

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



# weekly **worker**



**John McDonnell candidly admits  
LRC's problems. Conference  
sees witch-hunt averted**

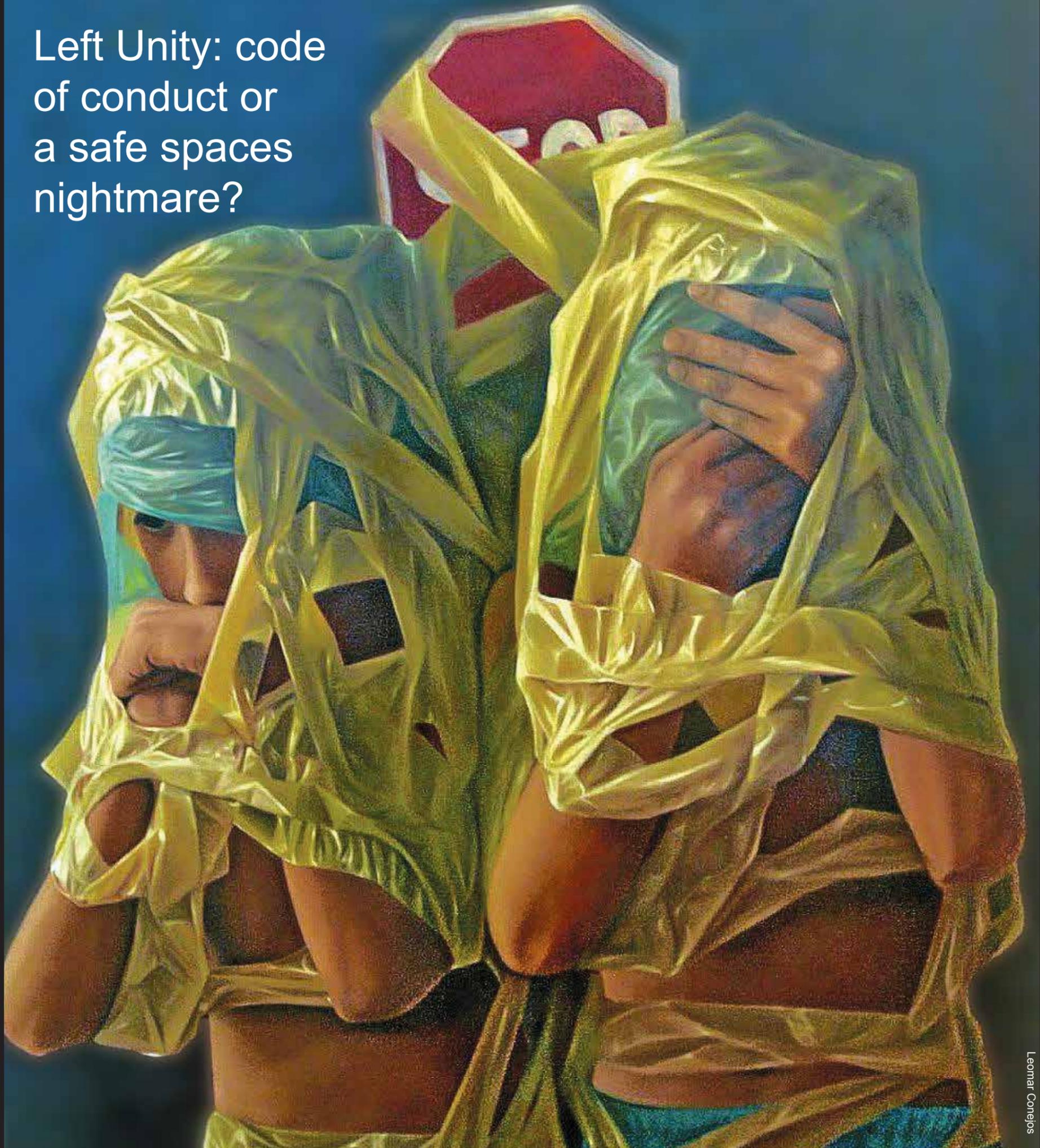
- Letters and debate
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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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Left Unity: code  
of conduct or  
a safe spaces  
nightmare?



Leonmar Correias

# LETTERS



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

## Propagandists

Clearly Mike Macnair is obsessed with intersectionality - he sees it under the bed of every dispute in Left Unity. In the Communist Platform report he is quoted as claiming that Lambeth Left Unity's resolution on Bianca Todd to the LU national committee was driven by anger over her refusal "to lend support to the campaign against Steve Hedley" ('Relating to the left as it is', November 6).

This is completely untrue. Lambeth LU passed a resolution asking for a written explanation from Bianca Todd following accusations in the national press that the social enterprise company that she was head of services in was found guilty at an employment tribunal of failing to issue a contract to workers. Three workers were awarded £2,000 in unpaid wages and sick pay against the company.

When an elected national spokesperson of a socialist party is accused of such a thing they have to be accountable and issue an explanation. That was all our branch asked for, but she resigned rather than do so. There was no Steve Hedley or "intersectionality" agenda ever raised by us. It is a *Weekly Worker* fiction.

It is revealing that Jack Conrad, in the same report, thinks this is an 'utterly trivial issue' to raise. It just shows how much concern leading members of the CPGB have with workers' rights.

Yasmine Mather, who is an elected member of the national committee of Left Unity declares that "Left Unity is probably the most dysfunctional of all the so-called 'unity projects' previously experienced". The "picture", she says, "appears bleak". National 'leaders' such as these are clearly part of the problem rather than the solution and the sooner she is democratically removed from the national leadership, the better.

Left Unity has none of the large socialist groups stitching up deals behind the scenes and laying down the line, as we experienced in the Socialist Alliance, and it's all the better for it. It is 2,000-plus individual socialists trying to bring together a new socialist party that can challenge neoliberal capitalism. It will involve muddle and mistakes, frustration and setbacks. If it is to succeed, it will be built from below, in struggle, by branches committed to actively supporting every local struggle against austerity, cuts and insecurity; fighting against Tories, Lib-Dems and Labour to establish a party workers can trust.

That is why the CPGB and its Communist Platform will play no role in building Left Unity except as self-appointed Marxist lecturers telling us all where we are getting it wrong. It's the role of a passive propagandist sect.

**Stuart King**  
Lambeth

## Gift to Zionism

Ian Donovan repeats his false allegation that such groups as the International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network and Jews for Boycotting Israeli Goods pretend to be "in some ways uniquely 'morally' qualified to pronounce on matters to do with the Israel/Palestine question" (Letters, November 6). This is rubbish - and remains rubbish, however many times it is repeated.

However, such groups are uniquely qualified to refute the Zionist lie that Israel represents all Jews around the world and acts on their behalf. Who is better qualified to do so? This is the *raison d'être* of these groups, and has nothing to do with claims of moral superiority.

But Donovan's prejudice regarding Jewishness blocks his understanding

of, and interest in, their progressive role. On the contrary, it inclines him to minimise the significance of the distinction between Zionism and Jewish identity - his gift to Zionist propaganda.

**Moshé Machover**  
North London

## Courage

Ian Donovan has shown considerable political courage in exposing the role played by Jewish comrades in transmitting Zionist ideology. Those who doubt this role have to answer: how could they do other than play it? Jews have gone from an oppressed ethnicity, excluded even from bourgeois country clubs until the 60s, to the richest ethnicity and religion. The rise in status of the Jews, from an oppressed to a privileged caste, coincided with the deepening imperialist alliance with Israel.

Jews are used by imperialism for more than mustering support for its Zionist aircraft carrier. Jews - historically without a country - have played a large role in furthering the financiers, and agro-capitalists' programme of promoting open borders. (Unfortunately, Ian has no problem with open-borderist reaction.)

But, most importantly, latent Zionism in the left is responsible for the perspective of building a 'revolutionary party' that includes Israeli settlers (they're all settlers!), whose 'rights' are irreconcilably counterposed to the Palestinians'.

The result is that Ian can only complain of "communalism", when in the end, he supports the ultimate legitimacy of the Hebrew presence. Marx's speculation about "backward peoples" headed for the dustbin of history applies, if nowhere else, to the Israeli settler population.

**Stephen Diamond**  
USA

## Feel the poppy

The poppy business is safe, sanitised. Better if poppies were frozen blood, melting on the TV presenter's shirt or blouse, soaking through, so they could feel it on their chest. That would make remembering more real.

The only white poppy I saw on Sunday was on a TV shopping channel. It was worn by a guy selling storage boxes - an unintended twofold metaphor. A consistent communist is not a pacifist, but, wading through the maulin, one can only admire this man. Respect.

**Jara Handala**  
email

## Not exploited

Andrew Northall makes many valid points about the *Adult Work* website and escorting in general (Letters, October 23).

Most people think of an escort as a short-skirted, heroin-addicted young woman standing at the kerbside in the dark. The reality is very different. The reason why the media does not portray escorting in a positive light is because the reality of escorting is very boring. Escorting, like car repair and maintenance, is just another business like any other.

Andrew asks why each October I do an analysis of the adult workers index - the total number of female escorts with profiles on *Adult Work*, the UK's premier website for putting escorts in touch with potential clients. My interest is a reaction to the oppressive moral conservatism of the Militant Tendency, and its Socialist Party and Socialist Appeal successors, both of whom are very prudish when discussing matters of sex, including escorting.

If Andrew was to take the trouble to check out the *Adult Work* website he would find 35 profiles from escorts based in his home town. None of these women are being exploited or

are being forced to do this, apart from the economic pressures to become an escort - although some women do it because they enjoy sex or the feeling of empowerment gained from knowing men are prepared to pay to meet them.

Andrew writes that escorts only get a fraction of the average £100 an hour they earn. This is utter rubbish. Most full-time escorts, if they are sensible, are registered with HM Revenue and Customs for income tax purposes. At the same time, many female graduates are able to make enough money through escorting over a three-year period to enable them to fully pay off their student loans.

Andrew would like to know my views in regard of the legalisation of prostitution. Frankly, I am against legalisation. In Australia, the legalisation of prostitution has led to companies which run brothels being listed on the stock market. Is this something Andrew would like to see in the UK?

*Decriminalisation* of prostitution, however, is a completely different matter. Decriminalisation has been a great success in New Zealand, and is the policy of both the Royal College of Nursing and the English Collective of Prostitutes. It is also part of the CPGB's *Draft programme* section on women.

Last week, an amendment by the Labour MP Fiona Mactaggart to the modern slavery bill, based on Swedish prostitution law, was dropped, despite cross-party support. This was an attempt by the do-gooders within New Labour to attack sex workers by criminalising their clients. Sex workers mobilised hundreds of individuals and organisations, including the Royal College of Nursing, the Hampshire Women's Institute, Women Against Rape, trade unionists, academics, church groups, lawyers and anti-racist and anti-poverty campaigners, to write letters urging MPs to oppose the legislation. Opposition within parliament was coordinated by leftwing Labour MP John McDonnell.

The English Collective of Prostitutes argues that criminalising clients would undermine women's safety, and drive prostitution further underground.

**John Smithee**  
Cambridgeshire

## Free schools

Reacting to reports in the local media about plans to open a new 'free' primary school, the Rugby Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition has undertaken some research and is concerned at what it has discovered.

The plans are somewhat mysterious, and very worrying. Free schools are run by charities and trusts. In Rugby, this would appear to be an education management company called the Bellevue Place Education Trust (BPET). It has significant financial backing from a small number of British and Swiss families, according to the company's website. It runs 11 private (independent) schools in the UK, many acquired recently. Now it is looking to create three free schools, including one in Rugby. Why would such a company want to do that? We have many very good state-run primary schools locally - why do we want or need a new school outside the state sector?

We also have concerns and questions about the running of this new school. Its lead proposer, Tom Legge, needs to clarify his interests. Mr Legge is board director of BPET. He is also a director of Waddington Mathews, a private limited company with a registered office in Rugby. Is the BPET linked to it? If so, why? The Waddington Matthews website is "currently under construction" despite Mr Legge being a director of it for over 12 months. The business website, 192.com, lists it as a "consulting engineer in Rugby". Under the heading 'Nature

of business', 192.com states: "Other business activities not elsewhere classified". What does that mean? This strikes us as mysterious, maybe suspicious.

Tom Legge is also chair of governors at Rugby's Eastlands Primary, which a couple of weeks ago announced it was applying to become an academy. Now there's a surprise! Or is it? Many of the arguments against 'free schools' equally apply to academies. Both are attempts to undermine and fragment state education - we suspect to try and make a profit out of it. This would be in line with Tory thinking. This September, education secretary Nicky Morgan said she had not ruled out the possibility of introducing for-profit schools. Her predecessor, Michael Gove, stated he had no ideological objection to free school providers making a profit from running schools. Rugby MP Mark Pawsey supports the establishment of the Rugby 'free' school: does he agree with his leaders that it is fine for it to make profits at some stage in the future?

There are many reasons for being concerned generally about free schools.

- They draw money and pupils away from other schools. The much needed library or classroom at a local state primary may have to be shelved.

- The way free schools are approved - by the department for education, not the local authority - means there is less local planning for places.

- They are unaccountable to their local communities and are run by unelected individuals - in Rugby's case, an educational consultant, a manager, a solicitor, a business person who prepares children for scholarships to private schools, and a local Tory councillor.

- Analysis of their intake show 'free' schools aren't representative of the communities they serve.

- They set their own pay and conditions for staff, which has obvious implications.

- They may not recognise trade unions, which would protect that pay and those conditions.

- They can employ unqualified teachers - 13% of teachers in 'free' schools were unqualified in November 2013.

- 'Free' schools don't necessarily raise standards, and a number have been judged to be 'inadequate' by Ofsted, with 45% of their pupils judged to be in schools that required improvement or were classed as inadequate at the time of inspection.

The conclusions that can be drawn suggest that, if this proposal for a Rugby 'free' primary school goes ahead, parents should think more than twice about whether to apply to send their children to it. There are so many questions to be answered, and so many concerns about the real political reasons for promoting 'free' schools and academies at a time when spending on state education is being seriously cut.

We call on Tom Legge, and Mark Pawsey MP, to answer the questions we raise, and if the plans for the school go ahead, we will continue to organise opposition to them. We will also ask Rugby Borough Council to refuse planning permission to the organisers for wherever they eventually decide the site for this new school will be - in the interests of preserving state education for all children.

**Pete McLaren**  
Rugby

## Total surrender

In the September 11 issue of the *Weekly Worker* Steve White declares his agreement with my analysis of the trends in education policy, including further ministerial centralisation of power, union busting, attacks on wages and conditions, open privatisation and so on, but disagrees

strongly with the conclusions drawn in the article and also by other *Weekly Worker* writers (Jack Conrad, Sarah Black) that the labour movement ought to take the slogans and phraseology in favour of 'free' schools at face value, and demand our own such establishments. Comrade White imagines a whole plethora of impassable Chinese walls that would render such an orientation futile.

In the first instance, Ofsted would find the values of the labour movement more offensive than the comparably "bland" values of various faith groups, businesses and so on and would close them down immediately. Though at present, technically, this is unlikely, because, as I pointed out in the article, free schools are not currently inspected by Ofsted, and instead a network of mini-Bonaparte, directly elected local 'education commissioners' is being mooted. Perhaps only a minor issue - surely these people too would seek to close down labour movement schools?

Comrade White continues: "Then there is the question of teachers and their conditions of employment." He asks: "Will labour-movement free schools ... employ unqualified teachers to teach whole classes? They may be forced to, because the funding is likely to be squeezed by future governments." Lastly the possible negative "divisive" effects upon the general, undefined community are considered against the background idea that labour-movement schools - if successful - would alienate sections of society precisely because of their values: labour-movement values, socialist values.

It seems therefore that the criticisms comrade White makes fall into two categories. In the first category the objection is basically that pursuing such a policy would be complex and full of possible pitfalls and setbacks. The second objection actually concerns the "divisive" effect of the values of the labour movement *itself*. Both are recipes, for inaction, and accommodation to existing, non-labour-movement, non-socialist values, for fear of provoking enemies of those values and of the socialist project as such.

The fundamental problem here is that, in the first place, life is complex and full of potential pitfalls and that, moreover, this is even truer for those who place themselves in opposition to the 'default' values of existing society and who have to act within the world of reality in order to realise their aspirations. Such arguments could be used against every kind of organisation and action within a capitalist society. Do trade unions not have to strike wage bargains which keep them within the relations of private property? Does a workers' cooperative not face tremendous difficulties obtaining funding, and have to overcome numerous legal hurdles? One could go on.

