

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

weekly



worker



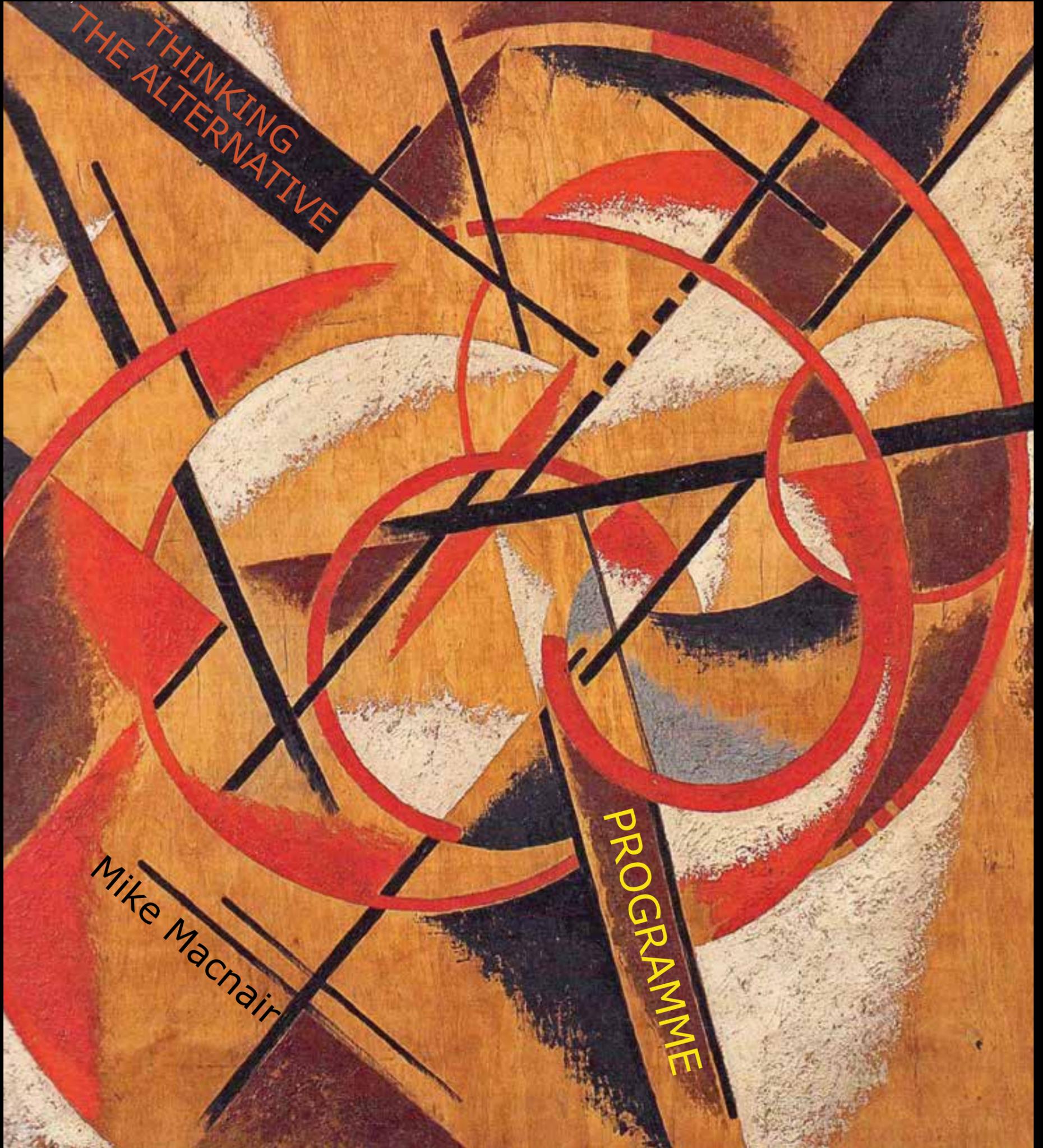
**Debating old Bolshevism
and the challenge of 1917:
Jim Creegan and Lars T Lih**

- Letters and debate
- General election campaign
- SR: shading into the green
- Left Unity and safe spaces

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THINKING
THE ALTERNATIVE

PROGRAMME

Mike Macnair

LETTERS



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

Future class

Mike Macnair accuses me of "Toryism" ('Magna Carta and long history', March 26), to which my natural response would be to accuse him of 'Whiggism' and progressivist history. Macnair's recent article ('Thinking the alternative', April 9) helps dispatch that potential charge, however, in favour of a new issue: the politics of 'class' beyond the socialist revolution.

Still, the problem of Bernsteinian evolutionism versus Marxist revolutionism remains - which is not that the goal is literally nil, but rather the gradualist belief that socialism is nothing apart from the struggle for it and as a goal is thus absorbed into the movement itself. By contrast, Marxists, such as Luxemburg, Lenin and Trotsky, recognised a dialectic of means and ends, practice and theory, movement and goal: the struggle for socialism took place within the contradiction of capital, and the revolution was a necessary expression of that contradiction to be worked through.

The problem with Bernstein as well as Kautsky is the endless deferral of the political revolution for socialism at the expense of its actuality. It should not take us centuries to get out of capitalism. Neither the storming of the Bastille nor the Tennis Court Oath nor the Continental Congress's Declaration of Independence were the realisation of Machiavelli's vision of politics or a confirmation of Hobbes on the state. On the other hand, they consolidated bourgeois society politically in ways that the political revolution for socialism will only inaugurate the struggle for its potential achievement.

Macnair thinks that an adequate socialist politics needs to offer a better collectivism than Islamism or Christian fundamentalism, etc, which is conservative-reactionary, but I think that socialism needs to offer a better individualism (as well as a better collectivism) than capitalism, which is progressive-emancipatory. But the progressive-emancipatory character of capitalism is expressed in bourgeois-revolutionary terms, not that of capital: 'capital' is a critical term.

Islamic State is not a misguided freedom movement, but revels in unfreedom. So does neoliberalism, which must be distinguished from classical bourgeois thought, as bourgeois emancipation must be distinguished from capitalism. Neoliberalism does not posit religious fundamentalism or the police state as external and internal other: these are expressions of the failure of society in capitalism, not the success of the capitalist politics. Liberal democracy has failed, and for a long time now: the only question is, why?

The Abbé Sieyès was inspired both conceptually and politically not by the Christian *Bible*, but by Locke and Rousseau. The French Revolution was not a peasant *jacquerie*, but a bourgeois revolution, expressed through urban plebeian revolt. Communists historically are not on the side of the peasants against the clergy and nobility, but with the burghers against all of the above. The question is what happens in the industrial revolution when the labouring classes against the ruling castes become the working class against the capitalists, which is a new and different social contradiction, the self-contradiction of bourgeois society: wage-labour against capital.

The 'dictatorship of the proletariat' in Marxism's original sense was meant to be global: if not absolutely every

single territory of the earth, then at least in very short order all the advanced capitalist countries, and so a form of political rule of global import.

Comrade Macnair's attribution of class to productive technique is mistaken. This causes him to reconceive the necessity of the dictatorship of the proletariat in terms of egalitarianism against the basis of middle classes in the development of high productive technique. Lenin, by contrast, followed Marx and described the problem not in such sociological terms, but in the historical social relations of 'bourgeois right', which came into self-contradiction in capitalism.

Macnair mistakes capital for social surplus: that, so long as advanced technique allows the opportunity for accumulation of social surplus through knowledge of specialist technicians, it will be necessary to suppress them. But capital is not like the surplus of grain in peasant agriculture, on which the aristocracy and church depended. According to Bukharin's *ABC of communism*, capital is not a thing, but a social relation. And it is one not of the exploitation of workers by capitalists, but of the domination of society by the valorisation process of capital. This is a change and crisis of both individuality and collectivity in society. Marx distinguished between the phases of bourgeois society in cooperation, manufacture and industry for just this reason. Industry was a crisis for bourgeois society, not due to technology itself, but its role.

According to Moishe Postone's interpretation of Marx's critique of capital, after the industrial revolution the issue is the accumulation not of goods, but *time* - or a matter of the power to *command* not the value of work, but time in society - not by proprietor *capitalists* as either entrepreneurs making a killing through competition or as *capital-rentiers* living off interest, but rather by *capital* in its 'valorisation process'. Liberalism is inadequate to just this problem. Furthermore, capital dominates - constrains and distorts - not only living, but also dead, labour.

So credit is an entirely different matter in capitalism than previously. Interest expresses not usury, but the imperative to increase productivity in time, and not for the purpose of profit, but rather to preserve the social value of capital from the depreciation of the value of labour-power in production in the changing organic composition of capital.

Overcoming capitalism will not mean a continuation of wage-labour, but its abolition. The compulsion to wage-labour is not the exploitation of workers by capitalists, but rather the need to valorise capital in society - at least according to Marx. Macnair finds labour subsisting.

The point is that the social value of capital is for Marx the (distorted expression of) 'general social intellect' and the (self-contradictory) social relations of this, which is no longer, after the industrial revolution, adequately mediated by the value of the exchange and circulation of labour-power as a commodity. Capital is not a thing; it is not the means of production, but a social relation of the working class to the means of production through the self-alienation of their wage-labour in capital, which is not the same as capitalist private property ownership of the means of production, but rather the role of the means of production as 'general social intellect' in the valorisation process of capital. Capital is a social relation not of the capitalists to the means of production through their private property, but of the working class through their wage-labour.

So the dictatorship of the proletariat will mean making the social value of

both capital and labour (human activity as a social resource) into an explicitly *political* rather than chaotic (and politically irresponsible) 'economic' matter. Marx thought that this was already placed on the agenda by the demand for the 'social republic' in the mid-19th century.

