most part unorganised, spontaneous and responsive. This unquestionably is a weakness - a weakness which has provoked heroic, but limited, actions from individual miners and, more

significantly, the organisation of small hit squads, which have been responsible for such actions as the gutting by fire of the buses of scab bus companies in night-time guerrilla actions.

The phenomenon of these tight-knit hit squads appears to have sprung originally from the feelings of despair and frustration that have been produced in pickets by their inability to breach the highly trained police ranks. They seem to have been an organised and conscious development of the struggle onto a higher level. Because of this we do not dismiss the action of these groups as useless acts of 'terrorism', as some other political organisations have done. In many ways these squads have provided very valuable lessons for the mass of strikers in that:

- *Firstly* they advance and build on the already apparent willingness of militant miners not to be bound by the niceties of the ruling class's laws. The law exists to serve and protect the capitalists and therefore workers should have no qualms about breaking it, just as one day they will have no compulsion about breaking the back of the bourgeoisie as a class.

- *Secondly* these hit squads evidently have a relatively high degree of *organisation* - precisely the missing ingredient we have pointed to in the miners' confrontations with the police.

Our major criticism of the actions of these squads is their smallness, their limited scope and effect, not the actions themselves. We have argued for the organisation of workers' defence corps under the control of such organisations as the miners support committees, which themselves must be transformed into broad, fighting working class organisations. What we have pointed to as a burning necessity (no pun intended) is the organisation of these workers defence corps to protect picket lines from the police thuggery and above all to make them *effective* - to make sure that scabs do not have the luxury of a safe escort into work and that the police start to have some of the batterings that they have been dishing out to miners over the last six months or so paid back, with interest.

We, unlike *Socialist Worker*, for example - the paper that specialises in telling workers what they already know - do not counterpose the actions

of the hit squads to mass struggle, as if the two were mutually exclusive. That is simply cretinous. The Socialist Workers Party has elevated the tactic of mass picketing *à la* Saltley Gates<sup>4</sup> almost to the level of a sacred principle of the class struggle. This organisation is terminally stuck in the model of industrial dispute of the early 70s - times may change, but the SWP goes on forever peddling the same old politics of the 'big push'.

In an article in *Socialist Worker* of August 18 attacking Kinnock's vile scabbing on the miners, they correctly point out that "violence is scarcely unusual in British industrial disputes ..." They then go on significantly to list three examples from history where workers have been on the *receiving end* of the state's violence - in Featherstone colliery in south Yorkshire in 1893, 1910 in Tonypany in south Wales and even in the 1926 General Strike. Instead of pointing to the positive examples of workers organising their own defence, as we do, they simply bewail the 'batoning' of strikers, while failing to mention the fact that strikers in the 1926 General Strike did quite a lot of 'batoning' of their own.

This essentially defeatist outlook is carried over into their analysis of today's struggle. "We are in favour," they assure their readers, "of strikers fighting back ..." Of course, the point to note here is that in order to "fight back" it is first necessary to wait to be attacked. *The Leninist*, on the other hand, is not in favour of setting workers up as punch bags - the surest way on earth to be attacked time and time again is to wait, unorganised, for the police offensive, then simply respond. The way to avoid violence is to prepare for it. In *The Leninist* No8, we pointed to the experience of communists who led the workers' struggles in Methil, Fifeshire during the 1926 strike:

"After police charges on mass pickets the defence corps, which 150 workers had joined at the outset, was reorganised. Its numbers rose to 700, of whom 400, commanded by workers who had been NCOs during the war, marched in military formation through the town to protect the picket. The police did not interfere again" (*Workers' Weekly* June 11 1926).

We carry this attack on the *Socialist Worker's* view of workers' violence not because of any particular importance we attach to the organisation itself, but because their arguments are common amongst some striking miners and in the workers' movement in general. We believe that this essentially passive attitude to the violence of the working class - that is, supporting it where it occurs as a spontaneous response to police attacks, but being content to leave it unorganised - is deadly. For what underlies it is this same old idea that the police are 'neutral' - that we go along to picket lines expecting to be 'protected' by the police and when they fail to carry out this 'duty', only then do we respond. Many miners have learned that the police are *not*

neutral (it seems to have even seeped through to *Straight Left*<sup>5</sup>).