What is more important, I believe, is the 'make lemons from lemonade' point. Reality is not as we would like it, but what we have, and the constant changes within society force us to seize at new and varied ways to point a way towards an entirely new society. In a sense the 'final goal' of setting up labour-movement free schools is entirely less important than the process required to fight for such thing, the naked class antagonisms such a campaign would bring out, and the positive vision for the running of society and how that is the necessary ideological corollary.

As for the values of the movement being alienating and divisive to those opposed to them - total surrender is the only alternative.

**Mike Copestake**  
Sheffield

LEFT UNITY

# Funny goings-on

Some members of Left Unity are too quick to throw in the towel, reckons Paul Demarty

As members of Left Unity congregate in London for the organisation's third conference, people's minds will (hopefully) be on the policy on the table, and the decisions in front of us.

We fear, in the light of recent (and, it must be said, somewhat cryptic) events, that some people's thoughts will be elsewhere, however. LU has seen, in the last few weeks, a clutch of resignations, one or two bizarre disputes, and a lot of doubts arising about the fitness for purpose of the disputes committee itself. Nothing life-threatening, needless to say; but signs that the reality of a new left organisation is starting to sink in with people who may have been too starry-eyed about the whole thing until now.

## I quit!

To take the resignations first: our inboxes have been clogged with friendly invitations from central office to volunteer for national committee posts. Laura Cockett, Adele Andrews and Dawud Islam have resigned as regional representatives from the north-west; Ben Lewis (not to be confused with the CPGB comrade of the same name) has disappeared from the south-east; and Melanie Griffiths from Yorkshire and Humberside has also gone. On top of that, we are now short a principal speaker, thanks to Bianca Todd's resignation; and Tim Nelson, one-half of the trade union officer job-share, has quit.

This is not, as will become clear, a collective walkout. (Indeed, comrade Islam has been out for a while, since the Manchester branch debacle; why his absence has only been responded to now is a bit of a mystery.) We need note only that comrades Todd and Nelson have, in a certain sense, resigned over each other: comrade Todd was unsettled by the enthusiasm some comrades had for getting rid of her, first when she unwittingly incited another bout of anti-Steve Hedley howling; and then when the bourgeois media picked up on a labour dispute at a non-profit company she worked at.

Her resignation has, however, not been enough for her opponents, like Tim Nelson, who somehow believe themselves to have been treated appallingly. In his resignation statement, he writes:

It is my opinion that there has been an unhealthy culture which has developed in sections of the leadership of the party over the last few months. When questions or criticisms were raised concerning Bianca Todd, it seemed that it was the instinct of some of the leadership, both officers and national council members, to rally around her and attack those who raised the issue, which did nothing more than turn what would have been unfortunate or embarrassing incidents into full-blown crises, deepening tensions much more than was necessary.

This seems perfectly reasonable on the face of it: except that it does not seem to occur to the comrade that, when close colleagues are attacked on spurious grounds, people do often "rally around" and close ranks. It is perfectly normal behaviour; for Tim, it seems that the only rational response when presented with a series of direct attacks on Bianca Todd as an individual is to immediately agree and cheer it all on. Of course, had Tim, Simon Hardy and the rest objected to Bianca Todd on serious political grounds, such a



Bianca Todd

response would be illegitimate - but then Todd is a representative of the political majority in LU, and so we suspect it would be a bigger fight than these comrades have the stomach for.

## Disputes over disputes

The other significant source of discontent is the poor, beleaguered disputes committee. LU's disciplinary body has an unenviable role, wading through dozens of complaints, many of which appear to be little more than political arguments that ended with shouting, name-calling and suchlike (as many political arguments do).

It has become the target of much complaining, thanks in part to a bizarre dispute between national secretary Kate Hudson and Mark Antony France, a member of the left-nationalist Republican Socialist Tendency. Comrade France found himself suspended summarily - his crime was to post a photograph of comrade Hudson swimming in a bathing costume on Facebook, and fail to remove it when asked. This seems to have been attached to a list of complaints about an alleged bias against those who, like comrade France, have collapsed headlong into vicarious Scottish nationalism (in his case, from the safety of the West Midlands). He claimed, additionally, that Alan Story - a pro-nationalist member of the disputes committee - had been suspended, although no independent confirmation has been forthcoming.

Exactly what this has to do with Kate Hudson in a bathing costume is beyond your humble correspondent - it looks like a pointless, sexist provocation in aid of grubby left-nationalist shit-stirring. Comrades France and Hudson have now made their peace, but not before 'the dark side of the internet' was lit up with LU members decrying the overweening behaviour of the DC. Tony Aldis, for one, has had enough - he has moved that all DC-imposed suspensions be lifted (frankly, a general amnesty outside of genuinely serious allegations would be a good idea), on the basis that the DC does not actually have the right to suspend people under the constitution as it stands.

We notice some - how shall we put this? - unlikely individuals taking up comrade Aldis's cry. "In the workplace suspension tends to have a paralysing effect on the individual affected: they become demoralised and the assumption of their guilt becomes the norm," notes one Beverly Keenan. When asked why she then participated in the suspension of comrade Laurie McCauley from Manchester branch, she provided a torrent of excuses: Laurie was only suspended from the branch, he could "join another branch temporarily" (not actually true, according to the constitution), or come

back if he promises not to write any "biased reports" of branch goings-on, which is "a breach of privacy". In short - comrade Keenan's privacy is more important, on her own account, than comrade McCauley's mental well-being. Delightful ...

## Cleaning up the mess

Readers of this article will probably have experienced a lot of involuntary eye-rolling - why should you care who said what to whom on Facebook? Why do people resign posts over such trivialities? Can people not just grow up?

Certainly, my own eyes have rolled many a time, as all this has taken place. It is surely impossible, moreover, in any left organisation (in any organisation, full stop) of significant size to prevent people from treading on each other's toes, reacting immaturely to disagreements, flouncing out, flaking out and all the rest. Yet the question arises: is LU doing all it can to prevent such behaviour? Is it an organisation in which taking politics seriously is rewarded more than individualism and small-mindedness?

There is certainly room for improvement, unfortunately. The disputes committee is hardly beyond criticism; many disputes have lingered on interminably, leaving comrades in limbo. Yes, we know it is overburdened thanks to political arguments being packaged up as disputes by our pettier members; on the other hand, we only know this because we hear it on the grapevine.

The true mistake of the DC is to have committed itself to confidentiality; there is simply no visibility of the situation with disputes, unless one attends all NC meetings and sees a harried look on the comrades' faces. We have argued repeatedly in these pages (and argue again this week) that this commitment is deplorable from the point of view of political principle; but here I would like to highlight how bloody impractical it is.

With transparency, trust would not break down so easily; comrades at large would be aware of the workload, that the committee had become a person light. Who knows? - if it was known at large how trivial many of the disputes were, perhaps some people would be shamed into dealing with arguments like grown-ups. If the DC comrades genuinely were untrustworthy, meanwhile, we would be in a position to judge.

More broadly, Left Unity's constitution is a nightmare: something finally acknowledged by the fact that it has been put back on the table this weekend. It is written, first of all, too defensively; it is less the right of members to fight for their views than the right of members not to be trodden on that is given priority. On top of that, it is hypertrophic: it mandates too many committees (many of which, like the regions, barely function), a leadership body too large to lead (with directly elected officers, always a dangerous point of failure), and so the organisation cannot be as responsive to internal developments as it needs to be. Unfortunately, this attitude is well represented among the membership: many proposals this weekend involve setting up yet more committees, or creating yet more specific jobs for people, rather than the radical streamlining that is required.

Both these problems will be up for discussion this weekend, and it is to be hoped that they are resolved in a helpful manner ●

paul.demarty@weeklyworker.co.uk

# 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 November 16: No forum.

Sunday November 23, 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 November 18, 6.30pm: 'British Pakistani women and the menopause'. Speaker: Mwenza Blell.

Cock Tavern, 23 Phoenix Road, London NW1. Talks are free, but small donations are welcome.

Organised by Radical Anthropology Group:

<http://radicalanthropologygroup.org>.

## What next for Palestine?

Thursday November 13, 5.30pm: Discussion, Hogg lecture theatre, University of Westminster, 35 Marylebone Road, London NW1. Free entry.

Organised by General Union of Palestinian Students:

[www.gupsuk.co.uk](http://www.gupsuk.co.uk).

## Left Unity

Saturday November 15, 11am to 5pm,

Sunday November 16, 11am to 4pm:

National conference, London Irish Centre, 50-52 Camden Square, London NW1.

Organised by Left Unity: <http://leftunity.org>.

## Striking together, organising to win

Saturday November 15, 11am to 5pm: Conference, Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church, 235 Shaftesbury Avenue, London WC2.

Organised by Unite the Resistance: <http://uniteresist.org>.

## TUC youth debate

Saturday November 15, 11am to 5pm: Meeting of young trade unionists, Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1.

Discussion on jobs, housing and workplace representation. Free entry. Organised by Trades Union Congress: [www.tuc.org.uk](http://www.tuc.org.uk).

## Palestine solidarity

Saturday November 15, 7pm: Fundraising meal, Chapelfield Methodist Church, Chapelfield Road, Norwich. £15 (£10 unwaged and £5 children under 16).

Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: [www.palestinecampaign.org](http://www.palestinecampaign.org).

## Defend protest rights

Sunday November 16, 11am till late: National conference against state violence and injustice in a climate of austerity, rising racism and inequality.

Organised by Defend the Right to Protest:

[www.defendtherighttoprotest.org](http://www.defendtherighttoprotest.org).

## For free education

Wednesday November 19, 12 noon: Student march for restoration of education maintenance allowance and abolition of student loans. Assemble outside University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1.

Organised by Student Assembly Against Austerity:

[www.facebook.com/thestudentassembly](http://www.facebook.com/thestudentassembly).

## Whistleblowing and the security state

Thursday November 20, 6pm: Forum, room B04, Birkbeck main building, University of London, London WC1. Speakers include whistleblowers from GCHQ, NSA, FBI and US state department.

Organised by Stop the War Coalition: [www.stopwar.org.uk](http://www.stopwar.org.uk).

## Homes in Hackney

Thursday November 20, 7.30pm: Public meeting, Round Chapel, Lower Clapton Road, London E5. Demand more council and social housing in Hackney.

Organised by Hackney People's Assembly:

[www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk/hackney](http://www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk/hackney)

## War, colonialism and protest

Wednesday November 26, 7pm: Public meeting, Haringey Kurdish Community Centre, 11 Portland Gardens, Haringey Green Lanes, London N4. '100 years on from World War I'. Speakers include: Jeremy Corbyn MP, Katherine Connelly, Dr Hakim Adi.

## Remember the miners' strike

Tuesday December 2, 7.30pm: Public meeting, The Mesmerist, 1-3 Prince Albert Street, Brighton BN1 1HE.

Organised by Labour Representation Committee: [www.l-r-c.org.uk](http://www.l-r-c.org.uk).

## Trade unions and Palestine

Saturday December 6, 10am to 4.30pm: Public meeting, Brighton University, Pavilion Parade Building, Pavilion Parade, Brighton BN2. Free entry.

Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: [www.palestinecampaign.org](http://www.palestinecampaign.org).

## Socialist films

Sunday December 14, 11am: Screening, Bolivar Hall, 54 Grafton Way, London W1. Jim Brown's *Pete Seeger: the power of song* (USA, 93 minutes) and Reel News's *Blacklisting - giant steps* (UK, 10 minutes). Followed by discussion.

Organised by London Socialist Film Co-op: [www.socialistfilm.blogspot.com](http://www.socialistfilm.blogspot.com).

## CPGB wills

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

**LEFT UNITY****Background, prospects and secret trials**

Jack Conrad introduced a session on Left Unity at this year's Communist University

**W**e have all spoken to so-called 'ordinary people' about politics ... and faced the inevitable string of questions: 'Why are there so many different leftwing groups?' 'Why are there so many splits?' 'Why don't you lot get together?' Only the complacent, the smug, the plain deluded would dismiss such remarks as evidence of irredeemable backwardness. The left's divisions, the morbid fear of open debate, the duplication of effort is irrational and self-defeating.

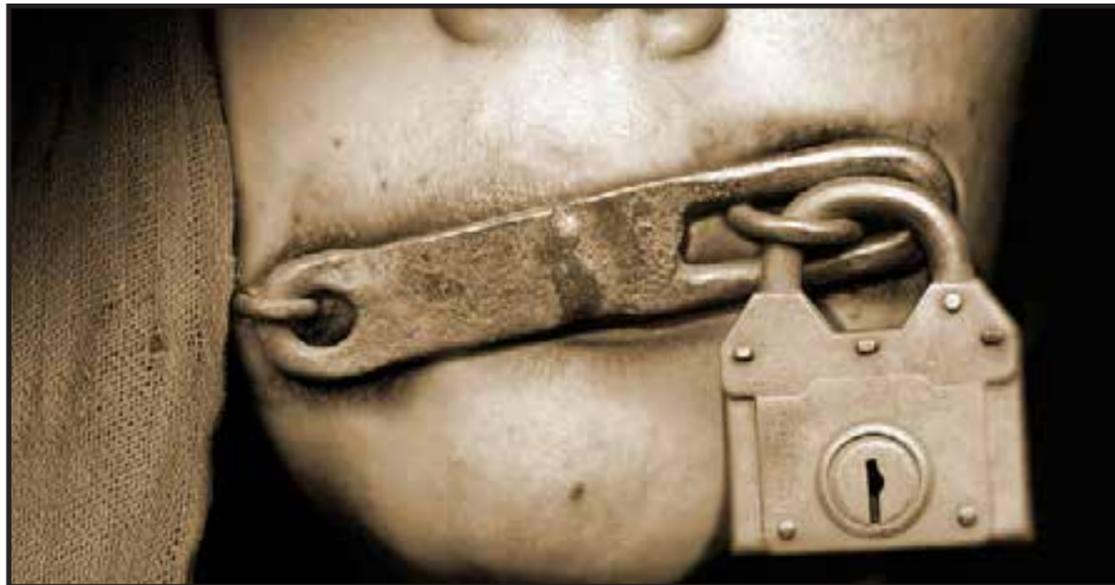
That does not mean that different historical interpretations and theoretical arguments are unimportant, irrelevant or in themselves problematic. They are not. Without enriching our theory, without interrogating the past, without the right to challenge accepted wisdom, we can never make progress towards revealing the truth, let alone win the battle of ideas. That said, without deep social roots and organising masses of people, there is no possibility of properly testing our strategy and tactics. Marxism, after all, is not only out to interpret the world, but to fundamentally change it.

So setting up Left Unity - an organisation of the left which all people on the left can join - was a welcome development. Yet, when we listen to those who constitute Left Unity's leadership, there are reasons for concern. Like many before them they want to 'do politics differently'. But, instead of applying the lessons of the past to our concrete conditions, what this 'doing politics differently' amounts to is dismissing classical Marxism, rejecting the Bolshevik model and not bothering with the fate of the Russian Revolution. The 'old' politics are outdated, no longer relevant, off-putting, etc. We heard it in the Socialist Labour Party, Socialist Alliance and Respect. We hear it in Left Unity too. There is much talk about original thinking, pushing the boundaries and new kinds of organisation. But, on examination, most of it turns out to be an eclectic rehash of Bernstein revisionism, Stalinist popular-frontism, soft Maoist feminism and Eurocommunism.

Once the model was Rifondazione Comunista in Italy and Die Linke in Germany. Now it is Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain. Such broad-party projects quickly show their limits and dash all the early optimistic aspirations and pipe dreams. Supporting the lesser evil, trying to appear respectable in front of the media, agreeing to coalition deals - all trump the radical claims. In many respects therefore Left Unity is another case of the triumph of hope over experience.

There is, of course, a big problem with transposing Rifondazione Comunista, Die Linke or Syriza onto the conditions of Britain. Such organisations have their origins in historically established parties. Namely 'official communist' parties.

Take Rifondazione Comunista. It claimed to be the continuation of the Italian Communist Party that in 1947 boasted 2.3 million members and in 1976 secured 34.4% of the popular vote. What about Die Linke? Well, one of the founding strands, if by far the smallest, came as a breakaway from the Social Democratic Party in western Germany. That is Oskar Lafontaine and 'Labour and Social Justice - the Electoral Alternative'. The other founding strand was, of course, the Party of Democratic Socialism: ie, the inheritor party of the Socialist Unity Party, which until 1989 ran the German Democratic Republic. Die Linke gets 20% of the vote in some

**Uphold free speech**

eastern districts. In other words, the explanation of the strength of the Die Linke, at least in part, lies in its existence as a former ruling party.

Nor did Syriza come into existence out of thin air. It began as one of the wings of the 'official' Communist Party of Greece: ie, KKE (Interior), which staged a split with the KKE (Exterior) in 1968. Despite formally dissolving in 1986, in effect it became Synaspismos in 1991 and finally Syriza in 2004. Needless to say, the left in Greece has throughout been a substantial force.