This is a very different issue from that of the social surplus commanded by the ruling castes in feudalism that Macnair thinks produced 'directly' capitalism rather than a bourgeois society of free exchange. The accumulation of capital is not the same as the political command of social resources (as in feudalism). And it is not a matter of individual countries, but rather of the global system of production.

When Luxemburg wrote that the proletariat could not build its economic power in capitalism as the bourgeoisie did in feudalism, she did not mean to distinguish between economics and politics, but rather to foreground the issue of *society*.

This will not mean a levelling down to protect equality, enforced by the working class in a protracted dictatorship of the proletariat, but the separation of human activity from the social value of production, which will become an immediate political issue, as it is indeed already in capitalism, however obscurely. That will be decided by a free ('democratic') association of the producers, whose status as producers will not be literally through their labour, but rather as subjects of humanity, as the inheritor of the accumulated history of technique, no longer mediated as a function of time in capital. The relation between society and time will be changed.

Technique will not be the province of specialised technicians potentially become capitalists, but rather the collective property of society, and on a global scale - as it already is under capitalism, but in alienated form: in the form of 'capital'.

For Luxemburg as well as Lenin this meant that, for instance, the already developed system of banking and credit provided the coordinating technique for socialist planning. But it will require a political revolution and a continued politics of socialism - subject to dispute - after the revolution to achieve this. Politics will survive the dictatorship of the proletariat into socialism.

That is what it will mean, as Lenin put it, to achieve socialism "on the basis of capitalism itself".

Chris Cutrone
email

Cold war

While I agree with almost everything that Mike Macnair has to say against Chris Cutrone, he errs in claiming that the late American socialist, Michael Harrington, was a "cold warrior".

Harrington made a great many political mistakes during his lifetime, but at no point could he be accurately termed a cold warrior. Contrary to popular belief, at no point did he ever support US imperialism in Vietnam, and he and his wing of the Socialist Party-Social Democratic Federation split from that organisation because - among other reasons - the dominant faction refused to support immediate US withdrawal. For evidence, see Maurice Isserman's biography of Harrington, *The other American: The life of Michael Harrington* (New York 2001).

Harrington also opposed the overthrow of the Chilean Unidad Popular government (as one would expect any real socialist to do) and critically supported the FSLN (Sandinistas) against the Contras in Nicaragua in the 1980s. The organisation Harrington helped found in 1982, the Democratic Socialists of America, also sponsored

a national speaking tour in 1988 by Rubén Zamora, then the vice-president of the El Salvadoran FMLN, another target of US imperialism.

None of these actions are compatible with the outlook of a cold war social democrat. Imperfect as he was, Michael Harrington was no Sidney Hook.

Jason Schulman
New York

False triumph

Tony Greenstein makes some truly bizarre claims (Letters, April 9). He tells us that "the attitude towards Israel's Arab or Palestinian population is not a question of national oppression (as opposed to settler racism directed towards a minority)". This would astonish Israel's Arab citizens, who so alarmed Netanyahu by voting "in droves" for the Joint List. The brief platform of this mostly Arab electoral bloc describes Israel's regime as one of "racist discrimination and national oppression".

Tony alleges that "the suggestion that Israel's Arab population are members of another nation, which is an idea that many subscribe to without even thinking of the consequences, is a dangerous one. It suggests that their real 'home' lies elsewhere, over the borders." But this "dangerous suggestion" is made explicitly in the Joint List's platform: noting that "the Palestinian-Arab community in Israel [is] an indigenous minority", which must be accorded "collective and individual rights", it demands official recognition of this community "as a national minority" and of "its rights to autonomy in the domains of culture, education and religion". It goes on pointedly to demand its recognition as "part of the Palestinian-Arab people (*sha'ab*) and the [all-]Arab nation (*qawmah*)". These just demands, supported by the Palestinian-Arab masses in Israel and by Hebrew anti-Zionist leftists, are opposed by the Zionist regime ... and, it seems, by comrade Greenstein.

But anyway since when does recognition of an indigenous community as a distinct national minority amount to the suggestion that its "real 'home' lies elsewhere"? For instance, does the demand for Kurdish national rights in Turkey imply that the Kurds should go elsewhere?

Tony rejects the idea that Israel's Hebrew ('Jewish') population forms "a nation separate from that of the Palestinians". Why? "Because of the nature of settler colonialists: they are incapable of forming separate nations unless they utterly vanquish or exterminate the indigenous population." If that were true, an American nation could not exist until late into the 19th century. In fact, as Wikipedia notes, many of the best known 'Indian wars' occurred during and after the civil war, until the closing of the frontier in about 1890.

To his absurd claims Tony adds an invention: a single nation in Palestine, in the borders of the British mandate, consisting of both "Jewish Palestinians or Hebrews and Arab Palestinians". This fictional entity is clearly modelled on South-Africa's 'rainbow nation'.

Tony's reductionism - reducing the essence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict entirely to 'racism', while ignoring its national dimension - is a false triumph of doctrinaire ideology over reality. So is his persistent conflation of the Zionist mode of colonisation with that of apartheid South Africa, ignoring the crucial structural differences between their political economies, which should be plain to any Marxist.

Moshé Machover
email

Tusc, not LU

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition has confirmed that it

is standing 136 candidates at the general election. This makes Tusc the sixth largest party contesting the general election. That is a tremendous achievement. Tusc was only set up in 2010. Within five years, we have built the largest coordinated left challenge since World War II - over 70 years ago.

I was proud to attend the national launch of our manifesto at Canary Wharf last Friday, when national chair Dave Nellist outlined how Tusc was the only genuinely anti-austerity party in these elections, with a commitment to full, democratic public ownership of education, health, energy companies, transport and banks, so that the country's wealth could be adequately redistributed.

I would like to think I have played a role in Tusc's development. I was involved at national level in a liaison capacity with other groups on the left in 2010; set up a Tusc branch in Rugby the following year, and became a member of the national steering committee, representing independent socialists, later that year. In 2013, I was elected as the Tusc local group development officer, and I have used that role to encourage the development of local groups up and down the country.

I was the first Tusc candidate to be selected nationally, by Rugby branch, in June 2013, and I was the first Tusc candidate in England to be authorised by the national steering committee to stand last autumn. More significantly, last year I was suddenly put in a position to influence events in a way I could not have foreseen.

This was through one of my other political roles over the last 10 years, as national secretary of the Socialist Alliance, the party with the previous highest number of left candidates (98 in 2001). The SA was informed last June that it had come into a legacy of £100,000 from former supporter Archie Dilloway, to be used "solely for the purposes of the Socialist Alliance". The SA agreed that this had consistently been about building unity on the left as part of the process of creating a new left party.

As a result, the SA agreed part of the legacy would be used to support the largest ever coordinated left challenge in the 2015 general election, a policy emanating from our 2013 AGM. With the newly formed Left Unity party continually rejecting proposals to join in an electoral coalition for 2015 with Tusc and others on the left, that I myself tried unsuccessfully to promote, the SA agreed to donate £500 each to candidates selected and endorsed by a left coalition, such as Tusc, which would help create the largest possible left challenge. The SA subsequently identified Tusc as that left coalition to receive such donations.

The funding from the SA helped ensure Tusc could stand enough candidates to reach thresholds which would guarantee national media coverage, and this is now happening, starting with party political broadcasts this Friday, April 17. I was a member of the subcommittee that devised the script, so I will be watching the broadcasts with added interest.

I am delighted to have been centrally involved with Tusc's development from a number of angles, and I am convinced that the support Tusc gets on May 7 will help progress it towards being the new, mass socialist party we so desperately need.

Pete McLaren
Rugby Tusc

Short straw

Recently after the general election hustings at Southwark Trade Council, a local press reporter asked me about the controversy over my candidature for the Republican Socialists in Bermondsey and Old Southwark, where Left Unity is supporting Tusc's

Kingsley Abrams. My answer was simply that the big capitalists had three parties in Bermondsey for workers to vote for - Tory, Liberal Democrats and Labour. So there was no reason why the working class should not have two socialist alternatives.

We need one to represent the best of reformism and the other to stand for a revolution. Standing under one big umbrella sounds comforting, but not when it is full of holes. Of course, the Republican Socialists have not launched any party and so part of my campaign is about making the case for one. But then Tusc is not a party either, having no membership, and the lash-up with LU does not make it one. However, this is not the main point.

If the Republican Socialists and Trade Union Socialists had the same policies and programme, then it would be counterproductive, if not sect-like, to duplicate the politics. This is obviously not the case here. Both are anti-austerity. But that is where it ends. Only the most rabid sectarians refuse to recognise what politics is staring them in the face. Tusc and the Republican Socialists have distinct and different policies and priorities.

One is arguing for the closure of Westminster, for a democratic revolution, an end to the Acts of Union and a new republican constitution. The other is making the case for a return to 1945 and the golden days of His Majesty's Labour Party. I will leave readers to work out which is which.

It is worth reminding the rest of the left that working class people are not stupid and don't like the idea that they can only have one political choice or are only fit to be fed one line. That is the old Stalinist method of fixing up what workers will be allowed to think about.

Neither can it be assumed there is a fixed pie of socialist votes and a zero sum game, where if one candidate gets more votes it is only by stealing them from the other. It is quite possible that our joint efforts might mobilise more voters for socialism than by assuming that one party has all the answers. The problem is not therefore in Bermondsey, but in the rest of the country, where the only choice is reheated Labourism.

This election is far from normal. Therefore it is vital that the working class is presented with a revolutionary alternative, not least when 'official communists' seem to have gone Awol and are putting forward no candidates at all. I was surprised to hear that the CPGB had volunteered to carry out the Socialist Resistance policy of expelling me from LU. I see in this a clever tactic of 'proving' your 'loyalty' to halfway houses. Good try, but it won't work!