Organisations like the SWP claim to know already that the police are not 'neutral'. Therefore it is simply criminal negligence not to fight for workers defence corps, to leave picket lines undefended and miners only capable of responding in a spontaneous and ill-disciplined way when the *inevitable* police assault comes. *Socialist Worker* simply assures miners that it is question of numbers. If we can only get enough people on the picket lines, they tell us, we can "intimidate" scabs and swamp the police. To prove their case they point (*ad nauseum*) to the example Saltley Gates and their only operative conclusion to take the struggle forward seems to be: "The miners have only one answer. To step up the picketing" (*Socialist Worker* August 18).

But in reality Saltley Gates proves *our* point, not the SWP's. Again what was decisive then was precisely the question of organisation - in this case the *lack* of organisation of the police. It was not simply a question of the numbers involved. Since then the state has learned its lesson. The police's organisation has been centralised and sharpened up in preparation for just such a strategic battle as today's.

A disciplined, organised and purposive body of people can stand against and defeat a far larger mass, if that mass is lacking in discipline, in technique and is without effective leadership. We would have thought that this is a fairly obvious point to make, and the conclusions which spring from it for the miners' strike are also self-evident. Significantly, however, we have been one of the very few groups on the British left who have actually made it.

Our conclusions on violence and the miners therefore are somewhat different to the dismal defeatism of the SWP and many in our own party:

- Organise workers defence corps under the control of transformed miners support committees.
- The miners' strike is a key battle for all workers. They must be prepared to win using any means necessary.
- Learn from Saltley Gates and Orgreave. It is time to organise our violence ●

### Notes

1. *Workers' Weekly* June 11 1926.
2. Neil Kinnock led the Labour Party from 1983 to 1992, making him the longest-serving leader of the opposition to date. He started on the left of the party, but is remembered now for his treacherous role in the miners' strike, his purge of Militant Tendency from the party and his campaign to move Labour policy significantly to the right. When Labour was defeated for the fourth consecutive time in the 1992 general election, Kinnock fell on his sword.
3. Roy Hattersley was deputy leader of the Labour Party from 1983 to 1992. His combination with Kinnock was promoted at the time as being a "dream ticket" - Kinnock from the left of the party and Hattersley from the right.
4. In February 1972 striking miners, aided by the mass picket of thousands of members of the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers, succeeded in closing down the Saltley Gates coking works, owned by the West Midlands Gas Board, despite police attempts to protect it.
5. The paper run by the pro-Moscow CPGB faction of the same name.

LEFT UNITY

# Modest expectations

Mark Fischer is impressed by a more sober and realistic attitude on the part of leading members

Many readers will have already picked up snippets about the October 11 meeting of Left Unity's executive committee. I attended as an observer and will make a few general observations.

First, a puff of realism seems to be blowing across the organisation - a very welcome corrective to the inflated initial expectations of quick success, even if it is ruffling a few feathers. Presenting a membership report at the beginning of the agenda, leading Socialist Resistance member Terry Conway generally characterised the state of play as "static" after some small losses. Comrade Mike, a regional rep from the East Midlands, was, however, genuinely "concerned by the implications of the figures" quoted. Concretely, they mean that LU has lost a third of the previous 3,000 members who had been on the books and last year's aim to expand to a national membership figure of 5,000 had been a clear failure.

In the general debate that followed comrade Conway's report, there were - unfortunately - far too many *technical* excuses put forward for the loss of momentum and *technical* solutions offered. One notable exception was the intervention of comrade Andrew Burgin, who was spot on when he pointed out that the losses had to be set in the more general context of the "wider political discussions we are in" and that, in any consideration of the forward momentum of the project (or lack of it), we had to place "politics at the heart of the discussion".

Thus, it was hardly surprising that we had seen a large number of "friendly resignations in Scotland" as a result of the changed political atmosphere generated by the campaigns around the independence referendum. (Or, to put it less diplomatically than comrade Burgin, the collapse of large sections of the left into petty Scottish nationalism). Similarly, the Green Party had exerted a pull on some sections of the LU membership - also reflected at a leadership level, with two members of the national committee having now joined. So, while it was correct to discuss organisational matters in this context, the key was a "strategic orientation to building a broad left party".

Of course, it is not a quibble to suggest that it is the current *strategic aim* of Left Unity that is wrong-headed and it is this unviability that accounts for the project's slowdown. It is attempting to build an amorphous "broad left party" in the context of mainstream politics and society moving to the right; where other, organisationally more substantial left groups with far more distinctive profiles are engaged in essentially the same project and - not a small consideration - the Labour Party continues to exist.