Certainly, when it comes to Britain, we need to recognise what is immediately possible and what is not immediately possible. Left Unity is not on the cusp of becoming a mass party. The Labour Party is not about to collapse. Nor is Left Unity going to replace Labour as a party which commands the loyalty of the trade unions. LU consists of a small number of small left groups and one or two thousand, largely atomised, dues-paying members. Perhaps it could carve out an electoral niche and consolidate an organisation of five or six thousand (though it has to be admitted that the first-past-the-post system mitigates against any Westminster electoral breakthrough in the short term). But, as long as we do not judge ourselves by numbers of MPs and councillors, as long as the right politics are adopted, the prospects of growth appear good. After all, there is a crying need for a fighting party of the working class that can point the way to socialism. Capitalism is deep in crisis, is visibly wrecking the ecosystem and consigns millions to a soulless existence. Meanwhile, the mainstream parties, including the Labour Party, are committed to maintaining wage-slavery, rolling back the socioeconomic gains of the past and promoting capitalist growth for the sake of growth.

**Space**

There is a widespread belief in Left Unity that, because the Labour Party has moved to the right over the last 30 years, there is a *reformist* space to the left of Labour. This is illusory, not least because reformism is illusory. The fact of the matter is that reformism - the old reformism of Bernstein, Fabianism, the *British road to socialism* and Bennism - was based on a false premise. Namely that it was possible to use the *existing* state machine, the *existing* constitutional order, the *existing* trade union bureaucracy to bring about - one small step being followed by another small step - a fundamental shift in wealth

and power till the realisation of some kind of national socialism. Then there is the nostalgia for the government of Clement Attlee. Yes, the national health service was founded, masses of council were houses built and incomes doubled. Hence the 'spirit of 1945' and Keynesian economics. But the long post-World War II boom was based on the US replacing Britain as the world hegemon and the massive destruction and millions of deaths in World War II. Do we want a new capitalist hegemon and a new world war? Hardly.

The history of the 20th century has surely proved beyond all reasonable doubt that reformism disempowers the working class. Long-term aims are sold for short-term gains. Nationalism is promoted. Eventually capitalism is accepted and the conditions are created for demoralisation, disorientation and the politics of despair.

Given this, it is strange, to say the least, that the Left Party Platform in Left Unity was dedicated to watering down demands and perspectives. Sweeping away the existing state, working class rule and socialism were deemed to be barriers, sectarian shibboleths. The most militant upholder of this dismal line was Socialist Resistance, the British section of the Fourth International (no wonder that nowadays it is dubbed *Resisting Socialism*). That was the task it set itself in Left Unity. True, when it comes to private meetings, and when it comes to its own paper, there are speeches and articles about revolution and socialism. But the real value of these speeches and articles is demonstrated by the fact that there is no attempt to equip Left Unity with such a perspective.

Socialist Resistance's only excuse for what is rank opportunism lies in the 'bottom-up' theory of spontaneity upheld by Mikhail Bakunin and the anarchists against Marx and Engels. Nowadays that is what the so-called transitional method amounts to. Basically the notion is that capitalism is so corrupting, so pervasive that the majority can never be won over by the strength of our arguments. But steer them into action, put them into motion, lead them from one moderate demand to ever more bolder demands and eventually the aim of working class power can be realised. Only the revolutionary elite knows what is really going on. And, of course, there are self-appointed elites by the dozen all aspiring to be the directing hand. So the trick is to carefully insert the right revolutionary elite in the right movement at the right time. Socialist Resistance and its predecessors have gone from left communism to

Bennism, from Labour Party entryism to the industrial turn, from Respect to Left Unity.

Though there is a consistency in the inconsistency, the strategy is thoroughly mistaken. Not only does it not work, but it breeds a generation of rightists. What begins sincerely morphs into cynicism. But people cannot operate on a permanently cynical basis. Activists become the message.

The Socialist Workers Party shares essentially the same method. That explains the deeply disappointing splits. There has been a process of degeneration on the left. The International Socialist Network walked out of the SWP over the 'comrade Delta' fiasco, only to undergo a split itself on the basis of a piece of furniture. That is, Bjarne Malgaard's take on Allen Jones's *Chair* (1969).

Looking back to the late 1960s and early 70s, the splits were, if I remember rightly, far more serious. Eg, today's Workers Power, Alliance for Workers' Liberty, Revolutionary Communist Group, Spiked, etc. It is not that these splits were always justified. After all, not a few came in the form of expulsions. But at least they were carried out on the basis of big political questions. Not trivia.

Nevertheless, that is what years of training in the SWP's atrophied internal life has produced ... and it has subsequently found its way into Left Unity. Reading the SWP annual *Pre-conference Bulletins*, I still experience a combination of amazement and sadness. The contents are dull, small-minded, technical and often apolitical. It makes a poor showing, even compared with the old 'official' CPGB. The biennial CPGB congress saw the publication of internal discussion papers with a 2,000 word limit and open discussion in the fortnightly journal *Comment*. Incidentally, we took full advantage of the pre-congress discussion publication to launch blistering salvo after blistering salvo against the *Marxism Today*, *Straight Left* and *Morning Star* liquidationists. There was, yes, a brief flowering of debate in the SWP - ie, over 2012-13 - but the oppositionists were without exception theoretically blinkered, politically confused and ultimately hopeless.

It was obvious from the start that the ISN did not stand a chance of doing anything serious. Despite having little more than a hundred members, the comrades really seem to have believed that they could mimic the SWP ... but only do better. Richard Seymour wanted to be the media face of the left, China Miéville wanted a publishing house, Tim Nelson wanted a rank-and-file trade union paper, Bev Keenan

wanted a women's magazine. But they did not want to open talks with the CPGB. They did not want to seriously rethink the so-called International Socialist tradition. They did not want to think about programme. And what goes for the ISN goes for Socialism in the 21st Century too.

**Free speech**

The contemporary left owes far more to Bakunin than Marx. The contemporary left is committed to the politics of spontaneity; the contemporary left is elitist and manipulative. This inexorably leads to the worship of strikes, demonstrations and occupations. Action, action, action is the alpha and omega of the contemporary left. Debate, critical journalism, polemic, historical investigation, theoretical development - these are at best tolerated, at worst frowned upon.

Hence in some Left Unity branches there is a deep-seated culture of 'anti-politics politics'. Everything is subordinated to the imagined level of the so-called 'ordinary people'. Patronising, insulting, but revealing. Always expected, like Godot, these so-called 'ordinary people' never arrive. However, in their name an intolerant, fearful, bullying culture has developed. Political debate is closed down, those who dare to think differently are subject to hectoring and votes of censure. In the case of Laurie McCauley he has found himself indefinitely suspended by Manchester branch. Did he disrupt meetings by shouting and bellowing? No. Did he kick and punch opponents? No. Did he threaten them? No. So what was his offence? He had the temerity to report the arguments between himself and some other members of the branch in the *Weekly Worker*.

That was in June 2014. And the disputes committee refuses to even hear his case because he is unwilling to submit to a secret trial. The DC demand that its proceedings be 'confidential' is surely a denial of natural justice. After all, for justice to be done it must be seen to be done.

It would be wrong to say the McCauley incident characterises Left Unity as a whole. It does not. LU's national council is regularly reported in these pages. Who said what, who kept quiet, who voted one way, who voted another ... all that has been covered without objections by the leadership.

More than that, Left Unity's founding conference was live-streamed and publicly minuted by leadership arrangement. I am sure that will be the case with future conferences. A model of openness which the whole left, resources permitting, should seek to emulate. Eg, we in the CPGB report our membership aggregates, publicly broadcast our weekly political report from the Provisional Central Committee, etc.

Given Left Unity's commitment to openness and transparency, it is therefore a surprise, a matter of concern, that no-one has stepped in to positively resolve the situation in Manchester. A polite phone call from Kate Hudson would surely have done the job. That or the offer of mediation.

But then comrade McCauley is a member of the Communist Platform and there are forces to the right that presumably must be conciliated. There are certainly influential 'anti-sectarian sectarians' who are demanding that Left Unity must purge the 'sectarians'. Who want to get rid of individuals and groups that refuse to submit to secret trials.

There are unofficial executive committee minutes to that effect ●

# How to vote at conference

Mike Macnair explains the Communist Platform's recommendations for November 15-16

According to the *Institutes* (533CE), an introductory law textbook enacted by the late Roman emperor, Justinian (reigned 527-565CE), "A statute is the type of law which the Roman people used to make on the motion of a senatorial magistrate: for instance, a consul. A plebiscite is the kind which the plebeians used to enact on the motion of a plebeian magistrate, such as a tribune."

As this passage indicates, "the Roman people" - or "the plebeians" - had no say on the law when they met in the *comitia* or voting meeting, apart from being able to vote yes or no to it. Any discussion of the statute or plebiscite could only take place at an earlier informal public meeting (*contio*), called at the discretion of the proposer; real, operative discussion, and amendment, could only take place in the Roman Senate, the assembly of 'the great and the good'.

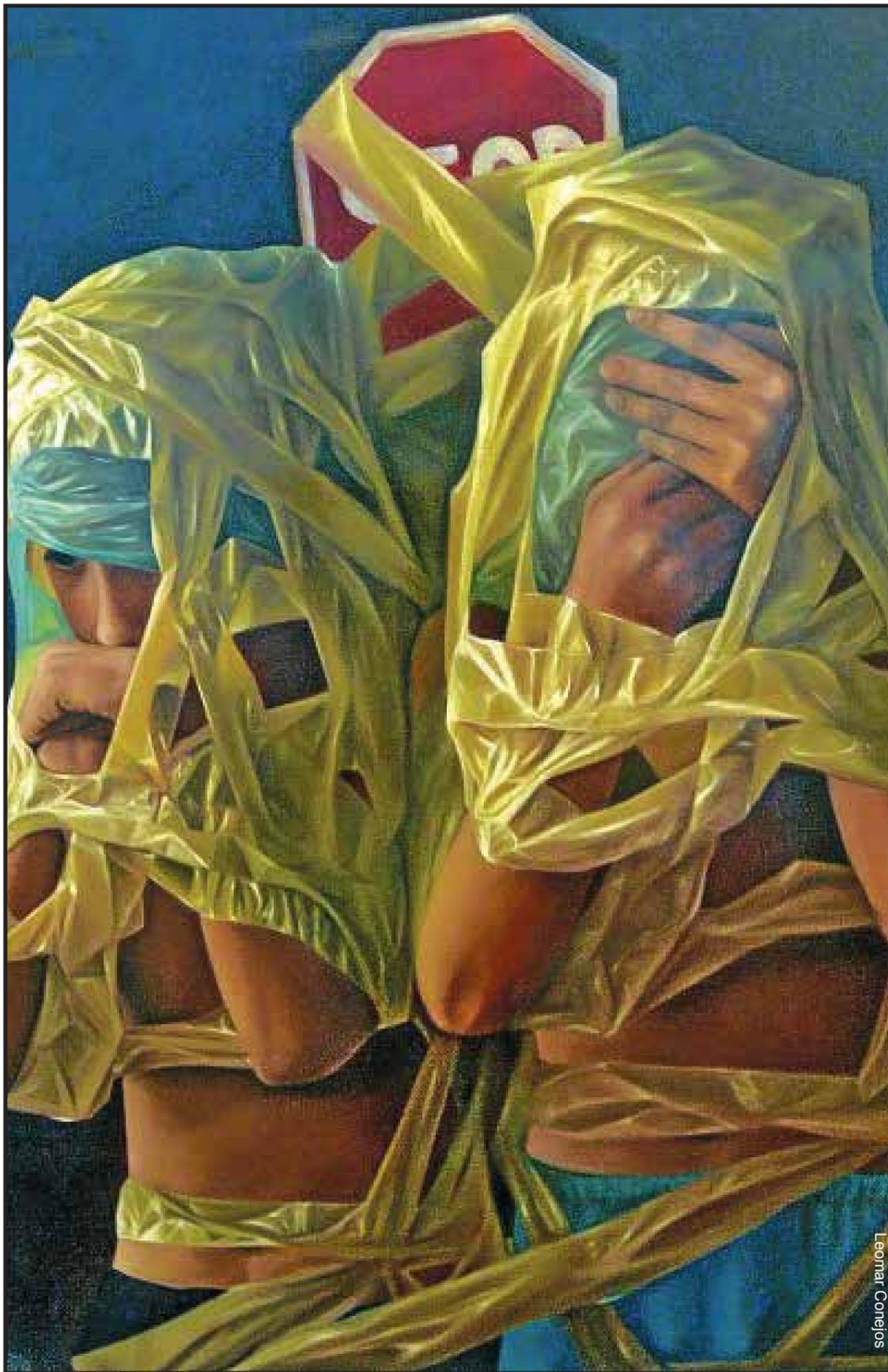
This is the meaning of 'plebiscitary democracy'. All the actual policy decisions - bar one - are made elsewhere. The one decision which is left to 'the people' is that of a rubber stamp, with which they can endorse or reject the proposal, *without discussion*.

We saw a modern textbook example of this method at work in the referendum on independence for Scotland. The British government refused to put options like federalism or 'devo-max' on the ballot paper. So there were only two choices: independence or the status quo. But, as soon as the unionist parties thought there was a risk they might lose the vote, 'devo-max' was at the last minute put on the table - *without* any opportunity for discussion of what, in detail, was on offer, or its merits or demerits. It is the method of 'plebiscitary democracy' *itself* which produces results like this. Discussion of details and amendment of proposals has to take place *somewhere*; the method of plebiscites, referenda or referendum-like forms of decision-making means that this discussion is *undemocratically* organised behind the scenes.

The alternative idea in principle is 'deliberative democracy', where real discussion, rather than the mere aggregation of votes, is essential to the political authority or 'legitimacy' of the decision reached. Communists do not usually describe ourselves as practitioners of 'deliberative democracy', but our methods are considerably 'deliberative' in orientation. The *Weekly Worker* is open to debate. Our aggregate meetings try to discuss *few* topics, with substantial periods allowed both for introductions and contributions. We are flexible about deadlines: that is, if a good point emerges *in discussion*, brief amendments can be put from the floor of the meeting to improve the motion under debate. Conversely, if it is clear that there has been insufficient discussion to achieve clarity about disputed issues, we can and do defer votes to a future meeting.

Left Unity, by way of its standing orders committee (SOC), has *de facto* adopted a policy of 'plebiscitary democracy', in the form of agendas (both for conferences and for national council) which are so overcrowded that no real discussion can take place, and deadlines for motions, amendments and compositing, which aggravate the problem by coming too late for much effective discussion in the branches and on too tight a timetable for effective compositing. Hence, like Roman plebeians, or like the voters in referenda, the members attending LU conferences have mostly nothing to do but to vote on nearly unamendable proposals.

The second LU policy conference



Proposed 'safe spaces' policy would entangle LU in endless internal disputes

will be meeting on Saturday and Sunday November 14-15. As in November 2013 and March 2014, its agenda is again grossly overcrowded. Five major topics - environment, crime and justice, social security, education, and international - are to be dealt with on Saturday between 11am and 5pm - five hours or less, allowing for the usual delay in starting and a lunch break. Seven agenda headings are to be dealt with on Sunday between 11am and 4pm (even less time): party and constitution (including highly contentious issues), equality, election strategy, fighting austerity, miscellaneous, constitution and democracy, and housing.

## 140 pages

Four days before the conference (November 11), the SOC has presented us with the final motions and

amendments. They come to either 108 or 140 pages, depending on the format you choose. This is a 'big ask'. At the university where I teach, the faculty expects students to read this sort of volume of text, or more, and then blag their way through a tutorial at the end of the week. But the students are not working for a living at the same time, and we certainly hope most LU members *are*.

The SOC has been guilty of some pretty arbitrary decision-making. The movers of the 'safe spaces' policy, for instance, have been allowed to rewrite it after the deadline for motions. Good, if the rewrite makes the document better or even merely less bad. The disputes committee offered an alternative proposal before the deadline; the SOC rejected it on the ground that the DC had no standing to present a motion (it announced this

after the deadline, so that DC could not produce a mover and seconder). Supporters of the DC proposal then put it in as an amendment and the SOC rejected this on the ground that 'delete all' amendments are not accepted. This is anti-democratic, denying the membership the right to a choice which they should have.