For my part I am concentrating on opposing Westminster, attacking the twin evils of the immigration laws and the Acts of Union, and calling for the people to take the path of democratic revolution. It is a difficult task when all the major and minor Trotskyist forces are against you. Still somebody has to do it and I've drawn the short straw!

In Left Unity, but not a prisoner of Left Unity.

Steve Freeman

Bermondsey and Old Southwark

Navel-gazing

I cannot help but think that the left continues to gaze at its navel, arguing over whether the belly-button fluff is decreasing or increasing. Comrade Freeman's letter (April 9), which followed mine, summed it up. Let me count the ways.

1. "To the left is the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition. The election is establishing it as the major power, with over 120 candidates and rising."

In what dimension is Tusc a "major power"? It has 120 candidates? Yay! 'Cos losing deposits means you're a serious party.

2. "For some unfathomable reason the Republican Socialists have decided

to come out in the open and appeal directly to the working class."

I have no idea if this is sarcasm or genuine criticism. As a communist, this sentence makes no sense. As someone who's decided that the British left is a Marx brothers' film, it makes perfect sense.

3. "British politics has changed significantly as a result of the 45% that voted to reject the Westminster constitutional system."

This is the nonsense that is in the media. I set aside the politics for now, and focus on the logic. British politics has changed because of the people voting for a change in British politics. And 45% of whom?

4. "Therefore the working class movement in England must be won to anti-unionism. Communists must be hard-line anti-unionists and call openly for the immediate end to the Acts of Union and a new democratic relationship between the people of England, Ireland, Wales and Scotland. The election in Bermondsey is a test for the CPGB to see where it stands - not as a theoretical abstract, but when choosing whether to back the unionist Tusc-LU or the anti-unionist Republican Socialist."

We get in to serious bonkers nonsense here. Attacking the Act of Union? Really? That's the key? No suggestion of a federal republic? No suggestion that the working class should oppose the capitalists? No. Repeal the Act of Union. And we can test where all our fraternal parties stand about independence in Bermondsey. Well done.

5. "Since you have 'Great Britain' in your party name, it is going to be very difficult for you." Great Britain is geographic description, covering the mainland and the islands. English, Welsh and Scottish are all British. The whole frikkin' point is that workers are not well served by national divisions and it is better for the English, Welsh and Scottish workers to unite than rely on nationalism promising them a brighter future.

To return to the problem of navel-gazing, the manifesto that seems to be suggested is this:

1. No-one cares. 2. No-one cares. 3. It'd all be okay if it wasn't for them pesky Englishers. 4. It was that god-damn Queen Anne that screwed us over in the Bermondsey election. 5. It's more important to have everyone have the same accent.

Good Friedrich Engels alive, stop. Hold your nose and vote Labour or Green. And work to get Tusc and Left Unity into a Socialist Alliance thing. That'd be useful.

Dave Brown

Clevedon

Hangers-on

Stephen Diamond (Letters, April 9) seems to be encouraging us to the view that collapse is too instant and apocalyptic a characterisation of the much needed social change. Just so. But in any case are we supposed to wait until the "expansion" of the productive forces 'exhausts' itself before we can make a move? Does this mean there will come a day when those profit-seekers who haven't diverted into finance, luxury services or online trading will cease building better nuclear weapons or bigger yachts and when breakfast cereals will finish their progress by being made entirely of sugar - the day expansion is concluded?

It seems to me that the contradictions peculiar to the current mode of production exert pressure for change in quite a different way. Rather, the question is how long people will continue to accept profit-seeking and the decay of working and living conditions which benefit only a few billionaires and their metropolitan hangers-on.

In Marx's famous 'Preface to A

contribution to the critique of political economy', new productive forces emerge within the older productive relations, the existing class hierarchy. "From forms of development of the productive forces," he further comments, "these relations turn into their fetters."

And this takes time. The dialectic of England, from Tudor sheep farm to industrial empire, took three centuries, with an agriculture-for-profit system starting under the feudal lords and passing through several epochs of attempted absolutism and compromise with commercial capital - where the balance of forces were only finally transformed by a parliamentary struggle between free trade and monopoly, as exercised in the Corn Laws and plantation slavery.

Since 1945 at least, capitalism can be seen to be declining as a 'pure' form. For it needs the assistance of the state, by such bodies as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank and in the form of military spending, government welfare and now bailouts - not to mention sponsorship of inventions like the internet, which are then privatised. And need we point to the EU or the state-led economy of China? This may not be a collapse, but it is a holding operation with the help of socialised support. Where would our brave entrepreneurs and titanic corporations be without government favouritism and the general taxpayer?

Mike Belbin

email

Taxing issues

Recently, the communitarian populist front running the 'workers' government' in Greece put forward a plan to combat tax evasion: tax inspectors.

Apparently, this is an attempt to emulate the Whistleblower Office of the US Internal Revenue Service. However, this agency only goes after (illegal) tax evasion, not after the broader (and legal) tax avoidance. Less positive reactions have suggested that the Syriza-led government is establishing a 'secret tax police' and a 'tax-collecting police state'.

The more I think about this in the context of tax avoidance problems in developed countries, the more I think both that Yanis Varoufakis has a crucial point, and yet that he has overlooked the issue of tax literacy. Liberal economists like Piketty like to point out the 'golden' post-World War II era of high progressive taxation and reduced inequality, but there is scant literature on the history of (illegal) tax evasion and (legal) tax avoidance, so the purported levels of tax compliance by corporations and the wealthy back then is suspect at best.

I'm thinking right now that a radical reform demand on the threshold regarding maximum tax compliance for full-spectrum progressive taxation (income, inheritance, land value, broadcast spectrum, financial transactions, etc) would be the coupling of awareness and/or literacy in taxation and tax policy with a mass phenomenon of tax anti-avoidance surveillance and informants. Think 'Tax NSA' and 'Tax Stasi'.

This would illustrate the bourgeois and petty bourgeois hypocrisy on mass surveillance/panopticism/panopticon society, never wanting any focus on themselves, especially in the area of (legal) tax avoidance - whether it's tax deductions within gross income or total income for tax purposes; tax deductions after gross income or total income for tax purposes to arrive at taxable income; 'nudge' tax credits based on the prevailing social policies of the day, alternative minimum taxes or dealing with the general anti-avoidance rule.

Jacob Richter

email

ACTION

CPGB podcasts

Every Monday we upload a podcast commenting on the current political situation. In addition, the site features voice files of public meetings and other events: <http://cpgb.org.uk/home/podcasts>.

London Communist Forum

Sunday April 19, 5pm: Discussion: 'Magna Carta and long history', Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. Speaker: Mike Macnair.

Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

Introduction to anthropology

Tuesday April 21, 6.30pm: 'The origin of the family, private property and the state'. Speaker: Chris Knight.

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

Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: <http://radicalanthropologygroup.org>.

People's Assembly

Thursday April 16, 6.30pm: London activists meeting, Unite the Union, 33-37 Moreland Street, London EC1. Help plan and mobilise for the End Austerity Now national demonstration.

Organised by People's Assembly: www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk.

Music for peace

Saturday April 18, 7pm till late: Music, performance, poetry, Globe Inn, 39 Clifton Road, Newton, Devon. £10 with veggie curry, £5 without.

Organised by Exeter CND: <http://exetercnd.org/event.html>.

Democracy and the media

Saturday April 18, 1pm: Debate, Red Shed, Vicarage Street, Wakefield WF1. Speakers: author Granville Williams, Campaign for Broadcasting Freedom; Don Mort (NUJ); and Alan Stewart (Wakefield Socialist History Group). Plus showing of Lindsay Anderson's classic 1952 documentary *Wakefield Express*. Free admission and light buffet.

Organised by Wakefield Socialist History Group: www.theredshed.org.uk/SocialHist.html.

Pay the rate

Saturday April 18, 10am: March and rally by construction workers. Assemble Majuba Road car park, Redcar TS10. SITA Sembcorp must respect nationally agreed rates of pay and allow unions access to the site.

Organised by Teesside Construction Activists: www.facebook.com/pages/Teesside-Construction-Activists/429641457200160.

Crisis cabaret

Sunday April 19, 7.30pm: Alternative comedy, The Bolton, 326 Earls Court Road, London SW5. With Paul Ricketts, Don Biswas, Dzifa Benson, Bob Boyton, Buddy Hell and Simon Hardy. Book tickets online at www.westleft.co.uk. All proceeds to Left Unity election fund.

Organised by West London Left Unity: www.facebook.com/LeftUnityWestLondon.

Israel's elections and the aftermath

Monday April 20, 7.30 pm: Discussion, Unity Church, 277a Upper Street, London N1. Speaker: Israeli Marxist Moshé Machover.

Organised by Camden and Islington Left Unity: camden@leftunity.org; and islington@leftunity.org.

The media and the 'loony left'

Tuesday April 21, 7.30pm: Talk, Bishopsgate Institute, 230 Bishopsgate, London EC2. LGBT London in the 1980s. £9 (£7 concessions).

Organised by Bishopsgate Institute: www.bishopsgate.org.uk.

Stop the war, have dinner

Wednesday April 22, 6.30pm: Food, drinks, music and speakers, Troia Restaurant, 3F Belvedere Road, London SE1. £40 solidarity, £30 standard.

Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk

Palestine and the general election

Wednesday April 22, 7pm: Hustings, Friends Meeting House, 10 Saint James Street, Sheffield S1. With PPCs for Sheffield Central.

Organised by Sheffield Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.palestinecampaign.org.

Children behind bars

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

Organised by Five Leaves Bookshop: www.fiveleavesbookshop.co.uk.