Unfortunately, most discussion on this item was of a decidedly *non-strategic* nature. The pluses and minuses of a proposed membership form were chewed over at (frankly tedious) length; a branch-building meeting - which was cancelled because of the inaccessibility issues of the original venue - had to be rescheduled to avoid losing momentum; someone needed to be employed three days a week to take this membership work forward; people should receive training on how to chair meetings, organise streets stalls, engage with the media; there should be starter packs for branches and a buddy system for new recruits; and Pete Green from



Kate Hudson: sober

Hackney thought an important part of the solution was to seriously "address the regional structures" ... a comment that was usefully heckled by the East Midlands rep, Mike: "which don't exist!" he reminded us.

The EC has a component of elected reps from all the LU regions.<sup>1</sup> However, Kate Hudson informed the meeting that we were missing the regional representatives from Eastern, North West, Scotland, South West, South East, West Midlands and Yorkshire and Humberside - a rather large percentage of what is supposed to constitute the LU infrastructure, in other words. The recognition that LU has now lost much of its initial forward impetus was a generally recognised fact in the room. Those comrades putting forward techie solutions seemed to have modest expectations. For example, if Tom Walker's proposal that people should have "training in the basics of how to organise" is adopted, I do not think he would expect the organisation to go stratospheric in terms of membership and influence.

## Patient

Kate Hudson articulated the more sober and realistic mood of leading LU members when she used the organisation's constitution as an example of the patient approach we needed to adopt. This was actually designed for an organisation of "20,000-50,000" members, she argued. Clearly, it is therefore something we need to "grow into" rather than seek to rigidly impose on an organisation of 2,000 people (in truth, well under that figure, of course). These are "early days" and we need to be "flexible", she said.

It is positive that this recognition seems to be more generalised nowadays. (To be fair, comrade Hudson has expressed a similar idea in the past). Readers will be aware that we do not actually think much of the current constitution, *whatever* the size of the organisation it is designed for, but this paper did make the basic point that, the moment LU tried to function in the real world, it would constantly find itself in breach of its own agreed rules.

The same holds true for the complex proposals for the resolution of conflicts

- and the whole so-called 'safe spaces' ethos that informed them. We predicted the disputes committee was going to be the hardest-working collective in the entire party and - sadly - we were right. The October 11 meeting discussed a communication from the DC on the fraught situation in Scotland. This related to some matters with potential legal implications and involving what seems to be the demarcation between the two committees. Space does not allow me to go into the details (whose political value is questionable anyway), but some of the comments from EC members were refreshing, as, again, they hinted at a dawning recognition that sharp *political* disputes - which is what you would expect in any serious organisation - are finding their way to the disputes committee as complaints about 'bullying' and 'offensive behaviour'.

Thus, Terry Conway commented that there seemed to have been confusion between issues of personal conduct and structures - something that should not have been allowed to happen. Kate Hudson was on the money again when she said we had to separate the issues around "distressed and upset people" and our role in "politics". Likewise, comrade Burgin when he characterised the split in Scotland: "this is about *politics* - we have a 'yes' branch and a 'no' branch" north of the border. This is representative "of Scottish politics as a whole", not the difficult personalities of the individuals involved, he sensibly pointed out.<sup>2</sup>

So, in spite of some rather solemn news on the membership front, this was a positive meeting and hopefully indicative of a more patient, mature approach to the long-term task of building LU from its modest beginnings. Other decisions and noteworthy points from the meeting were:

- The resignation of principal speaker Bianca Todd - again something that many comrades will have picked up online (as well as from a snotty 'Diary' item in the October 13 issue of *The Independent*). We have covered the rather sorry campaign against this comrade in several issues.<sup>3</sup> Late in the day, the comrade announced her intention to stand down and seek re-election - presumably as a way to face

down her detractors.

- The closing down of the unofficial LU Facebook presence, co-moderated by LU member Peter Morton, as the amount of trolling on it was becoming a "safe spaces" issue, according to some in the room. Bianca Todd commented that, while she recognised that "bullying" was taking place in this forum, and we generally want "nicer discussions", the best course of action was to ignore it rather than close it - a stance I thought jarred somewhat with her decision to step down as principal speaker, but there you go.

- A general election fund of £60k - at present there are 12 LU candidates mooted, with £5,000 each pencilled in for their campaigns.

- A crèche for the November 15-16 national conference - although cheaper options are being explored than the £1,500 charge proposed by the venue, the London Irish Centre.