Meanwhile, the new motions and amendments document, compared with the original, shows that the SOC has allowed through a large number of amendments to the LU constitution after the deadline for motions. Presumably this is because they are 'amendments'. This is as if I was to say, 'There's a mouse on my desk' (attached to my computer), so 'Call the rodent exterminator'. Proposals to amend the constitution are not "amendments", in the sense in which "amendments" are given a

deadline after that for "motions", but are themselves "motions". From the point of view of democratic discussion, constitutional amendments need *more careful consideration* than ordinary motions. This is because they can easily have unexpected and undesirable side-effects, which are not obvious without careful reading, without placing them in the context of other provisions and without thinking through hypothetical applications of the proposed rule. This is not an argument for the super-majority rule for amending the constitution, which was proposed and rejected in November 2013. It is an argument for the non-relaxation of the motions deadline for such proposals.

In the 'International' section, there are a number of overlapping motions on Islamic State and Kurdistan, and some long and complicated amendments to them. Clearly compositing has not taken place. My guess as to how this happened is that the SOC sent *all* the motions and amendments on international issues to a *single* e-circulation for 'compositing' (I know this happened, because I was on the e-circulation in question). The SOC should have 'concentrated people's minds' by sending the IS/Kurdistan motions and amendments only to those who had put forward motions and amendments directly concerned with *that* issue; the same applies to the Europe amendments, and so on.

Housing has rightly been placed last on the agenda. But the SOC should simply have told the movers of motions on this issue that their proposals were off the agenda for this conference, since we discussed the topic and voted through an elaborate composite only eight months ago at the March conference. The 'Miscellaneous' section of the agenda is also redundant: Communist Platform's proposal on the standing army and the people's militia, moved by Mark Lewis and seconded by David Isaacson, is a proposal *about the British constitution* and should be grouped with the other such proposals; Barnet's proposal for an LU campaign for the eight-hour day belongs either in 'party and organisation', along with Philip Clayton's and Kieran Crowe's proposal for a party slogan, or in 'Fighting austerity'. The 'crime and justice' commission's proposals are largely too vague to be worth voting on - Communist Platform could live with the whole section being dropped to save time and all the proposals remitted to the commission, even if that meant that our own more concrete policy proposals (in the name of Sheffield LU, already submitted to the March conference) were also deferred.

Even these changes would only marginally assist a severely overcrowded agenda. The conference needed *political decisions* by the LU leadership about what would, and what would not, be discussed this time. Such decisions could be challenged and debated if necessary; but they would have had some chance of producing a conference which had more than utterly token 'discussion' before coming to a vote.

It did not happen. Adding an extra day, without taking real political decisions about a workable agenda, has left us with another referendum-style voting conference. What follows is therefore *recommendations* for voting. These are based on discussions by a Communist Platform supporters' meeting on November 2, followed by a CP steering committee meeting on November 10; I say 'based on', because the final motions and amendments document only came

out on November 11, and on some proposals I have had to make a provisional recommendation myself.

## Recommendations

On a good many proposals Communist Platform is recommending *abstention*. This calls for explanation. Several proposals, particularly those of the policy commissions, display a combination of (1) good general principles which are 'motherhood and apple pie' for socialists, followed by (2) concrete proposals for micro-reforms within the framework of the immediately current general regime: ie, that created by Thatcher's 'reforms'. Only relatively few proposals - like Nottingham's call for support for the 'NHS Reinstatement Bill' - grasp the nettle that what is needed for serious reform in working class interests is a fundamental break not just from Cameronism, but also from Blairism, Thatcherism, and from some of the 'reforms' of Wilson-Callaghan in 1974-79, which continued Heath's policies. Even for 'reforms' what we need is, to use a phrase from 1640-41, proposals for *root and branch* change. And this is not on offer. Moreover, the *interrelation* between the different policy commission proposals is not satisfactorily addressed: for example, how do proposals on housing fit with welfare proposals, economic proposals, and so on?

The combination of good general principles plus more or less OK micro-changes reflects partly on the fact that a large part of LU's leaders and members have *internalised* Thatcherism to the point where they cannot see it - for example, in relation to LU's own use of directly elected officials by postal or online ballots: a Thatcherite innovation. It also and more importantly reflects the aim of a "broad left party" promoted by the Left Party Platform for the founding conference and adopted there, which leads to nervousness about making 'unrealistic' concrete proposals. This in turn then clashes with members' aspirations to fundamental change, which finds expression in the good general principles.

Communist Platform proposes an alternative *general approach*. This is that LU should openly recognise that we aim for a radical transformation of the state and society in the interests of the working class, and that this is not a left version of 'old Labour', but a political alternative to Labourism in all its forms. We proposed aims on this basis in November 2013 and were defeated. We have put forward a range of concrete proposals to the March conference and to this conference: these are characteristically shorter and more general than the rival resolutions, albeit still containing specific alternative policy. Where our resolutions are on offer this time, we urge support for them. But, where they are not, we do not wish *either* to lend visible support to proposals constructed on what we think is an unsound basis *or* to be seen to vote against 'motherhood and apple pie' principles, *or* against the limited gains which would be represented if the concrete reforms proposed were implemented. So in these cases we urge a demonstrative *abstention*.

The **Environment** discussion contains two motions: **A** is the general policy commission report, plus an amendment **A1** from Lambeth, and **B** a motion on factory farming. We urge *abstention* on both, for the reasons given above.

I have already mentioned the case for referring back the whole **Crime and Justice** discussion: the policy commission has not come up with sufficiently concrete proposals to justify voting on them at this date, and it is clear that more work is needed. Assuming, however, that this does not happen and the discussion and vote

goes ahead, we urge *abstention* on **A**, the policy commission report, on **A1**, the Lambeth amendment to it, and on **B**, the Liverpool resolution on children.

We oppose **C** (Islington/LGBTQ caucus) on 'fighting injustice, defending democratic rights' (mostly uncontroversial, but it contains a commitment to defend the Human Rights Act and European Convention on Human Rights), if it cannot be taken in parts to eliminate this element; and similarly oppose **D** (Islington) on defending the Human Rights Act.

Both resolutions in this respect defend the current evolution of the British constitution towards a US-style regime, in which courts are the ultimate arbiters of political disputes. The fact that *right now* the British courts and the Strasbourg court are at odds with Cameron's *Daily Mail* populism does not alter the fact that the European Convention explicitly treats corporations as having 'human rights'; that the right to private property is entrenched; and that the right to privacy has been used by judges in support of *corporations'* secrets, as well as of victims of tabloid smear campaigns.

**E** (Sheffield) on crime and punishment is our own resolution and, though we would be willing to see it remitted if that happens to the whole item, we would urge a vote for it.

We suggest *abstention* on **F** on child sex abuse (merely a proposal for an academic conference, which LU is not best placed to act on and anyhow does not need an LU conference resolution) and **G** (Liverpool) on the criminal justice system, which, like the policy commission report, is descriptive and general.

We urge *abstention* on all the resolutions and amendments on **Social Security** for the reasons already given. This is *particularly* a topic where coordination with other policy areas is required, in order to arrive at proposals which make any sense.

In the **Education** discussion we would prefer for **A**, the policy commission report, to be referred back and the various amendments to it, and Islington's motion **B**, 'Educating for equality', remitted to that discussion. The point is that even within the LU majority's 'terms of reference' the text clearly needs a lot of work, since it is unclear that is contentious in the several substantial amendments. If this does not happen and the proposals go to a vote, we would urge *abstention* on all of them for the reasons already given.

## International

There has been some compositing in the 'International' section, but not enough to achieve clarity. It would be better if sub-topics were 'grouped' on the agenda, but, as things stand, it is necessary to go through the motions and amendments in the order in which they appear.

We urge a vote *against* **A**, the policy commission report. The movers have accepted in compositing the weasel words proposed by Socialist Resistance supporters to water down the March conference's rejection of left-Ukipite anti-Europeanism: "... we recognise that the EU is a bosses' club, with the collective aim of increasing the exploitation of the European working class ..." - as if the United Kingdom is not *also* a "bosses' club" - and, in addition, one of the prime movers of neoliberalism in the EU. And the commission report also promotes illusions in *other* 'bosses' clubs': the United Nations and the states represented in it which are *not* (currently) imperialist powers or permanent members of the security council. A subsidiary point is that the movers have also accepted a longish amendment on the LGBTQ issue, which has an 'unbalancing' effect (overemphasis of a single issue), in the absence of (for example) a similar paragraph on gender issues in

international policy.

Though we are urging a vote against, we recognise that the document is likely to be passed and within this framework have to look at the amendments to see if they improve or worsen it.

I would recommend that we vote *against* amendment **A1** on Kurdistan and Kobanê, which has a similar 'unbalancing' effect; there are other motions on the table which address this *conjunctural* issue, without LU putting what happens to be on the order of the day into its *general* international policy.

Lambeth's amendment **A2** contains three elements: (a) on the EU question, replacing the current paragraph heading 1, is an improvement on the composite motion and should be *supported*; (b) deleting reference to unilateral nuclear disarmament and related matters, appears *unsupportable* in the absence of a motivation; (c), while formally addressed to paragraph 12, in fact proposes deletion of para 13 of the composite. This is *supportable*.

Liverpool's amendment **A3** contains two elements: (a) a welcome clarification of the introductory part of the policy commission report and should be *supported*; (b), on Europe, offers support to "the right of democratically elected governments" to refuse to implement austerity, and a commitment to promote working class solidarity across Europe. This again should be *supported*. The identical amendment is proposed as **A5** by Ed Bober and Brian Green and the two must surely be compositing by Saturday.

Fred Leplat (of Socialist Resistance) and Bel Druce propose, in amendment **A4**, (1) to delete the reference to staying in the EU, reversing the decision on this issue in March, and (2) to defer decision on whether to vote for withdrawal in an EU referendum to a special policy conference. This should be *rejected*: more evasive left Ukipism.

**B** concerns IS and western intervention in Iraq. **Ba** is proposed by Lambeth branch and by Matt Hale, and seconded by Tom Armstrong. **Bb** is proposed by Sheffield branch, and is, in origin, a version of Ba with certain points in it removed or amended. The two motions have a good deal in common and it is a pity that they were not compositing, with points of difference appearing at conference as amendments. The substance of the difference between the two versions is that Sheffield's 'Conference notes' part of the motion places more emphasis on the *geopolitics* of the British and US actions, and that Sheffield's version is more sceptical about the leftwing or working class credentials of the Kurdish nationalist parties.

Amendment **Ba1** from John Penney and Susan Pashkoff expresses a clear political difference with both versions. It contains three elements. The first is to replace the short comment that the invasion of Iraq and intervention against Libya destabilised these countries and substitute a longer and debatable analysis of the reasons for the 2003 invasion (eliminating reference to Libya). The second is to eliminate references to opposition to imperialist military intervention and replace them with the argument that the Kurds have the right to self-defence, and this includes calling for imperialist air support. The third is to add reference to the right of the Kurds to unify as a nation-state, *but* combining it with a restatement of the right to "secure weapons and air support from whatever source those doing the fighting think tactically appropriate". This amendment should be *rejected*: it intentionally ignores the lessons of 'the west's' previous military interventions in the Middle East and concludes that 'this one is different' - just as supporters of bombing Libya contended.

On the opposite side, amendment **Ba2** from John Tummon and Mark Anthony France is a long, elaborate

text on a counter-line of partial support for the idea of a caliphate as an 'anti-imperialist' project. If the SOC had been consistent in the *political basis* of rejecting 'delete all' amendments, it would have rejected this one, as it is clearly a counter-resolution masquerading as an amendment. Nonetheless, it should be discussed - since it represents the 'anti-imperialism of fools' common among a section of the left - and *rejected*.

Amendment **Bb1** from Manchester to Sheffield's motion would delete point 3.3 - "to stand alongside those sections of the working class movement that have not been tainted by either social-imperialism or false anti-imperialism" - and replace it with a phrase from Ba1's 3.6: "to call for the building of a socialist and truly democratic society in Iraq, Syria and throughout the world". Sheffield's clause is clumsily expressed in a way which can appear sectarian; but it attempts to address the very real problem of socialists getting ensnared in the tangled geopolitical politics of the region through solidarity with what appear at first sight to be leftwing trends (thus, for example, the Iraqi Kurdish KDP government is deeply linked to Israel; several groups of left origin have lent their support for local reasons to western 'humanitarian' interventions) or 'anti-imperialist' forces, the line of the Tummon/France amendment. Manchester's amendment substitutes for this imperfect formulation a piece of mere piety. It should be *rejected*.

If we have a choice between Ba (Lambeth) and Bb (Sheffield) we should *vote for Bb*, for the reason just given for rejecting Manchester's amendment to Bb. The PKK is undoubtedly to the left of the KDP and PUK. But it remains a *left-nationalist* party, not a class party; and we have seen all too often what happens to socialists' high hopes in such parties: see, for example, the Arab Ba'ath Socialist Parties of Iraq and Syria ... Ba does not draw a clear line against such illusions.

**C** on 'War and Peace', from Sheffield, is based on Communist Platform's draft motion. It is also proposed by myself, Moshé Machover, Yasmine Mather and Steve Cooke. The motion offers a clear, long-term general policy on issues of war and peace. Both the amendment and the motion should be *supported*.

**D** from Waltham Forest, on support for Palestinian rights and boycott, divestment and sanctions *I think* repeats in a slightly different form policy LU has already adopted. However, in any event it is clearly *supportable*. **E** on Zionism, Israel and Palestine, proposed by Moshé Machover and seconded by Yasmine Mather, is from a Communist Platform draft and should be *supported*: it offers a clear *long-term* strategic perspective on this high-profile issue. Amendment **E1** from Wandsworth and Merton is in effect a 'delete all' amendment. It is worse than simply an amendment in support of the traditional left line of a 'democratic, secular state' within the borders of mandate Palestine, since it "supports the existence of a homeland for the Jews in the Middle East": ie, is explicitly Zionist (and passing it would set up a contradiction with paragraph 9, which it does not propose to replace). It should be *rejected*.

**F** on nationalism from Glasgow is by no means perfect, but makes sound points against widespread left illusions in nationalism. It should be *supported*.

**G** on Ukraine is also supportable, even if it is somewhat slanted towards characterising the pro-US Kyiv regime as "far right" without mentioning the role of the *Russian* far right in the rebel regions in the Donbass. However, amendment **G1**, proposed by Richard Brenner and seconded by Kady Tait and Dave Stockton, would increase the slant and commit LU to supporting what is in effect a pro-Putin

front. It should be *rejected* and, if it is passed, the motion as a whole should be *rejected*. If it fails, the principal motion can be *supported*.

**H** on Latin America helpfully emphasises solidarity with the struggles of the working class in that continent. It should be *supported*. **I** on Nato merely duplicates what is already in the policy commission document, and is in any case - on its own - a pious wish. We advise *abstention*. **J** on 'internationalism and solidarity' purports to offer an orienting framework for *general* policy distinct from the policy commission's. But it is a hopeless mishmash of fashionable 'left' 'issues', covering merely opposition to imperialism, Palestine, national self-determination, nuclear weapons and 'against sectarianism' - nothing like a developed internationalist policy. For this reason, though more leftwing than the policy commission document, it is actually weaker than that document. It should be *rejected*. Amendment **J1** from Anna Fisher and Susan Pashkoff would be more useful (though it is not *very* useful, being completely sectional in its approach) as an amendment to the policy commission document than to this one. An *abstention* is appropriate.

**Ka** (Marcus Halaby and Dave Stockton) and **Kb** (Adriano Nerola Marotta and Alia Al Ghussain), on solidarity with Kurdistan, should be compositing together, and with **Ba** and **Bb** before Saturday if possible, so that common ground can be passed as common ground and differences voted on in the form of amendments. If this is not possible, Ka should be *supported*; Kb is already out of date and explicitly promotes illusions in the PKK and PYD, and should be *rejected*. In relation to Hackney's amendment **KB1** *abstention* is appropriate.

**L** on solidarity with Venezuela promotes illusions in the Chávista regime in that country (contrast H). It should be *rejected*.

## Party and constitution

Sunday morning begins with issues about the Left Unity constitution, presumably starting with the debate on **A**, the 'safe spaces' policy. As I said above, this has been redrafted yet again, with some slight resulting increase in clarity. It retains, however, the fundamental vices of the original text: (1) that it mixes up disciplinary arrangements with equalities policy, which is likely to turn all 'intersectional' disputes into disciplinary disputes, producing expanding witch-hunts; (2) that the *concept* of 'safe spaces' is misconceived; and (3) that it involves an elaborate disciplinary procedure involving compulsory mediation (now renamed 'conciliation'), which, as I have pointed out before, tends to favour the powerful over the powerless. It should be *rejected*.

**B**, 'An alternative to "safe spaces" document', proposed by Tina Becker and seconded by Robert Eagleton, is supported by Communist Platform. It does not pretend to offer a solution to everything, but proposes a *minimum*, short, transparent and workable disciplinary code and procedures, alongside a separate, short 'Equalities Policy'. It should be *supported*.