Reclaim the future

Thursday April 23, 7pm: Anti-austerity event, Karibu Education Centre, 7 Gresham Road, Brixton, London SW9. Speakers include: Ken Loach, Kingsley Abrams, Simon Hardy, Kate Hudson.

Organised by Lambeth Left Unity: lambethleftunity@gmail.com.

Save lifelong learning

Saturday April 25, 12.30pm: National demonstration and march on parliament. Assemble Kings College, The Strand, London WC2.

Organised by UCU Left: www.facebook.com/UCULeft.

Defend lifelong learning

Saturday April 25, 12.30pm: Demonstration. Assemble Kings College, The Strand, London WC2.

Organised by University and College Union: www.ucu.org.uk.

CPGB wills

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

ELECTION

Parties, swings and roundabouts

With the polls too close to call, writes Eddie Ford, neither Labour nor Tory strategists can be happy

Now that their manifestoes have been published, the general election contenders are bombarding us with pledges.

David Cameron has promised to scrap inheritance tax on homes worth up to £1 million, spend an "extra" £8 billion on the NHS by 2020 and resurrect the dream of a property-owning democracy by giving 1.3 million housing association residents, mainly very poor, the right to buy: zombie Thatcherism. As for Ed Miliband, he is now portraying Labour as the party of "fiscal responsibility" that will cut the deficit every year. Meanwhile, the Liberal Democrats have said they would not form a coalition with the Tories if they insist on forcing through £12 billion in cuts to social security - rather, it should be £3 billion. Nick Clegg claims that his party will add "heart to a Tory coalition" and "brain to a Labour one".

Though we are told by some that there is a "stark" choice facing voters on May 8, in reality the current general election battle does not amount to much more than managerial politics - the actual substantive difference between all the parties is pretty narrow. "Seven leaders and not one socialist", as this publication said last week about the seven-way TV debate. True, the United Kingdom Independence Party and its "low tax revolution" may be to the right of the Tories, and the Greens with their "peaceful political revolution" are currently to the left of Labour - but that is essentially a matter of shading, not distinct lines of demarcation or competing world views. Sorry, Socialist Resistance and other such comrades, but the Greens are not socialist or a working class party in any meaningful way whatsoever.

One thing is for certain, however, which is that the outcome of the general election is near impossible to predict - an unprecedented situation in many respects. For instance, an "exclusive" poll conducted on April 11 by *The Daily Telegraph* has Labour and the Tories almost exactly level-pegging - the latter on 31.8% whilst Labour have 31.7%. A week before, the same survey had the Tories on 32% and Labour on 31% - too close to call. Similarly, an April 13 Lord Ashcroft poll has both parties deadlocked on 33%.²

Interestingly, these polls raise the possibility that one of the parties could lose the popular vote yet still end up with the majority of seats in the House of Commons - complicating the Lib Dems' promise to let the party that wins the election have "first go" at forming a government and/or a coalition, especially given their historic commitment to voting reform (ie, proportional presentation). Anything is possible, so to speak, with the 'first past the post' voting system, in a period where electoral support for the mainstream parties is visibly

eroding.

Then again, other polls in recent weeks have come out with quite different results. Hence a Panelbase survey on April 9 had Labour with a 6% lead and a Survation poll for the *Mirror* on the same day has the party with a 4% advantage - though the same poll shows Cameron retaining a 12% lead on the question of who would make the best prime minister. But proving that it is all swings and roundabouts, an ICM telephone poll conducted on April 13 puts the Tories ahead by 6% - with support for the Lib Dems unchanged on 8% and Ukip dropping two points to 7%, which leaves them tied for fourth place with the Greens (the latter recovering by three points after having fallen to just 4% in March).³

As an aside, it is worth noting that telephone and internet polls tend to come out with different results - amongst other things, telephones favour the Tories and the internet inclines towards Labour.⁴ Thus the current 10-day average among telephone polls has the Tories securing 35.5%, with Labour on 33.5%, but the average online polls have the Conservatives trailing by two points (34% to 32%). The Lib Dems on 8% more or less get the same level of support regardless of which polling technique is used, but the story is quite different when it comes to Ukip and the Greens. The latter only average 4.5% with online firms, but get 6% with telephone polls, whilst the situation for Ukip is reversed: it averages a very respectable 15.5% with internet polling, yet slumps to 11% over the phone. Phone polls have tended to be more accurate: in 2010, for example, they were in general closer to the final outcome (internet surveys overestimated Lib Dem support to quite a degree). Of course, polling methods are bound to change if only for the simple reason that internet polling is considerably cheaper, can collect more data quicker and panels become increasingly representative of a population, as they grow in size.

Anyhow, the wider political significance of these varying polls is that any increase or decrease in levels of support for the minor parties could possibly determine the fortunes of either Labour or the Tories. Fairly obviously, any drop in Ukip support is *more likely* to benefit David Cameron's electoral chances and, where the opposite is the case (higher Ukip, lower Greens), Labour would normally expect to gain. The Lib Dems do seem to be regaining a measure of support, getting up to 14% in some polls. Meanwhile, as indicated above, backing for the Greens and Ukip appears on average to be slipping - from a peak of about 18%, Ukip is now at 12% or less; the Greens are down to 5% or thereabouts from a previous high of around 8%.

Indeed, it is far from

impossible that both Ukip and the Greens might end up with no MPs at all between them - indicting the manifestly dysfunctional electoral system. Smaller parties like the Greens and Ukip might be able to win by-elections here and there, but in a general election resources of such parties have to be spread over many constituencies.

Overall though, *most* polls give Labour either a slight lead or show them level with the Tories. For what it is worth, at the time of writing *The Guardian's* updated average of recent polls puts the Conservatives on 33.7% and Labour on 33.6% - but only because of that ICM result heavily skewing the results towards the Tories.⁵ Translated into seats, or insofar as you can make such a calculation, the Conservatives are marginally ahead on 272, with Labour on 269, while the Lib Dems have 29, Ukip 4 and the Greens one. With 650 seats in the Westminster parliament, you currently need 323 MPs to win a vote of confidence - assuming that once more there will be five Sinn Féin MPs who do not take up their seats.

Failing

Neither Labour nor the Tories can be happy with the poll findings, as they indicate failing strategies. With Labour, we have its notorious - or at least strongly rumoured - '35%' approach: that is, the task is to secure the 29% of voters who backed Labour in the 2010 general election, and then add on another six per cent of Lib Dem or other defectors in order to inch over the winning line. Thinking big. Labour's last election victory in 2005, which saw it win a majority of 66 seats, was achieved on a vote share of 35.2%. If that is the plan, then Labour is consistently short by a couple of percentage points.

Nor are the Tories doing much better - worse if anything. The Lynton Crosby-directed strategy of *endlessly* going on about the economic recovery, about how the good times are just about to happen, and there must be no return to Labour "madness", does not appear to be reaping any particular rewards in the polls. Nor have the personalised attacks on Ed Miliband paid off. According to the script, dutifully followed by the rightwing press, the Labour leader should have completely crumbled under the pressure by now - revealed as a gaffe-prone idiot who is not prime minister material.

In other words, the Tories are guilty of mixing their messages. On the one hand, Miliband is incompetent. On the other hand, as pointed out back in January by Chris Patten, former chairman of both the Conservative Party and the BBC - they should fear the Labour leader, not Nigel Farage, as Miliband is "highly intelligent" and a "good debater".⁶

Hence Cameron's fear of a two-way debate with him. As a result, the Tories and

their media supporters are getting a bit desperate. Firstly, we had both the *Mail* and *Telegraph* claiming on April 10 to have uncovered the unsavoury secrets of Miliband's "tangled love life" - which turned out, in the words of *Times* columnist Janice Turner, to be the rather uninteresting fact that before he was married he had "dated a bunch of hot, clever and successful women".⁷ If the Tory press thought that was going to dent the Labour leader's support, then they really are losing touch.

Then we had the pathetic comments by Michael Fallon, the defence secretary. He suggested that the Labour leader would betray his country in the same way that he apparently stabbed his brother, David, in the back during the Labour leadership elections - by "bartering away" the Trident missile system in return for a deal with the Scottish National Party that would see him into Downing Street. As one commentator put it, apart from being a move that saw the Tories "retoxified" as the nasty party, this just highlighted the Tory "confusion" about Miliband - is he a "useless dweeb or a power-hungry cad?"⁸

But the big story about the general election is Scotland, of course. According to the very latest surveys, the SNP is on 52% - giving the party an overwhelming 28-point lead over Labour north of the border.⁹ Support for the Conservatives is at 13%, down one point, with the Lib Dems up three points to 6% - and the Scottish Greens have dipped by one point to 3%. Unsurprisingly, support for Ukip in Scotland is negligible. Ominously for Miliband and Jim Murphy, there is strong evidence that the growth in SNP support is mainly attributable to disaffected Labour supporters. The last time any party won by such a margin was during the 1955 general election, when the Tories got 50.1% of the vote in Scotland.¹⁰

The SNP may now be on the cusp of that sort of victory - presently projected to win 54 of Scotland's 59 seats, effectively wiping out Labour. Or, to look at it another way, whether optimistically or pessimistically, the combined Labour-SNP share of seats in Westminster is 326 - enough to survive a confidence vote, albeit uncomfortably close.¹¹ The total Conservative-Lib Dem share, however, has fallen below 300 seats, and even by gathering up all possible sources of support - Ukip's four seats and the Democratic Unionist Party's nine - David Cameron has an uphill task to get the bare minimum needed to form a viable government. But certainly not impossible, depending on the *exact* way that the votes fall.