One last point on Left Unity's organisational culture. Reference was made during the discussion on membership to the burden of work that falls on a very small group of comrades at the core of the organisation (they have "400 things each" to do, one comrade commented). This, of course, is an inevitable product of the overblown expectations for the organisation's development at the time of its launch - the number of subcommittees alone seems hugely inflated, compared to the hard political 'product' the organisation actually puts out day to day.

Time for some radical pruning, perhaps? ●

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## Notes

1. According to the LU website, the EC is made up of "the elected national officers, one representative from each region and caucus, and 10 of the nationally elected national council members" (<http://leftunity.org/executive-committee>).  
 2. Perhaps LU comrades might care to reflect on how this might relate to comrade Laurie McCauley, a Communist Platform supporter suspended from Manchester branch for what seemed to be little more than having political differences and expressing them openly. For more on this, see 'What "safe spaces" lead to' *Weekly Worker* May 15 2014 and 'Transparency is a principle', September 25 2014.  
 3. See, for instance, *Weekly Worker* October 2.

## What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# weekly worker

**Ukip is  
chauvinist,  
not racist**

## Something to smile about

Last week's by-elections have proved once and for all that Nigel Farage and his party are a force to be reckoned with, notes **Paul Demarty**

The media in this country has, over the past couple of years, developed a peculiar obsession with a single image - Nigel Farage's grin.

He beams at us, day after day, from newspaper front pages - one bar-room photo op after another. His eyes light up with laughter; his two rows of reasonably well-maintained gnashers invariably parted, to speed the progress of a silent guffaw.

The grin, like all great pop-cultural images, changes its significance over time. It was not too long ago that the UK Independence Party was a bit of a joke. After a bruising encounter with the ego of Robert Kilroy-Silk, Ukip saw its electoral successes dry up in the middle of the last decade. David Cameron, the newly-minted Tory leader at the time, felt confident to describe the 'kippers as mostly "fruitcakes, loonies and closet racists"'. From this great reverse, Ukip had to be reborn. The man they chose to do the job was Nigel Farage. And, so long as his party remained on the near-fringes of bourgeois politics, his most striking pose was - well - a bit of a laugh, really. Farage was a clown; he was the jester in a Shakespeare play, needling the protagonists, while being demonstrably irrelevant to the overall plot.

The last two years have changed things. Ukip has grown, and grown in significance. By-election shocks, scores of new councillors, first place in this year's European parliament elections: Farage is no longer a walk-on part, but a major villain. His grin is no longer gormless, but threatening. His new sidekick, Douglas Carswell, likes to smile as well: a picture of the two is something to behold. Has Nigel known, all along, something we don't?

### Grim up north

Carswell's success in the Clacton by-election was hardly unexpected: not only did all the polling suggest that this high-profile Tory defector and assiduous constituency politician would cruise to victory, but you could be forgiven for wondering if the Tories bothered to campaign at all. Boris Johnson, the most Faragian character in modern Toryism, could not even remember the name of his party's candidate. (In case you were wondering, it was Giles Watling, an also-ran of British situation comedy. He is most recently credited - appropriately, given Farage's ale-toting persona - as 'Man in Pub' in the infamous Danny Dyer vehicle, *Run for your wife*.)

The simultaneous by-election in Heywood and Middleton, despite Ukip's narrow defeat, is more surprising - and just as valuable to Farage as the Clacton victory. Clacton, after all, was cited by Matthew Goodwin and Robert Ford in their book, *Revolt on the right*, as the constituency most likely, in demographic terms, to return a Ukip MP. Heywood and Middleton is a constituency in Greater Manchester. It has returned Labour MPs since its creation in 1983. Yet Ukip came close enough to victory to force a recount, before Labour's Liz McInnes was declared victorious.

This result has been leapt upon



**A laughing matter**

by the bourgeois press as evidence of Labour's vulnerability to Ukip, distracting attention from the corrosive effect Farage's merry crew are having on the Tory vote. We must voice a certain amount of scepticism here. Labour's percentage of the vote, after all, *rose* (albeit marginally) compared to 2010; the striking feature of last week's poll was the total collapse of the government parties: the Liberal Democrats retained their deposit by 34 votes, having garnered 22.7% in 2010. The Tories likewise dropped nearly 15 percentage points.