As I indicated above, the SOC was in my opinion wrong to reject as out of order both the third alternative proposed by the disputes committee ('Brief guide to party solidarity', Tony Aldis and Gioia Coppola, '**Disallowed motions and amendments**', **A** and **B**) and the Liverpool amendment to the 'safe spaces' policy (**same**, **E**). These proposals should be heard - but in both cases should be *rejected*. The DC alternative has at the end of the day the same vices as 'safe spaces' except the misconceived general concept. The Liverpool amendment would worsen

rather than improve the SS document.

According to the motions document, the next item is the **Disputes Committee Standing Orders and Procedures (Aa-Ad)**. This document should be *rejected*, because the DC has failed to grasp that the fundamental role of such a body is that it exists to provide a *quasi-judicial* forum to deal with disputes that cannot be handled otherwise: hence the DC draft's insistence on confidentiality; its "dispute resolution approach" to matters that do not meet the threshold for a recommendation for suspension to NC; and its assertion that it "reserves the right not to intervene". The DC should be told to go away and redraft on the basis that their job is quasi-judicial and not anything else.

In spite of this, some of the amendments would *mitigate* the problems. Amendment **A1** from Sheffield would do away with 'confidentiality' and substitute a right of the accused to be informed. It should be *supported*. **A2**, from Phil Pope and Mike Thomas, does a similar but slightly more extensive job, tackling some other weaknesses of the document, and should also be *supported* (perhaps the two could be composited before Saturday?). **A3**, from Anna Fisher and Brigitte Lechner, also has the merit of turning suspension into a sanction for the *most serious* cases, and obliging the DC to decide how much investigation is needed on a 'case by case' basis. It should also be *supported*.

Presumably also under this agenda item come the matters listed by the SOC under heads **13, Party and Organisation**, and **14, Constitutional Amendments**. Under head 13, **A** (Glasgow South) proposes that the national council should make available postal distribution of documents to members without internet access. This actually affects less than 3% of LU's current membership, and in our view it should in most cases be dealt with at *branch* level.

**B** on 'Social media strategy', from Hackney and other branches, Alison Treacher and Tom Armstrong, proposes an entirely worthy object - that LU should develop a social media strategy - with the concrete proposals amounting to the setting up of a team for this purpose, which is to report to the national council, but it is unclear whether it is to be set up by the NC or how it is to be constituted. Points 5-7 under "We resolve" deal with the moderation of "offensive" posts and those deemed to be "personal attacks". Sheffield proposed an amendment ('Disallowed motions and amendments', **C**) to delete the "We resolve" element and replace it with the immediate creation of an LU Facebook page open only to members under recognised identities; this would deal with trolling and moderation issues by eliminating anonymous and pseudonymous posting. The amendment has been rejected by the SOC as a 'delete all' amendment; in our opinion this is wrong. If the amendment is allowed to be voted on and passed, the motion is supportable; as unamended, it should be opposed.

**C**, 'Slogan', from Philip Clayton and Kieran Crowe, objects to "meaningless PR slogans" but then proposes that LU adopt one. It should be *rejected*.

There are 17 separate **Constitutional Amendments**, of which 11 were received before the deadline for motions and circulated in the initial motions pack. As I have already argued, those received after the motions deadline should be ruled out of order for this conference. However, assuming that this does not happen:

**A**. Stockport proposes to divert funds from the centre to regional committees. Since most regional committees are not functioning, due to lack of *bodies* rather than lack of money, this should be *rejected*. **B**, 'Constitution tidying', from

Phil Pope and Sam Williams, proposes, as its name suggests, a number of minor changes to the existing constitution. It should be *supported*. There are two amendments to it. **B1**, from Tom Walker and Guy Harper, is a (misconceived) attempt to make elections involving gender quotas work better by procedural means and should be *rejected*. **B2**, from Christopher O'Neill and Guy Thomas, would eliminate a contradiction in the existing constitution and should be *supported*.

**C** (Rugby) would put *branch* representatives onto the NC, making this body even more unworkably unwieldy than it already is. **D** from Brighton and Hove, amending section 12, would have similar effects. Both should be *rejected*. Brighton and Hove's motion also postpones to November 2015 the requirement for delegate conferences - *supportable*, but too minimal, since LU seems unlikely to be organised enough at branch level to have delegate conferences soon; and tinkers with the composition of the EC. An *abstention* is appropriate here, if Brighton and Hove's motion can be taken in parts; if not, the whole should be *rejected*.

**E**, 'Freedom of speech and public reporting', is proposed by myself and Jack Conrad. *Support*. It is difficult to overstate how important this issue is: the culture of secrets on the left is also the culture of disasters like the SWP's 'Delta' case.

**F**, 'Composition of conference', proposed by Nottingham, would make non-delegate conferences permanent, but provide for online conferences once membership reached 10,000, and demand rotation of conferences round the European parliament constituencies. Amendment **F1**, from Tom Walker and David Stoker, proposes a more rapid movement towards online "policy crowdsourcing". Both the motion and the amendment to it are committed to 'plebiscitary democracy' and should be *rejected*.

**G**, 'Minutes of NC', proposed by Nottingham, would replace the current requirement of publication of NC minutes within a week with publication within seven working days, and require video recording of NC and EC meetings. Amendment **G1** from Crouch End tinkers with the latter part of Nottingham's proposal with a view to *internal* publication and keeping some matters confidential. *Abstention* is an appropriate response to both motion and amendment.

**H**, 'Left Unity membership in Northern Ireland and Gibraltar', from Nottingham branch, would (a) give any LU organisation in Northern Ireland the famous 'loyalist veto' on Irish reunification, and (b) commit LU to organising in Gibraltar and the other British overseas territories and crown dependencies around the world. It should be *rejected*.

**I**, 'Composition of NC and EC', from Hackney and Tower Hamlets, and amendment **I1** (Crouch End) consists of more tinkering with the NC and EC structure. An *abstention* is appropriate. The same is true for **Ja** (Brighton and Hove) and **Jb** (Ed Huxley and Ian Llewellyn), which tinker with the branch model standing orders in the attempt to solve the problematic fact that many branch meetings are inquorate.

**K**, on the powers of the appeals committee (Camden and Islington), is more tinkering - and inappropriate, because it makes no allowance for the need of members of the appeals committee to recuse themselves from particular cases in various circumstances. It should be *rejected*. **L**, on 'unruly and disruptive behaviour', would replace the power of the *chair* of a meeting to exclude people who are 'disruptive' with that of *any member*. It is a recipe for chaos and should be *rejected*.

**M**, on national conferences (Crouch End), would postpone the use of delegate conferences until LU reaches 5,000 members. Kicking this

issue down the field in this way should be *supported*.

**N**, on the length of motions (Terry Conway and Merry Cross), would restrict all conference motions to 500 words. It is an attempt to deal with a real problem, which I pointed to earlier - far too much text - but a stupidly bureaucratic one. There would have to be exceptions and how would they be decided upon? *Reject*. Lambeth proposes alternative solutions to the same problem with **O** and **P** on 'National conferences and deadlines': **O** would require 10 signatories to conference motions - in my opinion an *acceptable* proposal, provided it is clear. **P** would extend the motions deadline to 10 weeks before conference, with compositing by five weeks before conference and amendments two weeks before. Longer deadlines is not a stupid idea, but this is too rigid in its present form: *reject*.

**Q**, on disputes and appeals, from Liverpool branch would amend the constitution in relation to the disputes and appeals committees in such a way as (it seems) to eliminate the latter. Without motivation it is unclear what the point of this is.

## Shorter topics

**10**, 'Equality', contains three motions, without any amendments. **A**, 'Oppression of disabled people, from the disabled people's caucus, is merely sectional 'identity politics' in character and we would recommend *abstention*. **B**, on recognition of carers, from Liverpool branch, should be *supported*, and so should **C**, 'Work capability assessment', from Tom Armstrong and Alison Treacher.

**12**, **Electoral strategy**, contains five motions, involving rather important debates. **A** (Nottingham) proposes joint candidacies with the National Health Action Party. Since NHAP representatives, when they attended the 'unity of the left' meeting organised by Pete McLaren a few years ago, described their party as "of the centre, not of the left", this seems inappropriate and should be *rejected*.

**B**, proposed by Glasgow South and others, is a fairly elaborate motion, essentially calling for LU to form a *coalition* with the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, as opposed to merely making stand-down agreements with Tusc. The problem is the sharply divergent policy on the question of the EU (Tusc stands for withdrawal) and that what is *essentially* proposed is to subsume LU within Tusc. Amendment **B1**, from John Tummon and Alison Treacher, would argue for the creation of a "People's Democracy" coalition with Tusc and the Greens; it should clearly be *rejected*. Amendment **B2**, from Pete Green and Phil Pope, draws the sting out of the pro-Tusc motion by removing the commitment to go beyond stand-down agreements and the proposal to overturn the NC on the issue. This amendment should be *supported* and, if it is passed, Glasgow South's motion is supportable; if it fails, the motion should be *rejected*.

**C**, proposed by Leeds and Lambeth, would commit LU not to stand candidates without a policy conference and a delegate conference on the final manifesto. This is an 'anti-electoralist' wrecking proposal to block electoral participation, since such conferences are impractical. Amendment **C1** (Tom Walker and Pete Green) would substitute approval by the NC of a manifesto, drawn up on the basis of existing policy commitments from conferences. The amendment is supportable and, if it passes, the motion is supportable; if the amendment does not pass, the motion should be *rejected*.

**D**, 'Against the endorsement of abusers as electoral candidates', has an entirely supportable *aim*: it is clearly undesirable to endorse abusers as candidates. *But* this motion would commit LU (a) to treating all *claims*

of abuse as if they were proved; (b) to the 1970s-80s radical-feminist 'MVAW' theoretical perspective without thorough discussion, and (c) to rejecting any electoral pacts with organisations which "include abusers" (meaning 'identified' abusers, not proved abusers) "as candidates". This is a sectionalist witch-hunting project and should be *rejected*.

**E**, on electoral tactics where LU is not standing (Richard Brenner and Joy Mac), calls for a Labour vote in constituencies where there is no LU candidate or "working class and socialist candidates with real roots" - a very slippery expression - together with calls on Labour to implement a broadly Workers Power-type 'action programme'. In spite of the serious weaknesses of this motion the Communist Platform steering committee thought it was *supportable*, offering a partial alternative to the 'auto-anti-Labourism' widespread in LU.

**11**, **Fighting Austerity**, contains four motions, again without amendments. **A**, 'Welfare, not warfare' (Crouch End), is acceptable enough, but it is not clear what it adds to policy already decided or to be voted on elsewhere. An *abstention* is appropriate. I have already referred to **B**, NHS Reinstatement Bill 2015, from Nottingham branch, as one of the few proposals which grasps the nettle of a *radical* break from recent legislation. It should be *supported*. **C**, 'The fight against austerity and a social republic', from Steve Freeman, Mark Anthony France and others, produces in the 'social republic' a direct analogue of the 'advanced democracy' stage of the old *British road to socialism*. It should be *rejected*. **D**, on libraries, from Liverpool, should be *supported*.

**6**, **Miscellaneous**, contains two motions. The first, **A**, is Communist Platform's own draft motion on the standing army and the people's militia, moved by Mark Lewis and David Isaacson. I have already said that where this belongs is with the discussion on the British constitution. However, if we get a chance to vote on it under 'Miscellaneous' it should be *supported*. The standing army is an instrument of the imperial financial oligarchy, and the idea of political democracy without universal military training is illusory. In **B** Barnet branch proposes an LU campaign for the eight-hour day. This is an interesting idea, but needs more thought. It should be *remitted* to NC - if not, we would recommend *abstention*.

**15**, **Housing**, is the last item on the agenda and will almost certainly be lost for lack of time. I have already argued that the SOC should have disallowed these motions on the basis that we have already adopted a housing policy. If the discussion does go ahead, we should *reject A*, the Somerset and Wilts proposal, which would actually *weaken* the policy agreed in March; but *support* amendment **A1**, and motion **B**, both of which represent Bristol's attempt to improve either the original policy or the Somerset and Wilts version, in ways which are broadly supportable.

## British constitution

**9. Constitution and democracy** concerns the British, rather than the LU, constitution. Placed second to last on the agenda, the item is very likely to be lost for lack of time. In one way this is unfortunate, since constitutional issues will certainly be to the forefront in the 2015 general election and it will be problematic for LU to have no agreed policy on the issue. However, **A**, the purported 'Constitution policy commission report', is actually a cut-and-paste draft by Steve Freeman, and the volunteers for the commission have only discussed it *after the fact* and agreed by majority that it be recommended for adoption *as a draft*. Even more unfortunately, comrade

Freeman has used this draft to try to commit LU to his 'independence' policy - which now takes the form of calling for an immediate campaign for the *repeal of the Acts of Union* (para 2.31 in the draft). The *political* meaning of this slogan is that in comrade Freeman's view the right of self-determination can only be exercised *after* separation, and the proposal is therefore in substance to *expel* Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland from the UK and allow them to decide afterwards whether to join a new federation on new terms (the *legal* effect of successfully 'abolishing the acts of union' without replacing them with alternative legislation would be rather different).<sup>1</sup>

I have argued on the constitution policy commission e-list that the document should be discussed, but *referred back* for further discussion. If it is nonetheless put to the vote, even "as a draft" - which is an undemocratic procedure - it should be *rejected*.

Amendment **A1** from Camden and Islington has three parts: to delete the preamble; to add a rave review of the pro-independence campaign in Scotland; and to add at the end a list of specific demands (proportional representation, extension of the franchise, and so on). If this is taken in parts, the first and third parts are supportable, but we should oppose the second; if it is taken as a whole we should oppose it. Amendment **A2** (Liverpool) proposes the right of recall of MPs. This is more difficult than at first sight it appears - how to avoid allowing the tabloid press to force repeated elections on MPs they dislike? In Communist Platform's motion we have gone for frequent elections as the solution to the problem.

**B** (Wales Left Unity) calls for a campaign to win an equal degree of devolution with Scotland, to develop a Wales LU manifesto, and to "work in conjunction with other parties in Wales that share these aims". The first two points are fine, but the third is the sting in the tail: does this mean turning Wales LU into a tail for Plaid Cymru? On this basis I would recommend that we ask for the motion to be taken in parts, and support points 1 and 2, but ask for remittal of point 3.

**C** is Communist Platform's draft, proposed by Sheffield. We obviously support it: it gives clear *general principles* for constitutional change, rather than micro-details.

There are two amendments. **C1** (Southwark) is a complex of amendments which would make the motion follow Steve Freeman's line. There is no basis for taking these in any parts and they should be *rejected en bloc*. **C2**, proposed by Islington and Hackney, is more peculiar. First, it would remove the demand for the abolition of "MI5, MI6, special branch and the entire secret state apparatus" - *why?* Second, it would give a public right to call referendums, to propose a law if 800,000 signed a petition within 18 months; to "oppose a law passed by parliament" (whatever that means) if 400,000 sign within 100 days. This proposal would give *The Sun, Mail* and so on an effective veto - by gathering 400,000 signatures - over the legislative programme of a parliamentary majority, backed by - say - two million voters. Both proposals should be *rejected*. And if either amendment is passed, we should *vote against our own motion as amended*.

We do *not* want more 'plebiscitary democracy'. We have too much of it already ●

mike.macnair@weeklyworker.co.uk

## Notes

1. Repealing the Act of Union with Scotland, without further provisions, would immediately vest the crown of an independent Scotland in whoever is deemed to be the 'Stuart pretender'. For Wales, it would leave the crown in control of Principality Wales (Gwynedd, Conwy and Ynys Mon) and cede the remainder of the country in the descendants of the various 'Marcher Lords' who had sovereignty in these areas in 1535. For Northern Ireland, it would leave the queen as sovereign of an independent Six Counties.

**SOCIALISM 2014**

# Keep on keeping on

Mark Fischer enjoyed himself at Socialism 2014

The annual school of the Socialist Party in England and Wales, held this year over the weekend of November 8-9 - was different in one important aspect. The mood at this event was far more buoyant than in recent years, when the routine assurances of big times just round the corner rang pretty hollow. There was a palpable sense of confidence and optimism from many of the comrades you spoke to and a feeling amongst them that the coming period was going to be one of substantial growth and political successes.

Undoubtedly, the numbers at the event were up. The brief report on the organisation's website - suggestively titled 'Socialism 14: infused with a contagious confidence'<sup>1</sup> - states that "over a thousand" attended. This is accurate - and a refreshing change to have a left organisation honestly report the real attendance at one of its events.