According to convention, the largest party in the Commons gets the first bite of the cherry. There has been premature talk of a deal between Labour and

SNP, but clearly Ed Miliband would much prefer to come to some sort of arrangement with the Lib Dems - assuming they

are not reduced to an ineffectual rump that can nearly fit once again into the proverbial London black cab. It is surely the case that, apart from Nick Clegg, most senior Lib Dems - let alone the ordinary membership - would be a lot happier to find themselves in partnership with Labour as opposed to the Tories. Vince Cable, after all, used to be a Labour member - in 1970 he unsuccessfully contested Glasgow Hillhead and nine years later he sought the Labour nomination for Hampstead, losing out to a certain Ken Livingstone (who failed to take the seat).

Talking of the Lib Dems, we in the CPGB have to admit to being surprised by the lack of splits within the party - eg, no crossing of the floor to Labour. We were also wrong to think that the Lib Dems under Clegg would be a purely *slave* party, with the Tories perhaps giving them a clear run in certain constituencies. Apparently, there is now some talk of a *post-election* split over the coalition issue (why did we do it?), but for the time being the party remains united and disciplined.

Yes, if there was a Labour-SNP deal of some description after the general election, that would give the establishment the heebie-jeebies - even if a less panicky section might regard it as an opportunity to tame the SNP by incorporating it into the Westminster fold. But, having said that, there is no doubt that the SNP leadership is anticipating another referendum in the fairly near future - definitely not a generation away. From this separatist perspective, a Tory-led government would make more sense. Quite clearly, it would make an independence campaign/vote much harder if the SNP were constantly propping up a Labour government in the Commons over this or that bill ●

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Notes

1. Polly Toynbee, 'Blair-plus? Hardly. This is a bold, persuasive manifesto' *The Guardian* April 12.
2. <http://lordashcroftpolls.com/2015/04/ashcroft-national-poll-con-33-lab-33-lib-dem-9-ukip-13-green-6>.
3. *The Guardian* April 13.
4. www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/apr/13/telephone-internet-polling-different-results.
5. www.theguardian.com/politics/ng-interactive/2015/feb/27/guardian-poll-projection.
6. www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-30860010.
7. <https://twitter.com/VictoriaPeckham/status/586435116165021696>.
8. Jonathan Freedland, 'The Tories' wobble shows they don't know how to fight Ed Miliband' *The Guardian* April 10.
9. www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/apr/13/snp-has-almost-doubled-lead-over-labour-in-scotland-poll-shows.
10. Or, more accurately, the *combined* votes of both the Unionist and National Liberal and Conservative parties.
11. www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/apr/14/labour-snp-combined-share-of-seats-projected-to-hit-326.



Minor parties matter: this time round

GREENS



Social composition does not equal political programme

Swept along by the moment

In the name of cuddling up to the Greens, Socialist Resistance warns about the dangers of the 'ultra-left'. Paul Demarty objects

It seems a week cannot go by without Socialist Resistance - the British section of the Fourth International, and the self-described "Marxist-feminist-ecosocialist" contingent most aggressively dragging Left Unity to the right - giving us some reason to despair.

Last week, there was the fallout from SR's calamitous intervention in the transgender 'debate' within feminism (more like a dirty war, at this point), in which SR managed to alienate more or less all interested parties - either by deciding to run a piece by Victoria Smith objecting to transgender politics, or beating an undignified retreat and slapping a 'trigger warning' on it when the screams of fury built up from the Twitter/Tumblr intersectionalist types.¹

Now, there is the small matter of a truly staggering statement from Resisting Socialism's national committee on the 'Green surge'. It lists off the numbers: the membership of the Green Party in England and Wales "has doubled in the past year and currently stands at 54,500, making it the fourth largest party in Britain - bigger than the Lib Dems and Ukip", while its Scottish sister party "has increased [its membership] in the last few years by a staggering 700% to 8,500 members today".²

Thus begins a serious puff-piece. The Greens "have shifted to the left in recent years", and are occupying the space to the left of Labour effectively: "most young people find the Green parties an easier option to contemplate rather than going directly to the more radical socialist (or revolutionary) organisations". Glowing encomia to Caroline Lucas and Natalie Bennett follow.

Low profile

This is not the first time that Resisting Socialism has gotten a little starry-eyed over a few left Greens, of course - that 'ecosocialist' branding is designed as a licence to schmooze with such characters. So what do the comrades actually hope to achieve on the basis of this guff?

In practical terms, unfortunately, it amounts to a call for Left Unity to keep a low profile. After all, that space for a 'broad party to the left of Labour' is now presently occupied. Perhaps it could respond by carving out its own space, as a radical socialist alternative to the capitalist order? Certainly not: "The danger is that the ultra-left in LU will attempt to push LU to the left and force it to abandon the space in which a broad party can be built." (No prizes for guessing whom the comrades mean here, although why they do not just say it defeats me.)

Instead, socialists "should work with the Greens in the campaigns and encourage LU to do so. We should urge LU to seek electoral arrangements with them if possible." Those of us who are concerned that this will mean LU abolishing its own profile to act as leftist bag-carriers for Bennett, etc, need not fret.

Although [the Green Party] is a response to the space to the left of Labour, it does not resolve it in the form of the kind of a broad radical left party that is required in order to build a socialist alternative ... The main reason for this is that it has a substantial conservative wing that would never accept its transformation into such a party.

Only LU, or something like it, can produce the right kind of party: provided, presumably, its own 'conservative wing' (viz Socialist Resistance) find it in themselves to 'accept' it.

The core of this argument is fatuous in the extreme. We may first of all deal with the calumny against the "ultra-left": we in the Communist Platform, the semi-official "ultra-left" of Left Unity, have argued all along for a party that will fight for what we need, not for what happens to be popular during a Socialist Resistance NC meeting. That means a party committed to the independent revolutionary action of the working class: a Communist Party.

Whoever happens to be grabbing the votes of well-meaning leftie youths right now is a secondary, tactical question. (I will say that I have heard the argument parodied here advanced in earnest, that LU should move to the left as an instrumental and tactical manoeuvre in response to the success of the Greens and SNP - but not from any traditionally 'left' quarters of the organisation.)

SR's schema, however, amounts to a patchouli-scented popular front: its right wing, the Green Party, will inevitably discredit itself, and LU - as grimly envisioned by SR - will emerge as the 'best fighters'. SR's only novelty is to skip out the social democratic component of the popular front entirely, subsuming itself directly into its 'radical bourgeois' component.

The most striking consequence is that the substance of the Greens' politics escapes notice almost entirely: they are anti-austerity, yes; they are concerned with the environment, yes; and there is a malevolent "conservative wing" of some kind.

Yet the Greens' alternative to capitalist austerity is localism, preferential treatment for small business over large, and so on. It is, from a certain perspective, quite an inspiring vision - it is a clearer view of an alternative future than radicalising youth are likely to get from, say, SR comrades, who can only ever fret about 'campaigns' - which are almost invariably against things nowadays (cuts, closures and suchlike).

Those more vulgar leftists who say the Greens are straightforwardly 'just another capitalist party' miss the point - the Greens offer a petty-bourgeois utopia. It is utopian because capitalism grows anew out of all commodity production; a utopia of small businesses can only be the prelude to the return of the dark Satanic mills. By burnishing the 'anti-austerity' and eco credentials of the Greens, SR becomes insouciant about all these radicalising youth dedicating themselves to a

project that by definition cannot possibly work.

Why bother?

Alas, in what went before, I have made the error of assuming that the Greens are not a working class organisation! How fortunate that the good 'Marxists' of Resisting Socialism are on hand to correct me:

Some argue that the Greens are not working class parties ... [but] most members of the Green Party and most of those who vote for them have to sell their labour-power as much as do the supporters of the Labour Party, Left Unity or any far-left group.

Taking this bizarre sentence at face value, one could first object that a considerable majority of people in this country are, from the Marxist point of view, working class; they do not all vote Labour, Green or far left. What about the Scottish Nationalists, comrades - are they now a working class party? Hell, what about Ukip, or even the Tories? There are not enough capitalists to get the Tories in on their own, and it is certainly not pin-striped bankers who go out on the knocker for them come election time.

Then one could reply, crudely, that it is not a party's votes that matter so much as its sources of funding. The Labour Party gets the majority of its funding from trade unions, and would go into financial crisis without that money. The Tories are straightforwardly reliant on money from big business. The Greens are funded, in the main, by the type of people who own quaint shops in the North Laines. It is petty bourgeois in its social base, as well as in its politics.

But really we feel we are beyond the point of sensible argument here. What a sorry pass we have come to when 'Marxists' - even if they are "Marxist-feminist-ecosocialist" - present sophistries as intellectually vacuous as this little gem! We

wonder why SR even bothers to keep 'Marxism' on its masthead. Marxism is time-consuming; there are so many books to read and, while some are great works of world literature, others certainly are not.

Moreover, Marxism leads the humble Marxist to sometimes counterintuitive political conclusions. We are no longer permitted to evaluate a political phenomenon on the basis of an instinctive 'feel-good factor', but instead we must analyse what its unconscious motive forces are. We cannot separate whatever nice things Natalie Bennett says from what she is likely, or indeed able, to do. It is exactly this that gives Marxism its power, however, for it allows us to plan strategically, to think about politics over decades, and even centuries, not week by week.

So is the 'Green surge' a progressive or reactionary development? On the face of it, it is both: a positive thing that many people are willing to be active participants in politics outside the neoliberal consensus; but a negative thing, in that the Green 'alternative' is a petty bourgeois utopia. The real story here, however, is the departure of the far left from the field of political struggle, and with it the severe weakening of even the idea of independent working class politics.