On the other hand, Labour gained by far its lowest *absolute* number of votes in the entire history of the seat - 11,633 on a turnout of 36% of eligible voters. When the Murdoch papers and crowing Blairites complain that people are hardly raring to go out and vote Miliband, it is difficult to object too strongly. Blairites in particular like to point out that Harwich - the defunct constituency from which Clacton was extracted in 2005 - returned a Labour MP in 1997 and 2001. 'Red' Ed, so the argument goes, just does not have the pull in swing constituencies that he needs.

All of which is guaranteed to keep Nigel grinning. Since the by-elections, poll ratings for Ukip have soared. A purple vote is no longer obviously wasted - it is by no means fanciful to picture a handful of Ukip MPs in the Commons by this time next year.

Farage claims that his Heywood and Middleton candidate *did* pick up Labour votes; only Lib Dem defections saved McInnes. Until serious numbers become available, we can only say that it is a perfectly plausible tale. Barring some truly enormous disaster, Ukip hopefuls will go into May 2015 confident in their ability to give the established parties a scare.

### Understanding Nigel

As Farage laughs his way into 2015, we could forgive our comrades on the left for being a little bewildered. This, after all, was supposed to be our time: a City broker turned ultra-Thatcherite politician like Farage should not have got a look-in.

We have argued, however, that the left simply cannot get a handle on what forces were really unleashed by the 2008 crash - not a leftwing reaction to collapsing neoliberal orthodoxy, but overwhelmingly a rightwing one. Despite its Thatcherism, Ukip succeeds because any concrete economic position it takes is obscured under a momentarily convenient populism. Thus it can drop the rightwing pipe dream of a flat rate of income tax the moment it becomes inconvenient; it can switch between petty bourgeois fear-mongering and sympathy for the plight of the beleaguered British worker, right-libertarianism and love

of the National Health Service.

What do you call such a thing? The *Morning Star* provides us with a dramatic illustration of the confusion that exists. Its editorial column, has some sage advice: "Branding Ukip and by extension its misled new followers as racists or fascists dissuades nobody." Quite so, comrades (though, of course, the *Star* no doubt has its own anti-EU chauvinism in mind here). Such a shame, then, that elsewhere *in the same edition* we discover the headline "Clacton secures *racist* Ukip's first parliamentary seat" (my emphasis, October 11). Has free speech broken out at *Star Towers*, or did "home affairs reporter" Paddy McGuffin just not get the memo?

Alas, it is comrade McGuffin who is more representative of the left than his cooler-headed editors. The Socialist Workers Party's central committee, defending its dire Stand Up To Ukip campaign in the organisation's first pre-conference bulletin, writes that "much of [current] anti-migrant racism is targeted at white east European workers. This has created more complex arguments for anti-racists. It has allowed Ukip to go on a migrant-bashing rampage and at the same time claim it is not racist."

More "complex" arguments indeed are required to condemn as "racist" prejudices which are not actually directed against other 'races'! In truth, we know what is going on:

since racism is generally agreed to be a Bad Thing, successfully convincing people that a given enemy is guilty of racism is enough to condemn it. For an ostensibly revolutionary organisation to make this a political priority, on the other hand, requires believing that anti-racism is *not* the official 'common sense'; the position, beyond being straightforwardly nonsensical, is self-contradictory in its motive forces.

### Troubled waters

Ukip, to be crystal clear, is *not* a racist party. It is virulently chauvinist, reactionary, cryptically anti-gay and - while it is no longer politic for David Cameron to say so - littered with fruitcakes, loonies and closet racists. Whenever such racists surface, however, they find themselves outside the organisation double-quick: because Farage wishes to be all things to all people, so long as they feel left behind by the political establishment.

This is not good for Ukip's long-term prospects. Even its short-term victories are not unassailable. Douglas Carswell is now Ukip's favourite man - but he is a generally socially liberal individual, who happens to be of a Eurosceptic bent. How well will he fit into a party whose councillors have blamed floods on the legalisation of gay marriage?

Such is the trouble with setting one's party up as an undifferentiated repository for any and all gripes about the establishment. All these gripes simply do not add up. Polls have shown that, apart from the issue of immigration, the majority of Ukip voters are well to the left of their chosen party - far more fond of the welfare state, the NHS and so on; and far more keen on aggressively progressive taxation.

It is possible to go a long way in politics pretending these contradictions do not exist. Beyond a certain point, however, a party must cease to 'really mean it'; must join in the game of manipulating popular sentiment with no intention of translating policy into government action; in short, must become part of the hated establishment.

None of this is likely to kick in before next May, however, so we have an interesting election season on our hands - albeit for the worst of reasons ●

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