The two rallies on the Saturday and Sunday in the Camden Centre in London's Kings Cross were a useful gauge of Socialism's size. True, SPEW deputy general secretary Hannah Sell was a tad on the lavish side at the Sunday gathering, when she claimed that there were "over 1,000 people at this rally" (the Camden Centre has "a licensed capacity for up to 1,000 people", according to its website, and there was a noticeable number of empty seats). However, this was more than compensated for by the overflow at the Saturday rally in the same venue and by the fact that, come late Sunday afternoon, many participating comrades were having to leave to catch trains and buses home.

Comrade Sell told us that we had been part of "a little bit of history" by attending this year's Socialism. It had been a "qualitative step forward" and was "very clearly the biggest Socialism we've organised". The second statement here may well be true: the first is clearly not. Numerically, comrade Sell's "over 1,000" is not a qualitative improvement on what SPEW has been organising for quite some time now. (For instance, the report of last year's school told us that "around 1,000 people" were there.<sup>2</sup> Exactly the same phrase pops up in the coverage of the 2012 event.<sup>3</sup>)

Was there a "qualitative" change in the social composition of the school? Well, despite a noticeably larger percentage of younger comrades milling around (see below), clearly not. The majority participation was still from the older generation - the fundamental make-up of SPEW's ranks has not been visibly transformed by an influx of new forces either from youth or the working class itself.

Which leaves us with the politics, of course. And here again it was very much business as usual, unfortunately. Aside from the rallies, the school consisted of 33 sessions. In these there was a smattering of non-SPEW speakers, but these activists were mostly from anti-cuts, low-pay and similar campaigns, or were billed according to their particular unions (of course, these comrades could also have been members of SPEW or its international grouping anyway<sup>4</sup>). So, as in all previous years, we had an intensely insular event in political terms, where leading members talked to other members and supporters about how really, *really* good SPEW politics are.

## Culture

Inevitably, a culture like this on today's left produces sects defined by a set of ideas that have ossified into dogma and a politically and



Confident, but not closed-minded

theoretically passive rank and file. This year, I thought this problem was quite neatly illustrated by the CPGB's decision to invite Lars T Lih to one of our London Communist Forums, staged in a nearby venue, an hour or so after the final rally at Socialism. It was shame that no SPEW comrades attended - for many, no doubt, it was a meeting too far after what must have been an exhausting weekend. For others, however, it was clearly a reflex act of sect patriotism. One CPGB comrade reported handing a leaflet advertising the LCF to a young SPEWer who, after spotting the name of the speaker, said, "Ah, that's the bloke Peter Taaffe doesn't like" - as if that settled the question.

To be fair to the young comrade, Taaffe did not have *that* much more of substance to offer by way of critique in his relatively lengthy article on Lih in the organisation's monthly journal earlier this year.<sup>5</sup> However, in it he tells us that the reason he bothers to pen the hatchet job at all is a response to the fact that some on the left - recoiling from the crude characterisation of Lenin as "a brutal dictator" - are "[turning] to Lars T Lih". This is in the context where there is "an element of the reappearance of the 1960s" in academia - something to be encouraged: "The enormous radicalisation of students and academics which developed then was a reflection and, to some extent, precursor to the mass movements of workers in the 1960s and 1970s."

In this fluid situation, the crude character assassinations of Lenin clunked out by the likes of Service, Figs and Pipes no longer suffice: a "more 'subtle' approach is required, given the protracted crisis of capitalism, which has seen a renewed interest in socialism and Marxism". Step forward, Lars T Lih, who, while he is "more sympathetic to Lenin", attempts to gut the man's ideas of their revolutionary context and paint him in the colours of "some kind of woolly liberal", as the (naturally) partisan intro to comrade Taaffe's piece puts it.

So the need to counter the ideas of Lih is hardly a trivial one, then. In fact,

one might expect comrade Taaffe to be all the more keen to cross swords with this "subtle" corruptor of Leninism, given there have been some dissenting comrades in his very own organisation who have turned to Lih in the recent past to interrogate their tradition and, as Paul Demarty put it in these pages, "[blow] apart the pseudo-Leninism of the bureaucratic sects".<sup>6</sup>

However, it simply would not feature in the mental landscape of the SPEW leaders to actually *invite* Lih to the major educational event in their annual calendar; to give him a platform to expound and defend his views in an extended exchange with his critic and to give the audience the opportunity to interrogate both Lih and Taaffe on the details and nuances of their stances - and perhaps arrive at totally different theoretical conclusion to *both* of them.

No, no, no! This is not the purpose of SPEW educational events at all! As a leading member once told us when we were discussing the relative merits of *The Socialist* and *Weekly Worker*, this sort of thing would simply "confuse" the poor, benighted rank and file.

I use this example not as special pleading for the ideas of Lars Lih. As I mention above, the terrible fact is that there were no debates with contending Marxist views in the movement at all at this year's Socialism. Rather, I raise it to contrast the SPEW leadership's method to a genuinely rigorous and scientific approach to the body of theory that constitutes Marxism - a contested, constantly refined arena of conflicting ideas and perspectives. Not a finished dogma that it is now simply necessary to learn.

A partial qualification to this criticism is the fact that - again this year - the session chairs had no problem about bringing CPGBers and members of other groups into the debates following the main openings; they were generous with their interpretations of the five minutes allocated for contributions and even, in some meetings, thanked our comrades for sparking debate and highlighting differences in the approach of our two organisations. This culture also found reflection outside the meeting

halls, where our comrades did pretty brisk paper sales, found a willingness to take and read our leaflets and got into some interesting discussions and comradely arguments.

Clearly, this is a confident organisation that feels it has weathered the storms of the late 80s and early 90s and seen off its most serious rival. The travails of the Socialist Workers Party are a definite contributor to SPEW's upbeat assessments of its immediate future and its robust morale. For instance, a number of more experienced cadre agreed with my suggestion that at least part of the (still small) influx of youth that the organisation has had is composed of comrades who might in different times have gone to the SWP. Nowadays, of course, even a cursory internet search will quickly reveal that sect as tainted goods following the Delta debacle.<sup>7</sup>

## Myopia

However, SPEW has *persevered* rather than genuinely *developed*. Tenacity is an admirably quality and this trend in the workers' movement has shown plenty of it in its time - but it is no substitute for genuine thought and there is a worryingly unreflective, uncritical view of the organisation's history. Small organisational successes in the here and now are not conclusive proof of fidelity to political principle in general or that the crises that badly mauled SPEW and its forerunners in the past are now simply history.

This is a characteristic sect myopia that the comrades unfortunately share with the SWP. The latter organisation seems to have learned nothing from its recent series of political and organisational disasters - disasters the SWP leadership now seems absolutely determined to repeat.<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, in the Socialism session on the Scottish independence referendum, for Socialist Party Scotland national secretary Phillip Stott the killer vindication for the 'yes' position was the claim that large sections of the working class and youth - especially in the major conurbations

- wanted independence. The 'yes' campaign was dubbed a "working class revolt" in this session (while in another session on 'Trotskyism in the 21st century' Peter Taaffe referred to it as "a proletarian revolt"). So, apparently, the job of Marxists is to tail such nationalist sentiments when they appear in the class - certainly not to confront it and launch a critical dialogue with those who embrace it. Then to give it a little 'transitional method' glitter by raising the demand for an "independent socialist Scotland" - even though socialism in one country is not simply a theoretical impossibility, but a recipe for Stalinist-style horror, as we were told by a leading SPEW comrade in a simultaneous session in the same building.

Likewise, we were told that - while everyone in the Sunday session on 'Ukip, Europe and immigration: a Marxist approach' of course supported open borders - the method of Marxism apparently *precludes* you from actually saying that publicly, as the majority of working class people do not agree.

Examples of the advocacy of this approach from the Socialism weekend were legion - as they are, to varying degrees, across the whole left unfortunately. It is a hopeless, non-Marxist method, comrades. Again in the event's closing rally, comrade Sell correctly observed that today "socialist ideas are not popular", but she was apparently confident that "more and more people will take up socialist ideas" - spontaneously presumably, without those who honour themselves with the title of 'Marxists' arguing for them, even if they start in a small minority.

This 'path of least resistance' politics can, as we have seen in the cases of both SPEW and the SWP, win some short-term popularity for the sect - perhaps even more for the front it operates behind. However, because it is not a unity forged around the open fight for a principled Marxist programme, it inevitably sows the seeds of division and decline pretty quickly - as the leaderships of both organisations should have the gumption to recall.

Personally, I cannot help remembering Rob Hoveman, then a minor SWP luminary, implacably listening to me criticising his organisation for a list of similar sins, while we relaxed in a pub after a Socialist Alliance meeting, on the eve of the SWP decamping to what it imagined to be the greener pastures of Respect. The comrade waited patiently till I paused and, with a tolerantly amiable smile, said: "Well, it works for us, Mark" - before ambling away to find someone *much* more important to talk to.

I wonder if he still thinks so ●

mark.fischer@weeklyworker.co.uk

## Notes

1. www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/19647/10-11-2014/socialism-14-infused-with-contagious-confidence.
2. *The Socialist* November 6 2013.
3. *The Socialist* November 7 2013.
4. The Committee for a Workers' International, whose website claims to have "parties, groups or individuals in over 45 countries around the world".
5. *Socialism Today* February 2014.
6. *Weekly Worker* February 20 2014.
7. Reflecting the slightly skewed importance that SPEW gives to the recruitment of younger comrades, Hannah Sell called on the audience in the final rally to draw in new comrades "in their school, their college, their workplace" - even though the majority of people present were clearly *not* 'youth'.
8. See Peter Manson's reviews of the SWP's first two *Pre-conference Bulletins* in the October 9 and November 6 issues of the *Weekly Worker*.

LRC

# Threat of witch-hunt averted

Stan Keable reports on the Labour Representation Committee's November 8 annual conference

Thankfully, the “thoroughly bureaucratic, intolerant and dangerous” proposal<sup>1</sup> put before the Labour Representation Committee’s annual conference was pulled at the last minute.

Michael Calderbank, on behalf of the LRC’s national committee, agreed to remit the ‘LRC culture’ section of the NC statement that had been presented to the conference in Friends House. This, amongst other things, threatened to “suspend or terminate” the membership of individuals, affiliates or local LRC groups that are guilty of “wilfully misrepresenting the views of the LRC, its elected national bodies or officers, whether to other LRC members or the wider public, by any means” (item (c)).

So neither the ‘LRC culture’ section, proposed by the NC, nor the Labour Party Marxists amendment to it was voted on. This amendment would have deleted all but the first two paragraphs, and listed examples of “bureaucratic tendencies” which “we must guard against” in order to defend freedom of discussion and the “open, inclusive and mutually supportive atmosphere” which the NC statement claimed to defend.

Moving the section, comrade Calderbank had reminded us that the first priority is “getting the politics right” and stated, quite rightly, that “the culture of the organisation is important too”. Debate is essential “within a shared viewpoint”. I agree. Interestingly, he explicitly upheld the right to heckle, praising comrade Walter Wolfgang of Labour CND - who was present - and had been manhandled out of the 2005 Labour Party conference for heckling Jack Straw over the invasion of Iraq. As James Marshall wrote recently, heckling is a “time-honoured way for the weak to challenge the power of the strong”.<sup>2</sup>

Accepting the right to heckle was not the view of all, however. Communication Workers Union activist Gary Heather, who had been chair of Greater London LRC for a number of years, “reluctantly” supported the NC’s proposal, and was “disappointed that it was necessary”. He could not “see why heckling is necessary”. Likewise Susan Press, who had “chaired the worst meetings of the national committee, where people were shouting each other down” (I believe this must refer to the notorious April 2012 NC row, which broke up in disarray, and was never minuted). She said: “Heckling is not acceptable in any shape or form. It is the last refuge of those who have no rational argument.”

I would ask comrades Press and Heather to reconsider this one-sided, negative, fixed view of heckling, evidently born of bad experiences. A heckle can be a quick way of contributing to a debate without wasting time, whether in support of a speaker or critical of what they are saying, and is not always and inevitably disruptive of the discussion.

Of course, heckling might sometimes be unacceptably disruptive - the chair should intervene when appropriate - or it might be off-putting for a particular speaker, who is certainly entitled to say “No heckling, please”. But a blanket ban would be overkill, and accusing those who do not want such a ban of being in favour of disruption, as some do, is inaccurate and unfair.

## Bad behaviour

Explaining why the NC had found it necessary to make its proposals, comrade Calderbank surprised me by referring to “bad behaviour” in the Workers Revolutionary Party and Socialist Workers Party. Both of them, he said, had “covered up bad behaviour” - something the LRC must not do, if it is to be a ‘non-sectarian’ organisation, free

from the deficiencies of the ‘sectarian’ left. The reference to the SWP is, of course, its cover-up and mishandling of the ‘comrade Delta’ rape accusation.

Comrade Calderbank here spectacularly misses the point of the SWP’s deficiencies in respect of the Delta case, in my view. The SWP did not have a policy of tolerating rape - or sexual abuse or discrimination: quite the opposite. It did, however - and still does - run an extremely bureaucratic regime - by which I mean a regime which restricts debate to such an extent that anyone expressing a dissident viewpoint soon finds themselves subject to a silencing order or even summary expulsion. It is precisely the outlawing of free speech, and the forbidding of public criticism, that creates fertile conditions for cover-ups by a ruling or dominating bureaucracy. It is precisely the open reporting of NC meetings, and *Labour Briefing* editorial board meetings, which can help to guard against bureaucratic cover-ups and keep our leadership accountable.

“A lot of nonsense” has been written about the NC proposals, said comrade Calderbank, and assured us that the NC was not “preparing for a witch-hunt” - but, there was “no place in the LRC for sectarian activity”. Not very reassuring. Now “sectarian activity” must certainly be a very bad thing, not to be tolerated, but in case anyone wondered what he meant by “sectarian”, he went on: “Telling lies to discredit the LRC or to build their sect” might help to sell “sectarian gossip sheets ...”

Having been explicitly accused of “misrepresentation” in “a deliberate attempt to undermine the LRC” in my report of the October NC meeting<sup>3</sup> (an irresponsible accusation not backed up by any explicit quote, nor by ‘putting the record straight’ with a public reply), I cannot avoid the conclusion that he was talking about my article, and the “sectarian gossip sheet” was a reference to the *Weekly Worker*. Item (c), quoted above, in the NC’s “examples” of behaviour which the LRC will “refuse to tolerate”, fits perfectly with comrade Calderbank’s hopelessly, if unintentionally, sectarian phrases.

Nevertheless, in moving Labour Party Marxists’ amendment, I accepted comrade Calderbank’s, and the NC’s, good intentions. But, I said, “the best of intentions can lead to the worst of outcomes”. They do not intend a witch-hunt, and they do not want to be expelling people - they just want comrades to toe the line and obey their interpretation of acceptable behaviour. Sorry, comrades, no thanks. The inclusive and tolerant atmosphere we all yearn for must, above all, be tolerant of the free expression of minority views (within a shared socialist viewpoint, of course). It goes without saying that violence or the threat of violence should not be tolerated, but the NC proposals are “superfluous” in this regard, I said.

In the discussion, comrade John Moloney also asserted that the proposals were superfluous. Points (c), (d) and (e) (“wilfully misrepresenting” etc, “disruptive behaviour” etc, and “bringing the LRC into disrepute”) were “totally subjective”, while “expulsion for violence or threats of violence don’t need new rules”, he argued. And points (a) and (b) (“physical, sexual or verbal abuse, attacks or harassment”; and “discrimination or abuse on the grounds of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, or religion/belief”), he said, “we do anyway”.

Graham Durham said the NC proposals were “politically motivated”. “The class wants to fight”, he said. “This is a motion to expel those who want to fight.” And the alternative NC slate led by comrade Durham, in their flyer, said:

“We support the right of socialist political groups and individuals to have freedom of discussion in the LRC and are opposed to any attempts to introduce codes to allow exclusion or expulsion.”

John McDonnell MP, unusually, intervened in the debate to correct an assertion by comrade Durham that the origin of the NC’s concerns about LRC culture had been an incident in a meeting in a House of Commons committee room, where he had been accused of supporting the “fascist” government in Kiev - but, as he had explained at the time, he had been misquoted, and had never said that he supported the Kiev government (leaving aside whether it is fascist). The misrepresentation had been resolved immediately, in that meeting. In fact, explained comrade McDonnell, the ‘LRC culture’ proposals arose in response to bad behaviour at NC meetings at which he had been absent, due to ill-health.