The latter is an effect of world-historical transformations, principally the collapse of the USSR; but it hardly helps matters when the likes of SR attempts, as it does here, to demobilise itself in the face of ephemeral shifts in bourgeois politics. It is one thing to be swept into the gutter by one's enemies, but quite another to politely set up camp there of one's own accord. And we are supposed to be the wreckers ... ●

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Notes

1. 'Headlong into a trap' Weekly Worker April 9 2015.
2. <http://socialistresistance.org/7356/the-rise-of-the-green-parties-in-britain>.

PROGRAMME

Thinking the alternative, part 2

Peter Hudis Marx's concept of the alternative to capitalism Haymarket, 2013, pp241

Michal Polak Class, surplus, and the division of labour Palgrave Macmillan, 2013 (Kindle edition)

What is the final goal of communist political activity, or the strategic alternative to capitalism? The CPGB's *Draft programme*, following communist tradition, identifies it as follows:

The higher stage of communism is a free association of producers. Everybody will contribute according to their ability and take according to their need. Real human history begins and society leaves behind the realm of necessity. In the realm of freedom people will become rounded, fully social individuals, who can for the first time truly develop their natural humanity.

But is this option really posed to us by capitalist development, or is it merely another utopia? And if it is posed to us by capitalist development, what are the implications of this final goal for present-day political orientation?

As I said in the first article in this series,¹ I think that to approach these questions it is useful to begin by looking at two fairly recent books which bear on the issues. They are very different in character. Peter Hudis's *Marx's concept of the alternative to capitalism* is the book of his 2011 PhD at Loyola University, Chicago. It is a work of Marxology (working out what Karl Marx actually argued), albeit, in its 'Introduction', it engages critically with alternative approaches, which he calls 'objectivist' and 'subjectivist'. A great deal of water has flowed under bridges in the 132 years since Marx's death in 1883, so that it is foolish to suppose that 'what Marx argued' can be used as a direct guide to political orientation without consideration both of subsequent developments and of subsequent discoveries about matters from before and during Marx's own times. But good Marxological work can help orient us in the present, if mainly by identifying clearly what Marx did argue, as opposed to the extraordinarily common bad Marxological work produced in the cold war period both by opponents of Marxism and by many self-identified Marxists.

Michal Polak's *Class, surplus and the division of labour* is also a PhD thesis undertaken at the London School of Economics. It is almost the opposite of Hudis's book. Polak's investigation of Marx's argument is at best skeletal. He offers, in fact, a *criticism* of Marx, which is heavily engaged with the (now near-defunct) 'analytical Marxist' school; but which, he suggests, at the end of the day *reinstates* the ideas of class and exploitation at a higher level of generality than that used by Marx. He is concerned precisely with the developments which have occurred since Marx's time: in particular, the Soviet regime and its imitators, and their obvious failure to do away with class. A book of this sort asks questions which - whether or not we end up agreeing with its conclusions - can force us to think about the foundations of our ideas.

In both cases, this review will be primarily *descriptive* of what the books contain, with critical elements secondary. This is mainly a matter of space; but in the third part of the series, I will deploy issues which have arisen out of these reviews, and will add some further criticisms of the arguments.

Hudis

Peter Hudis is a prominent leader of



Liubov Popova, 'Spacial force construction' (1920-21)

the International Marxist-Humanist Organisation, one of the several splinters which have emerged in the early 21st century from the US News and Letters Committee, originally led by Raya Dunayevskaya (1910-87). This background creates an inevitable risk that his account of Marx will be biased to 'finding Dunayevskaya in Marx'. It would be illusory to expect an *absence* of bias - the point is, rather, to read Hudis with *awareness* of this possible bias.

The first issue is the ground covered by the book. Setting the introduction and conclusion for the moment on one side, the structure of the book is to review Marx's major theoretical writings (whether published or unpublished in his lifetime) chronologically, looking for what, if anything, they contain on the image of the future society.

Chapter 1 - 'The transcendence of alienation in the writings of the young Marx' - begins with an attempt to work out the normative foundations of Marx's arguments in his earliest writings before considering in the second section Marx's partial drafts critiquing Hegel's *Philosophy of right* (the unpublished draft on *Staatsrecht*, constitutional law, and the published 'introduction'); in the third, the 'Comments on James Mill' and 'Economic and philosophical manuscripts of 1844'; and in the fourth, the 1845 draft article on Friedrich List's *System of national economy*, *The German ideology*; and (very briefly) the *Communist manifesto*. Use is not made of the 1848 *Demands of the Communist Party in Germany*, or of the 1850 *Address of the central committee to the Communist League*.²

Chapter 2 - 'The conception of a post-capitalist society in the drafts of *Capital*' - follows Samuel Hollander's 2008 (marginalist) account of Marx's

economics³ in treating Marx's *Poverty of philosophy* (*Misère de la philosophie*),⁴ published in 1847, as the 'first draft' of Marx's *Capital*. The 'drafts' treated then consist of this text; the 1858 *Grundrisse*; and the 1861-63 manuscripts, part of which was published by Kautsky in 1905-10 as *Theories of surplus value*. The published 1859 *Contribution to the critique of political economy* is not analysed on the ground that "many of the points contained ... are found in either the *Grundrisse* or *Capital*" (p133 - this is not a particularly strong argument).

Chapter 3 - 'The vision of the new society in Marx's *Capital*' - is broadly based on the published state of the text in three volumes. Hence it starts with Volume 1 (first published in 1867, second edition 1872, and a revised French edition 1872-75, in Marx's lifetime), and proceeds to Volume 2 (published by Engels in 1885 from a draft revised by Marx after the publication of Volume 1) and then to Volume 3, which was edited (not to the point of producing a coherent argument) by Engels, and published in 1894, on the basis of drafts Marx wrote before the publication of Volume 1. It might have fitted better with the chronological approach to the development of Marx's thought for Hudis to have placed *Capital* Vol 3 with the drafts in chapter 2, and to have treated slightly more systematically the differences between the second German edition of 1872 and the first French edition, the last in Marx's lifetime, of 1872-75.⁵ There is a brief reference (p164) to Marx's 'popular' version of some of his core arguments in *Value, price and profit* (1865, published 1898).

Chapter 4 - 'Marx's late writings on post-capitalist society' - covers *The civil war in France* (1871) and its

drafts (as is characteristic of 'new left' and similar writers, no differentiation beyond the footnoting is made between the drafts and the published version); the 1875 *Critique of the Gotha programme*; and, very briefly, Marx's 'Conspectus of Bakunin's *Statism and anarchy*' (1874). Notably, no use is made of the draft programme of the Parti Ouvrier (1880).⁶

I add, more generally, that of Hal Draper's *Karl Marx's Theory of revolution*, Hudis cites in his bibliography only Vol 1, *State and bureaucracy* (1977), though Vol 3, *The dictatorship of the proletariat* (1986), and Vol 4, *Critique of other socialisms* (1990), are both clearly relevant to Hudis's theme. This reflects a bias in his choices of 'Marx material' in favour of 'major works', as opposed to Draper's method of attempting to use everything available.

It may also be related to a second issue, which is that of the use (or not) of Engels. Dunayevskaya was a supporter of the 'Engels vulgarised Marx' school of opinion. Hudis in general is committed to "investigate Marx's theoretical corpus on its own terms. In doing so I will avoid conflating it with that of his close colleague and follower, Friedrich Engels ... Marx was, by Engels' own admission, a far deeper and more rigorous thinker" (p8). He concedes (p8, note17) that there is "direct textual evidence" that "Marx approved of specific formulations of Engels" in relation to the discussion of "workers' cooperatives and labour time in *Anti-Dühring*". The evidence referred to (not cited here) actually amounts to Marx being for practical purposes a *co-author* of the *Anti-Dühring*, so that the book has as strong a claim to inclusion in the 'Marx corpus' as the *Communist manifesto*, also co-authored, and probably a stronger claim than *The German ideology*, given that this latter text appears to have been constructed by Ryazanov out of several separate manuscripts.⁷

Vision

Having outlined the shape of the materials Hudis studied, let us now consider what he found in them as Marx's vision of the alternative to capitalism - and how this developed (if at all).

The red thread which Hudis finds running through Marx's arguments from the very beginning, in his doctoral dissertation, is the critique of alienation, or, more exactly, of the 'inversion of subject and predicate'. Here, human beings' own creative powers are 'externalised' into powers controlling humans and blocking or limiting human freedom.⁸ From the *Critique of Hegel's philosophy of right* drafts and *On the Jewish question* Hudis draws the idea that emancipation is the reduction of social order to the truly human, while still cautioning that these texts date before Marx's break with capitalism.

The *Comments on James Mill* and *Economic and philosophical manuscripts*, Hudis argues, represent this decisive shift beyond democratic to anti-capitalist ideas, with alienated labour central to the first, and the second showing philosophical foundations of political economy, grounded in a shift away from Feuerbach and a deeper appropriation of Hegel's *Phenomenology*. This is a line of argument common to the Hegelian Marxists, which is directly criticised by David Leopold in his *The*

young Marx; but, though Hudis cites Leopold, he does not reply directly to Leopold's arguments as to Marx and Hegel (chapter 2) and Marx and Feuerbach (chapter 4).

The final substantive section of the first chapter, on the 'Draft article on List', *The German ideology* and the *Communist manifesto*, stresses the leading role of the proletariat as a class; and that the abolition of private property proposed in the *Communist manifesto* is merely a first step. Hudis takes the opportunity here to polemicise against "Kautsky and Lenin" on the issue of theory coming to the workers' movement "from the outside" (p80), citing an article of his own from 1998; but he does not appear to respond to the point made by Lars Lih in *Lenin rediscovered* (2005), that Kautsky's and Lenin's arguments merely asserted a point Hudis himself accepts, that theoretical work is itself a form of labour; nor does he recognise the *context* of these arguments: ie, the claims of the rightwing trade union bureaucrats and their hangers-on that the bureaucrats' working class background should overrule leftwing arguments offered by Marxist intellectuals. Here we get another signal of the 'Marx leads to Dunayevskaya' narrative.