Any instance of “disruptive”, “threatening” or “bullying” behaviour should, likewise, be dealt with at the time, and not stored up as a perpetual complaint against those you disagree with. The “worst” behaviour was undoubtedly at the April 2012 NC meeting (which I did not attend), and I do not envy Susan Press the extremely difficult task of trying to keep order as chair of that meeting. I understand it broke up in disarray and, as minutes of the meeting were never distributed, I have never seen a proper report of what happened. So we are left with mutual recriminations and vague, unsubstantiated allegations and generalisations. After two and a half years, it is futile to attempt retrospective disciplinary action by inventing an inappropriate catch-all code - which is what the NC’s proposals amounted to.

In the conference itself - despite sharp political “attacks”, difficult moments of heckling, individuals occasionally speaking over or ignoring the chair, sometimes continuing speaking after being told to stop - all these instances were handled with reasonable discretion at the time. The organisation showed itself tolerant of debate, and thankfully did not give way to the few philistine voices wailing against “wasting time” on debate, or complaining about “sectarian divisions” - read ‘political debate’.

## Left ‘pressure’

Last year I reported a one-third drop in attendance at the annual conference - it was down to a little over 100 in 2013. This year, however, I am pleased to report no reduction in attendance, with approximately 110 comrades packed into the small hall at London’s Friends House. Perhaps we have passed a low point, and can now start to grow. In any case, tolerance of minority views, debate and majority decisions is the way forward. United action requires that minorities be heard - or else why should they join, and why should they stay?

No NC report was presented to conference, and no membership figures or list of current affiliates were given. But comrade McDonnell candidly reported the views of some affiliates, who have said, “We can’t send delegates, because you don’t do anything”. Sussex LRC, with a record of effective organisation, public meetings and campaigning rivalled only by Brent and Harrow, submitted an emergency motion to “restructure” the NC, which NC member Clare Wadey described as “too large at 67 members, or inoperative” and her admission that “it has been totally ineffective” was not challenged. Political secretary Pete Firmin confirmed that “everyone agrees” that the NC needs to be restructured, but “the question is how to do it”. And, on that

basis, conference voted to remit the Sussex proposal to the new NC.

Guest speaker Matt Wrack of the Fire Brigades Union brought “greetings from the TUC general council”, and said that to get rid of this coalition government the only alternative is a Labour government - “but we need to have a discussion about that”. He contended that “Toning down the rhetoric to get Labour elected is a disastrous route” and was very critical of the trade unions’ role in the Labour Party. After a unanimous anti-austerity vote at the TUC congress in September, almost all union delegates at the national policy forum had voted down an “emergency budget” resolution. Instead of posing “austerity lite” against “austerity armageddon”, we need a “socialist renaissance”. He commented: “People are prepared to fight, but do not think the organised left is the answer.”

Disagreement over our assessment of the state of the workers’ movement was brought out in the hustings session, where two of the three rival candidates for the post of political secretary presented their cases. In the event, Pete Firmin was elected with 59 votes to Graham Durham’s 21, while Louise Reece, who did not speak, received 12 votes. Comrade Durham’s oft-repeated charge that Pete Firmin and the LRC leadership are pessimistic and defeatist, while the working class is itching to fight if only it is given a lead, was countered by comrade Firmin’s sober assessment that the “bad state of the movement is reflected in the bad state of the LRC” - the sort of honesty that is necessary to face up to, and remedy, the weaknesses of the organisation and the workers’ movement as a whole. Self-deception does not help at all.

Vicky Morris of the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty moved the successful motion, ‘Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory’. This commits the LRC to “advocate a Labour government as the best outcome of the May 2015 election” and to “advocate a Labour vote, at the same time as advancing working class measures as demands for the labour movement to press upon the Labour leaders ...” Comrade Morris said that Labour had adopted policies to abolish the bedroom tax and repeal the Social Care Act as a result of pressure, and such pressure could achieve similar results with respect to a Labour government in office. Assessing the “condition of labour movement forces”, she said that

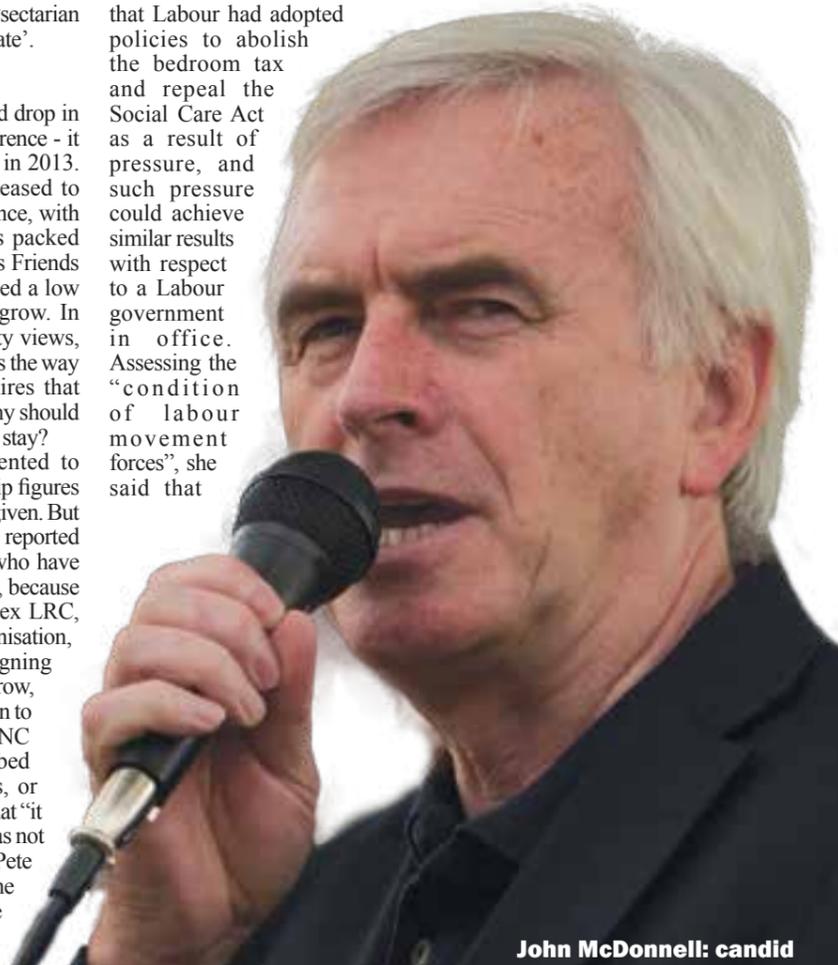
the “direness of the Labour Party reflects and feeds back onto the direness of the trade unions, which, in turn, reflects and feeds back onto the direness of the socialist left”. In these circumstances, she argued, “there is no realistic alternative to voting Labour and the election of Labour government”.

The NC statement, moved by comrade McDonnell and adopted by conference with minor amendments (apart from the ‘LRC culture’ section, of course), offered a similar perspective: “Our task is to campaign for the Labour leadership to represent the interests of the working class by offering a real alternative to austerity in the form of socialist policies.” Left MPs, said comrade McDonnell, must resist the attempted rightwing coup against Ed Miliband: “The first meeting of the LRC NC must set about the task of bringing together left MPs and councillors on a socialist platform, so they can become a distinct socialist element influencing the Labour government after the May general election.” The election may produce a small Labour majority - in which case we must ensure “the socialist left is a distinct element in the coalition of forces behind the Labour government”. Labour may be simply the biggest party, in which case we must argue against a coalition with other parties, and for a minority Labour government to “enact policies in the interests of the working class”.

Comrade McDonnell welcomed the Greater London LRC amendment to the NC statement, under which “the LRC will prioritise support for Labour candidates that support LRC policies”. This is an improvement on the AWL’s call for an across-the-board Labour vote, and sensibly allows us to direct our limited forces in support of leftwing and socialist candidates ●

## Notes

1. See <http://labourpartymarxists.org.uk/the-culture-we-need-comes-with-thorns>.
2. *Ibid.*
3. ‘Inclusivity and intolerance’ *Weekly Worker* October 9; and <http://labourpartymarxists.org.uk/lrc-inclusivity-and-intolerance>.



John McDonnell: candid

**REVIEW****Predicting the future: a risky business**

# ‘March of history’ and the question of agency

Immanuel Wallerstein, Randall Collins, Michael Mann, Georgi Derluguian, Craig Calhoun **Does capitalism have a future?** Oxford University Press, 2013, pp192, £14.99

**A**s its title suggests, *Does capitalism have a future?* is an attempt on the part of five prominent sociologists to discuss the prospects for the system of capital, and the likelihood of its replacement by a new social order. The co-authors write from a varied range of theoretical perspectives and, as would be expected, arrive at different conclusions as to what they believe may be to come.

## Three problems

In the first chapter - ‘Structural crisis, or why capitalists may no longer find capitalism rewarding’ - Immanuel Wallerstein gives his prediction as to what the future may hold for humanity. Wallerstein has certainly been heavily influenced by (and has had an influence on) Marxist thought, although he seems slightly reluctant to fully identify himself with the Marxist movement.<sup>1</sup> He is well known for developing the ‘world system theory’ as a framework of analysis. According to this, the modern, capitalist global

system, which he argues originated in 16th century Europe and North America,<sup>2</sup> is a “world economy” characterised by a global division of labour and multiple politico-cultural units brought together in an inter-state system headed by a hegemon state. Wallerstein contends that the present world system will in the coming decades undergo a transition into a qualitatively different one. He is not saying that this will necessarily be socialism, as Marxists understand it, or even necessarily a more democratic or egalitarian form of social organisation.

For Wallerstein the defining characteristic of capitalism is that production is aimed at the “endless accumulation of capital - the accumulation of capital in order to accumulate more capital” with existing political structures necessarily facilitating this drive (p10). It is this drive towards endless accumulation that is unique to the capitalist world system, according to Wallerstein - commodity production and wage-labour have occurred in pre-capitalist

societies (although they were obviously not as prevalent). It is this system, we are told, that will reach its limits in the next century and be succeeded by a new mode of production.

Three main problems for capital are identified. The cost to the capitalist class globally of the managers and middle stratum (particularly the former) is increasing and taking its toll on profits, whilst deruralisation is shrinking the pool of “potential low-wage workers” (p23). With ecological crisis looming, capitalists will find it harder and harder to externalise costs of production, such as waste and resource renewal, thanks to state regulation. Furthermore, the history of capitalism has seen an increase in government taxation that can only increase if problems of ecology, as well as infrastructure, education and welfare, are to be addressed. Increased personnel costs, the decreasing ability of capital to externalise costs, and the social necessity of increased taxation will squeeze capital to breaking point.

Ultimately, Wallerstein contends,

governments will find themselves without the means to “reform the capitalist system, such that it can renew its ability to pursue effectively the endless accumulation of capital” (p32). The rise of the ‘Brics’ and decline of US hegemony - rather than revitalising capitalism, as liberals currently suggest - will simply lead to an increasing number of capitals vying for surplus value and a more multipolar world order characterised in the short term by protectionism.

So how does he envisage the post-capitalist world system to come? Here we are told there is, broadly speaking, a struggle between two camps, themselves split: that of the ‘spirit of Davos’ and that of the ‘spirit of Porto Alegre’. The triumph of the former would lead to a successor system characterised by hierarchy and surplus extraction, while the victory of the latter would produce a relatively democratic and egalitarian system (possibly still characterised by class divisions). The camp of Davos is split between hard reactionaries in favour of austerity

and repression, on the one hand, and proponents of green capital, diversity and meritocracy, on the other. For its part, the camp of Porto Alegre is conceived as being split, not principally between reformists and revolutionaries, but between ‘horizontalists’ and ‘vertical’ organisations seeking to win political power. The outcome is not determined and “we have at best a 50-50 chance of getting the world system we prefer” (p35).

## Missing agent

Randall Collins also predicts a terminal crisis of capitalism, which he argues will be brought about by a massive technological displacement of labour in the next 50 years. Collins calls his approach a “stripped-down Marxism” (p38), focusing on the long-term trend towards the technological displacement of labour under the capitalist mode of production.

Collins’ central argument is that “the process of technological displacement of labour, driven to a sufficient extreme, will generate the

# What we fight for

long-term and quite possibly terminal crisis of capitalism, all by itself and without the other processes in Marxian and neo-Marxian theory" (p37). Supposedly this process will lead to such high levels of unemployment on a global level that the capitalist social order would buckle under the political pressures that would be unleashed. In particular Collins sees the displacement of "middle class" admin and service workers by information technology as a big problem for capitalism, since it is such sectors that have absorbed those displaced by mechanisation.

'Escape routes' for capitalism in the face of technological displacement that are no longer viable are identified. The now closed escapes include mass education, which has employed large numbers of staff and in which credential inflation has absorbed massive amounts of surplus labour. Higher education is facing a serious crisis of funding in the west - major struggles have taken place over this issue and the current Anglo-American tuition fees approach has led to a situation where US student debt reached almost 10% of GDP in 2011 (p55).

Government investment and employment has been used in the past to address unemployment, but Collins argues that fiscal austerity and the effects of technological displacement in the public sector itself make this option less viable than before. He does not rule out the development of new industries on the basis of new technologies, but argues - correctly in my view - that there is absolutely no guarantee of this preventing the rise of structural unemployment.

So what exactly will follow the unprecedented levels of unemployment to come? Collins acknowledges that the "radicalism of a movement is not correlated with the degree of immiseration" (p58), so socialist revolution is not the inevitable result: ideological factors have a role to play. However, he predicts that a state crisis may lead to the replacement of capitalism by a social order that

reduces inequality by roughly half (as he claims 'state socialism' achieved in the 20th century). He argues that this would not be the end of history, but may lead to a cycle of revolution and capitalist restoration.

Despite the fact that both co-authors emphasise at the end of their analyses the ability of agents to shape structure, Collins and Wallerstein seem particularly economic in their approach. The strength and coherence of contending social forces is certainly given less attention than it deserves, considering where we are headed. Where these thinkers depart most radically from Marxism (as I understand it) is in their refusal to name the international working class as the structurally determined emancipatory agent (due to its relation to the means of production); an agent capable of replacing capitalism with a democratic social order, in which the forces of production are set in motion in order to fulfil human need.

## A 'viable' capitalism?

Michael Mann rejects the approach of studying societies as if they are systems. Instead they are "multiple, overlapping networks of interaction, of which four networks - ideological, economic, military and political power relations - are the most important" (p72). These networks supposedly have their "own distinctive causal chains" (p96), but also overlap and interact (somehow).

The examples of the great recession and great depression are used to attempt to prove that, because people have and act on ideas, no crisis is strictly economic or a consequence of the economic system as such, but is a consequence of actors' choices and other structures. We are also told that these crises were not global, since the effects were not identical across the world (is this not due to a global division of labour and the fact that productive processes are not spread

in a uniform manner?).

So what does Mann foresee? He argues that US hegemony will end and that the Republicans may well deepen its crisis through destroying consumer demand. This will help lead to a multipolar world. He essentially takes a developmentalist position in respect to the west and the 'rest', whereby the latter will follow the road of the former, with class 'compromise' leading to a greater degree of welfarism and the gradual levelling of global living standards. Unemployment, we are told, is a western rather than global problem and increased productivity and consumer demand in developing countries will see that it remains as such.

Mann argues that new needs may well develop to sustain low growth and hold unemployment back at around 10%-15% (p91). For him it is not capitalism (provided external threats are kept at bay), but revolutionary socialism, for whom "the end really is nigh" (p92). The external threats to the 'fairer' capitalism which shall emerge are: nuclear war (possibly caused by 'rogue' or non-state actors) and global warming. Mann holds out hope that climate change may be staved off by green industries, but argues that "market-regulating supranational collectivism" will probably be required, and is pessimistic as to the likelihood of this being achieved before "tangible" (read: devastating) effects are felt in high-emitting countries (p95).

Unlike Mann, Craig Calhoun argues that reactionary political forces are endangering the ability of the state to enable the reproduction of the conditions of capitalist production and are producing destabilising levels of inequality. However, like Mann, he also sees the main threats to the capitalist system as geopolitical and environmental ones. Calhoun warns of the potentially destructive consequences of resource competition over water, energy resources, minerals and arable land. Such conflicts would only be exacerbated by the ecological crisis facing the system. Furthermore, with the decline of US hegemony, the possibility of upholding the 'rules of the game' of global capitalism may become more uncertain. A multipolar world with dwindling resources may well be a more unstable one.

Both Mann and Calhoun contend that ecological crisis may bring down an *economically* viable capitalism, with the latter arguing that capitalism may have to change in order to survive (p180). But surely a system of production and distribution cannot be considered viable, if the logic of that system's development drives it to destroy the conditions for its own existence? The ecological crisis facing humanity cannot be separated from profit-driven production. Equally it is the system of states upholding property relations on a territorial basis that produces war and has led to the creation of weapons capable of wiping out human civilisation. Class rule and conflict are inextricably linked. It is class rule that makes the use of weapons of mass destruction a possibility. The threat of a catastrophic war that could end capitalism is not one that is external to it.

Mann and Calhoun emphasise, to a greater degree than the other co-authors, the unpredictability of the future. The former puts this in terms of whether actors behave rationally or "ideologically" (p97). This is a false opposition, the real question is: In line with what ideology will actors act rationally?

## Ruling class failures

Georgi Derluguian's contribution to the book looks at Bolshevik and Stalinist state-building before examining the fall of the USSR and specifically the handling of its fall by its rul-

ing elite. He asks what lessons can be learned from the behaviour of that elite in the state's final years.

Derluguian accepts that the USSR was not a separate social order analogous to capitalism - its collapse cannot be compared to the possible collapse of capitalism. Nevertheless, the aim is to look at how a ruling class behaves when faced with a crisis so overpowering that there is no hope of maintaining the status quo, in order to address the danger of a non-socialist transition to post-capitalism, which could be characterised by social disintegration.

He characterises the post-Stalin USSR as a bureaucratic oligarchy and argues that, to some extent as a result of the cold war, the USSR was partially integrated into the world system. He argues the transition to a 'normal' capitalist state could well have been achieved in a manner that would have protected the place of Russia in the world system through pulling out of the global periphery and eastern Europe, through bilateral nuclear disarmament along with the US, and through an influx of western investment in its industries, in which the cost of labour was low. Derluguian contends that this may well have been Gorbachev's aim.

Instead what occurred was a colossal "failure of collective action on the part of the *nomenklatura*" (p120) that meant Russia could not negotiate its way into reconciliation with the west from a position of strength. After the loss of the European satellite states in 1989, the Russian state fragmented along the lines of "bureaucratic turf in the industrial sectors and national republics" (*ibid*). The bureaucrats "squandered and cannibalised Soviet assets in a panicked rush to protect their individual oligarchic positions against both Gorbachev's purging and the prospect of popular rebellions" (p123). The means of production were effectively taken into private hands before the privatisation legislation had been passed (p121).

Despite the crisis of the ruling class, what popular opposition to the Communist Party existed did not have the organisational capacity to overthrow it and affect the direction of events. The principal lesson Derluguian draws from these events is that "oligarchic elites... can grievously botch their transitions" and that "insurgent movements" must be able to act decisively in such situations (p123).

*Does capitalism have a future?* offers an interesting selection of differing, and rather sobering, perspectives on where humanity is headed. It addresses the long-term issues largely ignored in mainstream political discourse and the structural possibilities confronting us, posing important questions for political actors in our time. However, what is largely lacking in the analyses of the co-authors are suggestions as to how various agents (parties, classes, ideological 'camps', etc) could overcome their adversaries and act in such a way as to achieve their aims within our present context. This would obviously be a major undertaking, but it is absolutely necessary from the point of view of the left today.

If the book has a lesson for communists, it is that we cannot rely on the 'march of history', on the development of productive forces or on capitalist crisis to deliver humanity unto socialism. Prevailing social conditions allow for multiple outcomes and only the self-conscious agency of the working class can produce a progressive alternative to the current order. But we must get our act together, somehow, if we are to take the future into our own hands ●

Callum Williamson

## Notes

1. See the 2013 interview with Wallerstein: [www.jwsr.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Williams\\_Interview\\_vol119\\_no2.pdf](http://www.jwsr.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Williams_Interview_vol119_no2.pdf).
2. I Wallerstein *World systems analysis: an introduction* London 2004, p23.

## Fighting fund

### Striking a chord

The problem with the wrong postage on issue 1032 of our paper (October 30) rumbles on. As readers will recall, that issue included the latest edition of *Labour Party Marxist*, but we didn't stick on enough stamps - we were 4p short!

Some subscribers got a card from Royal Mail saying they needed to cough up the missing 4p (plus a £1 surcharge), but others have heard nothing after almost two weeks. While the original failing was obviously ours, this has been compounded greatly by RM apparently sitting on most of this mail without advising either their customers or ourselves. It was the first issue featuring the full-colour front page too!

Anyway, let me repeat: if you let us know you didn't get your copy, we'll extend your sub by a week to make up for it. Or else we'll send you a replacement - just tell us which you prefer. We've already sent out a second copy to some people.

But this cock-up hasn't put off our supporters from donating to the *Weekly Worker*. For example, TR decided to make a bank transfer for £30 - that definitely covered the cost of sending him a second paper! Then there was a £50 PayPal gift from new donor DS - thank you, comrade: it's much appreciated. Plus £20 from regular contributor NW, using the same method, and

two handy cheques from KL (£25) and FO (£20). Finally the standing orders from six regular donors this week totalled £128, which means we received £273 altogether.

That takes our running total up to £611, but, don't forget, the target is now £1,750, which means we need another £1,139 in less than three weeks.

When it comes to online readers, it's comrades in the USA who are still edging out those in Britain - we had 1,246 US visits, compared to 1,198 from the UK. Once again, those readership figures come with a health warning. I can't really believe that we are only getting 2,768 visits all told, especially when you think that the monitor for our old website sometimes informed us we were getting 10 times more readers!

Well, I don't know which set of figures is/was (more) accurate, but I do know that most of those readers really value their paper - our call for a consistent fight for Marxist unity on a principled basis strikes a chord with them. If you appreciate that message too, then you know what to do. Make a donation - or, better still, set up a standing order! ●

Robbie Rix

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

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

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# weekly worker

## Rightwing press fears a Labour victory

# Coup that never was

The campaign against Ed Miliband is part of a long tradition, writes **Eddie Ford**

Ed Miliband is not having a happy time. The polls continue to show chronic underperformance, to put it mildly. ICM on November 10 claimed that support for Labour had fallen three points to 32%, giving the party a mere single-point lead over the Conservatives, whilst the United Kingdom Independence Party was on 14% and the Liberal Democrats were registering 11%. Perhaps even more distressingly for the Labour leader, the same poll had his personal ratings falling to a new low of minus 42% compared with Cameron's minus 3% - only Nick Clegg has a worse showing, and a recent YouGov survey suggests that Miliband is now even less popular than his Lib Dem counterpart. Meanwhile, according to a Fabian Society study, there has been a 4% fall in support amongst those who voted Labour in 2010.

As for Lord Ashcroft, the king of pollsters, he has the Tories on 30%, Labour 29%, Ukip 16%, Lib Dems 10% and others on 8%.<sup>2</sup> Labour, however, has only a fragile lead in a string of key marginal seats, which could be wiped out if Ukip voters (or potential voters) can be won over to the Conservatives - which is a touch-and-go prospect, as Ukip still seems to be gathering momentum, with the Rochester and Strood by-election only two weeks away (its candidate, Mark Reckless, has a 12-point lead over his Tory rival<sup>3</sup>).

In the same vein though, Ashcroft calculated that the Tories can afford to lose no more than 21 seats to Labour if they are to remain the largest party. Interestingly, he said voters were more likely (and swing voters twice as likely) to say they would rather have Cameron as prime minister *even if it means the Tories remain in power rather than vice versa* - but the reverse was true for Labour. People were twice as likely, and Labour voters *three times* as likely, to say they would rather have Labour in government even if it means Miliband becoming prime minister than they were to say the opposite - only 7% said they "would rather have Ed Miliband as PM than David Cameron, even if it means having Labour in government". Must be nice to be loved.

Adding to Labour's woes, a recent *Guardian* analysis indicates that the party in Scotland could lose 20 or more of its Westminster seats to the Scottish National Party - posing a direct threat to Miliband's chances of securing a workable majority in May.<sup>4</sup>

But, whatever the exact swings or fluctuations might be, as things stand now it is looking unlikely that Labour will be able to form a majority government on its own - though, of course, you could say exactly the same about the Tories. Almost anything can happen.

## Frenzy

We should hardly be surprised that Miliband is doing so exceptionally poorly in the polls at the moment. Over the week or so we have had a press feeding frenzy about plots and conspiracies against him. From reading these stories you would have got the impression that Miliband was only days away from losing his job. *The Observer* breathlessly told us that 20

shadow cabinet ministers from "all areas" of the party ("bar the hard left") were "on the brink" of calling for him to stand down, maybe in favour of former home secretary Alan Johnson, or even the oleaginous shadow business secretary, Chuka Umunna (November 9). Slipping into a fantasy world, *The Observer* informs its readers that the supposed plotters did not want a destructive leadership contest - fancy that - but would just like to see Johnson, or whoever, take over from Miliband in a bloodless putsch.

Perhaps unexpectedly, the press campaign against Miliband was not instigated by the *Daily Mail* or some other foul rightwing rag, but rather the *New Statesman* - a publication founded in 1913 with the active support of the Webbs and George Bernard Shaw, and which backed Miliband's leadership campaign in 2010. Yet, for all that, the magazine's editor, Jason Crowley, penned a withering assessment of the Labour leader (November 5).<sup>5</sup> Sounding more like a *Daily Telegraph* bore than a progressively-minded journalist, he described Miliband as "very much an old-style Hampstead socialist", who "doesn't really understand the lower middle class or material aspiration" - or "Essex Man or Woman" either. The reason being that he is the "product of this narrow background". Indeed, Miliband apparently has a "deterministic" and "quasi-Marxist" analysis of the present situation, which views the Ukip insurgency, Scottish nationalism, the hollowing out of political parties, Islamist radicalisation, etc as "manifestations of a failed economic model" - by contrast, Crowley 'quotes' Lenin to the effect that there are no "absolutely hopeless situations" for capitalism. What a silly dogmatist Miliband is. Instead, Crowley argued, Labour does best when it has a leader who "seems most in tune with the times" - Attlee in 1945, Wilson in 1966 and, of course, Blair in 1997. In fact, he concluded, it would be better for everyone if Miliband just learned to accept that Europe's "social democratic moment, if it ever existed, is fading into the past" - bring back Blair!

Naturally, the *Daily Mail*, well known for its near pathological hatred of the Labour Party and trade unions - well, virtually the entire human race - instantly picked up on Crowley's article and ran with it: in fact it ran and ran and ran with it. Leading the rightwing pack, the paper proclaimed in a headline that now the "bible of the left turns against Red Ed" because he is a "quasi-Marxist"

- and excitedly told us that there were "rumours swirling" at Westminster that a letter calling on Miliband to go was being prepared by some Labour MPs (November 6).<sup>6</sup> From there, the attack intensified. A few days later the *Mail* carried a two-page article claiming Labour was "committing suicide", presumably by having Miliband as leader, and an editorial innocently poo-pooed the idea that he was becoming the victim of a concerted character assassination attempt by the rightwing press. After all, it said, look at *The Observer's* report about the 20 shadow ministers calling for Miliband's head - and they are *lefties* (November 9).

Another article in the same edition of the paper helpfully informs us that "now 42% of the party's voters say Miliband is not fit to be PM ... and his rivals are far more popular" - before deluging us with largely meaningless statistics. For instance, "if" Ed Miliband's 'exiled' brother became Labour leader, a YouGov poll "suggested" the party would enjoy a "six-point lead" over the Tories<sup>7</sup> - get on that plane now, David. Alternatively, it seems, if Miliband were replaced by Johnson or the "suave" Umunna, Labour's "four-point lead" over the Tories would "double" - and that "extra support" could "gain" Labour 50 more seats. Everything clear now?

Furthermore, the *Mail* believed that Miliband has "just weeks to save his job" and a "poor showing" in the Rochester by-election "could tip him over the edge" - a rather odd analysis, as surely such a scenario would apply far more to Cameron. When Ukip wins on November 20, Cameron's fear must be that a clutch of Tory MPs will jump ship to the ascendant Ukip - throwing his leadership into doubt, not Miliband's. At the very least, we will hear renewed calls for a Tory-Ukip 'pact' - something Cameron clearly does not want to contemplate.

Obviously, the rest of the newspapers piled in to do Miliband over. *The Sun* on *Sunday* went on about the "Labour push to axe Miliband"; *The Times* thought that Miliband has "lost public confidence"; *The Daily Telegraph* spin was: "Labour admits Miliband crisis may cost it election"; and the *Daily Express* entertained its readers with "Labour's turmoil, as 'posse' plots a coup to replace Miliband". From the other end of the spectrum, the normally Labour-loyal *Sunday Mirror* predicted that Miliband has "got six weeks to shape up" (we shall see) and *The Independent on Sunday* (November 9) treated us to a different angle: "Jewish donors drop 'toxic

Miliband" - some people are apparently upset by Miliband's "anti-Israeli" stance over Gaza and Palestine (with actress Maureen Lipman ending her five decades of support for the Labour Party because of its "new" foreign policy).<sup>7</sup>

However, some rightwingers want to play the 'long game' - ie, keep Miliband as leader so they can *continuously* mock him and in that way undermine the Labour Party as a whole. That unpleasant flophouse, Boris Johnson, espoused exactly that strategy in the pages of the *Telegraph* - suggesting the Tories should "save the Panda" (Jack Straw's nickname for Miliband) on the grounds that it "would be in our interests to protect the poor beleaguered left", thus removing the possibility that he is "replaced by someone more threatening" (November 9). *The Sun*, on the other hand, strongly disagreed - there is still the danger, an editorial warned, that Labour could win the election: "As the saying goes, when you strike at the king, you must kill him" (November 11).

Here we come to the heart of the matter. The rightwing press is terrified that 'Red' Ed will somehow win the next general election - which is a bit strange if you think, like some on the left do, that the Labour Party is a bourgeois party just like the Tories and the Lib Dems. But, of course, it is not - though currently the left within it is in a truly wretched state. The *Mail* and all the rest of them demonstrate that the rightwing media will go to almost any lengths to discredit and demonise any Labour leader who is *perceived* to be deviating even in the slightest degree from the neoliberal and 'common sense' consensus.

Meaning, needless to say, that the recent attacks on Miliband are part of a long tradition - a standard feature of British political history. Michael Foot was ceaselessly derided for his supposedly loony left views and for 'inappropriately' wearing a donkey jacket to the Cenotaph. Neil Kinnock was mercilessly mocked and abused as the "Welsh windbag", culminating in the legendary *Sun* front page in which his head was superimposed on a light bulb: "If Kinnock wins today, will the last person to leave Britain please turn out the lights". Lest we forget, Gordon Brown was lampooned as a ditherer who could not even sign his own name. The only Labour leader not to be vilified in this manner was Tony Blair - telling you all you need to know about Blair: the press recognised him as someone they could do a lot of business with.

You can guarantee that, as the general

election draws nearer, Miliband will have many 'light bulbs' attached to him by the press - and far worse besides, especially if the polls look close.

In the end, there was no palace coup or letter demanding - or pleading - that Miliband must go. You might almost think that the press had made it up. Writing in *The Guardian* on November 10, Alan Johnson dashed the hopes of those silly enough to think that a last-minute leadership change was either possible or desirable. Reminding everyone that he has "never sought" the Labour leadership and, "regardless of the circumstances, never will" - Miliband, he said, is "entitled to expect our loyalty". In fact Johnson praised his "courage" in standing up to "vested interests" and declining to follow Cameron down the "populist path" of "economic uncertainty" and an "arbitrary" in-or-out EU referendum.

In a move further intended to close down speculation about Miliband's future, 100 prospective Labour parliamentary candidates signed a letter calling on the "anonymous" rebels to stop "briefing" newspapers and instead rally round the leader - "now is the time to stand our ground and to work even harder for the Labour victory that our communities so desperately need".

No-one should be the slightest bit surprised that absolutely nothing happened - we have been here before. In January 2010 Geoff Hoon and Patricia Hewitt circulated a letter calling for Gordon Brown to go. Then, as now, no saviour came forward. The shamefaced plotters retreated back to the shadows.

Our hatred of the venal and hypocritical press, however, should not blind us to the fact that there is a grain of truth in what they say about Miliband - he is a bad media performer. What about his weird, Dalek-like response to the storm enveloping him: "I don't accept that this matter arises" - who else would come out with such a constipated formulation? ●

eddie.ford@weeklyworker.co.uk

## Notes

1. Which apparently caused champagne corks to pop at Lib Dem HQ.
2. <http://lordashcroftpolls.com/2014/11/ashcroft-national-poll-con-30-lib-29-lib-dem-10-ukip-16-green-7>.
3. <http://lordashcroftpolls.com/2014/11/ukip-lead-12-points-rochester-strood>.
4. *The Guardian* November 3.
5. [www.newstatesman.com/politics/2014/11/ed-miliband-s-problem-not-policy-tone-and-increasingly-he-seems-trapped](http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2014/11/ed-miliband-s-problem-not-policy-tone-and-increasingly-he-seems-trapped).
6. *Daily Mail* November 6.
7. *The Independent on Sunday* November 9.

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