The fundamental point of the chapter is drawn out in its conclusion, polemicising against Allan Megill's *Karl Marx: the burden of reason* (New York 2001). While Megill is, Hudis argues, right to deny Marx was a *materialist* or broke with the fundamentals of Hegel, contrary to Hudis, Marx's vision is *not rationalist*, but *humanist*. His vision is of the emancipation of *humanity as such*, including its sensuous experiences and subjective interactions.

It is worth commenting briefly that Leopold's chapter 4, 'Human flourishing', addresses the same issue without the presupposition of a Marx breaking with Feuerbach's ideas in the *direction of Hegel*, and, consequently, with more discussion of Feuerbach's ideas and of the relation of Marx's ideas to them. The result is, in fact, a *richer* account of Marx's early views of human emancipation than that offered by Hudis, and one which engages more directly with the standard liberal criticisms of these views.

The two chapters on "the drafts of *Capital*" and on *Capital*, while elaborate, add relatively little to the image Hudis paints of Marx's vision of the alternative as fundamentally humanist, speaking more to the transition to this form. In substance, the point is the negative critique of forms of 'Riparian socialism', especially Proudhonist versions, and of the associated proposals for 'labour tokens' as an alternative to money. The underlying point is there already in the 'Comments on James Mill' and 'Economic and philosophical manuscripts': that the requirement to 'work for a living' in the sense of wage-labour *in itself* entails the subordination of human ends to value-production, so that 'purified' forms of market order such as Proudhonist mutualism - and equally forms of 'state capitalism' - remain within this logic.

This negative critique leads to the conclusion, for Hudis, that the replacement of capitalism involves the *immediate* overthrow of value production, with a *subsequent* process of construction of the free human society. The *immediate* overthrow of value production is conceived

in terms of a “communal network of associations, in which value production has been superseded on a systemic level” (p110). While this view is specifically attributed to the *Grundrisse* in Hudis’s text, the specific formulation in fact involves ‘reading back’ aspects of *The Civil war in France* into the more indeterminate ones in the *Grundrisse*. I leave on one side the various formulations in Hudis’s text which are designed to ‘save the phenomena’ for the idea that the Soviet Union and its imitators were forms of ‘state capitalism’. This has the usual knock-on consequence of such theories: that it drives Marx’s critique of political economy towards a pure abstraction about the wage relation *alone*, which, as redesigned, would be unable to distinguish between capitalism and the late antique economy⁹ - so that Hudis has difficulty in handling or accounting for the historical elements of the *Grundrisse* and of *Capital*, and the *Contribution to the critique of political economy* has to be left on one side.

The chapter on ‘Marx’s late writings’ begins by reasserting the standard left point from *The civil war in France*: the claim that the proletariat cannot simply take hold of and use the existing state machinery is a change from the formulations on the issue in the *Communist manifesto*. This is true enough, but poses the question of what Marx meant by the suggestions at the Hague congress and elsewhere that the *British* constitution would allow the proletariat to take over simply by winning an electoral majority. In my opinion these suggestions were mistaken - though comprehensible, given the weakness of the central *domestic* bureaucratic-coercive state apparatus and the high degree of freedom of local authorities in 19th century Britain. But, since they date after *The civil war in France*, this text cannot be treated as Marx’s last word on the issue. The larger part of the chapter wrestles with the *Critique of the Gotha programme*, and, in particular, the proposal for the use of labour tokens in the ‘lower stage of communism’ in this text, which - even as Hudis reinterprets it - does not sit terribly comfortably with Marx’s prior critiques of labour tokens proposals. The conclusion begins with the statement:

This study has shown that a coherent and vital concept of a new society is contained in the works of Marx, present from his early works of the 1840s to his last writings. From the inception of his philosophical project, Marx expressed strong opposition to any formation or situation in which individuals become dominated by social relations and products of their own making. His criticism of the inversion of subject and predicate, which is evident from his early writings on the state and civil society, carries over into his critique of the economic formations of capitalism ... (p207).

Close to its end, comes the claim that

Given the absence of a viable alternative to capitalism, discontent with the many ills of existing society risks falling short of a serious challenge to the system as a whole. In this sense, a philosophically grounded alternative to capitalism is not only needed to further develop mass opposition; it is needed to actually inspire it (p215).

In spite of all the criticisms I have made of Hudis’s argument here, clearly he is right that Marx’s project is precisely one of general human emancipation - and hence of a society whose goal is the development of human capabilities both individual

and collective.

However, it is very questionable indeed whether the problem with lack of inspiration is about the *philosophical* grounding of a socialist or communist alternative. It seems far more likely that the problem is a lack of belief that such a project is *practically viable*. Here Hudis’s Dunayevskayan commitments, and choice to proceed *via* Marxology, may well limit the value of the book.

Polak

Michal Polak’s politics are a great deal less visible, at least to this Anglophone reader, than Peter Hudis’s. His publishers, Palgrave, and various other links, advertise him as working as an advisor to the Slovak finance ministry (since 2012 the centre-left SMER Social Democrat party has formed the Slovak government); a 2004 article (in English) in the Austrian journal *Kurswechsel* on the evolution of Slovak politics since 1990 identifies him broadly with the left.¹⁰ The introduction (chapter 1) to *Class, surplus, and the division of labour* concludes with the comment:

Ultimately, of course, I hope to contribute in at least a minor way to that current of history which, despite the failure of one grand attempt, will nevertheless one day lead to an overcoming of the division into classes, making it possible for the first time to fully appreciate that which despite and across the class boundaries and barriers we glimpse uncertainly in a myriad ways even today: that great sense of shared belonging, our common humanity.

The book is an exploration of the basic theory of class, understood primarily as an economic phenomenon. The starting point is that Marx’s *elementary* accounts define classes (a) by relation to the means of production and (b) by antagonistic relations of exploitation. They also project a tendency for the class of small producers to disappear and society to become polarised between a small group of capitalists and a large group of proletarians.

These approaches have been ‘problematised’ by ‘revisionist’ writing since the time of Eduard Bernstein and a great deal of academic production. Polak identifies broadly three problems, the first of which is subdivided. The first point concerns classes in ‘advanced’ capitalism. As Bernstein identified, while the old class of small producers has indeed declined, polarisation in its full sense has not resulted, since capitalism has produced a new, employed, middle class, who cannot be simply identified as skilled workers (though some people who self-identify as ‘middle class’ clearly *are* simply skilled workers). Meanwhile, as Adolph Berle and Gardiner Means and, following them, James Burnham argued, modern capitalism is characterised by *separation of ownership and control*: ie, big corporations in the Anglosphere are characteristically ‘owned’ by dispersed groups of shareholders (often pension funds, etc), and actually *controlled* by senior executive managers (in recent years these managers have been distributees of a large share of the corporate profits, fraudulently identified as ‘salaries’ or ‘executive compensation’).¹¹

The second point is, of course, Stalinism - ie, that, whatever the ‘Soviet mode of production’ was (if there was such a thing), it was certainly not the ‘free association of the producers’. The third is the extensive objections which have been made to the labour theory of value and hence the concept of exploitation associated with it. Polak addresses the solutions which have been proposed to these problems as *problems of the theory of class*; he

suggests that this will, in the end, allow a superior concept of exploitation, which can more successfully handle the ‘managerial middle class’.

There are some fairly serious problems with Polak’s Marxology, and some problems with the range of literature used in other respects. As to the Marxology, as with Hudis, Hal Draper is underused - here not used at all, though *Karl Marx’s theory of revolution* Volume 2, *The politics of social classes*, would be plainly relevant to the argument. On the issue of the theory of classes and exploitation, GEM de Ste Croix’s *Class struggle in the ancient Greek world* (1981) is cited in the bibliography, but only used for a limited empirical point about the tendency of the class elite to intensify exploitation, not for de Ste Croix’s *theorisation* of what it means to attribute a particular class character to a society.

Similarly, on the issue of the labour theory of value and exploitation, a very limited range of literature has been used. Polak’s initial definition takes Marx to have adhered to something like Ferdinand Lassalle’s ‘iron law of wages’: ie, that wages cannot rise significantly above bare subsistence rates. Marx’s explicit denunciation of this view does not ‘solve’ the Marxological problem, since in places Marx himself wrote as if it was true; but it does problematise Polak’s basic assumption. Though Polak considers the ‘temporal single systems interpretation’ of Marx (TSSI) and uses Carchedi’s early work on class, he does not use Carchedi’s more recent work on the labour theory of value; nor does he consider the alternative line of reasoning, which deals with the ‘transformation problem’ by rejecting the arithmetical-average ‘general rate of profit’ in *Capital* Vol 3, and hence ‘prices of production’ - as in Farjoun’s and Machover’s *Laws of chaos* (1983) and the ‘probabilistic political economy’ school influenced by this book.

Polak’s arguments are, nonetheless, of interest, since, though the problems he identifies may not have been Marx’s problems, they were certainly problems with *common interpretations of Marx*; and the issues of Stalinism, of the managerial ‘middle class’ and of ‘ownership and control’ are real issues for Marxist policy and for the idea of a real strategic alternative to capitalism. In particular, Hudis’s approach, which blames post-Marx Marxists for *philosophical* errors leading to Stalinism, is vulnerable to the critiques referred to.

The resulting argument is fairly intricate - a great deal more complicated than Hudis’s argument - and I can only give a very sketchy and, probably, as a result partly misleading outline of it. Chapter 2 - ‘It’s not what you have, it’s what you do: the return of the division-of-labour theory of class’ - begins by arguing that Marx’s theory necessarily entails class as a form of polarisation of exploiters and exploited and therefore theoretically *cannot* account for intermediate classes. Meanwhile, however, the early Marx also analysed class in terms of the division of labour, and in particular the division between mental and manual labour. The problems already referred to have led, he argues, to a return of division-of-labour analysis. Polak reviews and critiques in depth variant versions offered by Nikos Poulantzas, Allin Cottrell, Erik Olin Wright, Guglielmo Carchedi, Rudolf Bahro, Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel, and Pierre Bordieu, concluding that division-of-labour approaches remain *ad hoc* and do not solve the ‘exploitation problem’.

Chapter 3 - ‘Exploitation is not a game: a critique of John Roemer’ - systematically reviews ‘analytical Marxist’ Roemer’s attempts to construct a theory of exploitation

without the labour theory of value and by constructing counter-factuals about the distribution of property rights. The critique of Roemer then sets the stage for chapter 4 - ‘Back to basics: reproduction, subsistence, exploitation and class’ - which concludes that the essential core of Marx’s argument is the need to distinguish reproduction (reproducing the current state of the human individual, or of the economy) from surplus production, and then works through defining terms - distinguishing ‘exploitation’ from ‘poverty’ and ‘wealth’ - and concludes with a treatment of the issue of class as a structural position: class ‘awareness’ and ‘consciousness’ and class ‘agency’. Chapter 5 - ‘If profit is the answer, what is the question: income from capital and the labour theory of value’ - argues that neoclassical and Austrian-school theories of profit simply fail to explain the phenomenon, and the labour theory of value in some sense is essential to doing so.

Chapter 6 - ‘What price value? Beyond the transformation problem and the Sraffian critique’ - argues, broadly, that both the ‘New interpretation’ of Gerard Dumenil, Duncan Foley and others and the TSSI are logically incoherent. Instead, he argues that Marx’s account is a *subset* of cases, valid only if capitalists invest the whole surplus product rather than consuming any of it as luxury goods and services. If they consumed the *entire* surplus as luxury goods and services, this luxury sector of the economy would be characterised by ‘Walrasian’ subjective-utility prices and the law of value would not hold outside the ‘reproductive’ sector; with the result that produces the ‘transformation’ problem.

Necessity and freedom

Chapter 7 - ‘A beast of many faces: complex exploitation, the sphere of necessity and the sphere of freedom’ - ‘cashes’ the argument of the rest of the book in an attempt to synthesise the surplus-product and division-of-labour approaches to class. It is at this point that Polak’s argument becomes most directly relevant to the issue of visions of the future.

Polak has constructed an abstract model of class, which ignores issues of inheritance and social mobility. He makes the point that this is an *explicit* abstraction, in contrast to the commonplace practice of *implicitly* abstracting from these issues. When he comes to resynthesise, he begins with the proposition that most people receive some income above subsistence; and that class identification is not a matter of *how much* income, but of *how* income is received. The three basic classes are ‘capitalists’, who receive income from ownership of ‘non-human resources’; ‘professionals’ who receive, in addition to a wage, *rents* from naturally or artificially scarce skills; and proletarians, who receive only a wage.

The managers are characterised by the fact that they *both* perform the function of capital - by seeking profit - *and* do so by exercising hierarchical authority. Polak gives fairly extensive analytical arguments for supposing that hierarchical authority is not *in itself* exploitation; but that its existence will commonly *entail* exploitation.

Indeed, under a permanent managerial hierarchy, he argues, the managers are better off *in the sort of work that they do*, whether or not they are sufficiently well-paid to command luxury goods and services - and they are better off *at the expense of the managed*, who are stuck with doing boring/drudgery type work and/or working in unpleasant environments. Hence, his ‘generalisation’ of the concept of exploitation is that the exploiters do not *need* to be pure parasites or anything like it. He tags this

phenomenon as ‘complex exploitation’. Put another way, the ‘complex exploited’ are, he argues, pushed into or held in ‘the realm of necessity’; while the ‘complex exploiters’ have a degree of creativity and choice in their work which places them more in ‘the realm of freedom’ and allows them a degree of more all-round human development. The result is inherent class conflict between ‘complex exploited’ and ‘complex exploiters’.

The merit of this argument is precisely to pose the issues of ‘managerialism’ and ‘bureaucracy’ in ways which *can* be used to analyse the persistence of class and the politics of class in ‘developed’ capitalist society - and in the Stalinist regimes; and which *can* be addressed to the question of general human emancipation. The book does not in itself address these questions. But its logic has large implications.

In particular, it returns us to two points I made in the first article. One is underdeveloped (though present) in Hudis: ie, that Marx’s vision of the new society involves the *overcoming of the ‘division of labour’, meaning occupational specialisation*. The second, and related, is the *persistence of the middle classes*, even if the immediate political power of capital is overthrown. I will return to these issues in the final article ●

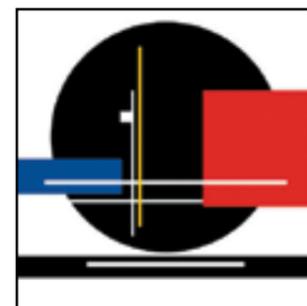
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Notes

1. ‘Thinking the alternative’, part 1 *Weekly Worker* April 9.
2. The Marx texts referred to here and below are generally available on Marxists Internet Archive.
3. *The economics of Karl Marx* Cambridge 2008.
4. The title, which would at first sight not suggest a book about political economy, comes from its character as a polemic against Pierre-Joseph Proudhon’s 1846 *Philosophie de la misère*.
5. Compare, for example, KB Anderson, ‘The “unknown” Marx’s *Capital* Vol 1’ *Review of Radical Political Economics* No15 (1983), pp71-80.
6. www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/05/parti-ouvrier.htm.
7. See Carver: <http://marxismcritico.com/2013/05/06/the-german-ideology-never-took-place>.
8. The idea in this form is quite similar to Ludwig Feuerbach’s critique of Christianity, but Hudis argues (pp42-43) that Marx’s dissertation was completed before Feuerbach published *The essence of Christianity* (1841); David Leopold, similarly but not identically, argues that the idea of the *verkehrte Welt*, the topsy-turvy world, was an intellectual commonplace of the period: *The young Karl Marx* Cambridge 2007, chapter 2, notes 131-32, addressing Marx’s slightly later *Critique of Hegel’s philosophy of right*.
9. Cf J Banaji *Agrarian change in late antiquity* Oxford 2001 - and contrast PF Bang *The Roman bazaar* Cambridge 2008.
10. ‘Slovakia: from “national capitalism” to EU liberalism (and beyond)’ *Kurswechsel* No1, 2004, pp70-77: www.beigewum.at/kurswechsel/jahresprogramm-2004/heft-12004.
11. A Berle and G Means *The modern corporation and private property* (1932) second edition, New York 1999; J Burnham *The managerial revolution* (1941) London 1945; cf B Cheffins and S Bank, ‘Is Berle and Means really a myth?’ *Business History Review* No83 (2009) pp443-74.

Communist Platform Magna Carta and long history



Speaker

Mike Macnair

Calthorpe Arms,
252 Grays Inn Road,
London WC1

Sunday April 19, 5pm

BOLSHEVISM

April in Petrograd

Is Lars T Lih a disinterested scholar without a political agenda? **Jim Creegan** argues against the creation of yet another mythical Lenin

Lars T Lih in a recent letter to the *Weekly Worker*¹ challenges certain of my factual assertions² about the political situation in Russia upon Lenin's return in April 1917 - "April in Petrograd", Lih has dubbed it - as well as my larger argument that his *April theses* represented a break with 'old Bolshevism'.

I stand corrected on one point. Mass desertions from the Russian front did not take place immediately after the February revolution, as I stated in a careless telescoping of events. Revisiting this issue, I get the impression that there was, in addition to a steady trickle of deserters, a widespread expectation on the part of the military rank and file that the government would move toward peace, and a reluctance to undertake offensive operations. The officer corps was loudly complaining about 'disorganisation' in the rear, due in no small part to the fact that many soldiers, already infected with the bacillus of soviet democracy, now insisted on discussing their orders instead of obeying automatically. Mass desertions, however, did not begin until the Provisional Government (hereafter the PG) attempted to resume offensive operations at the urging of the Allies in June.

Lih also states that Lenin did not call for an insurrection against the PG in April, either as a tactical or strategic objective. What I actually wrote - and what is true - is that Lenin posed the *overthrow* of the PG and the transfer of power to the soviets as a strategic objective. He added that the overthrow could not take place immediately because a majority in the soviet still supported the socialist compromisers, who comprised its executive and in turn supported the PG. In Lenin's perspective, the Mensheviks and right Socialist Revolutionaries had to be discredited through agitation and a further unfolding of the revolution before the soviets could assume state power.

Misunderstanding or left turn?

In his most recent article,³ Lih seeks to bolster his argument, made more extensively in other articles and talks, that Kamenev and Stalin, the two most prominent Bolsheviks to return to Russia before Lenin, shared his basic view that the PG had to go, and that Trotsky's claim that they initially assumed a conciliatory attitude, and were reoriented by Lenin, is a myth.

Being unable to read Russian, I do not have access to all the documents that Lih does. But if his strongest textual evidence is the *Pravda* editorial he cites, written by Kamenev in March, predicting an eventual clash between the masses and the PG, I submit he has not yet made his case.

Even amid the general confusion with which the leaderless Bolshevik ranks responded to the February revolution before more senior figures returned from exile, right and left tendencies were discernible, if not always clearly defined. Kamenev and Stalin, who took over the editorship of *Pravda* in mid-March, were perceived as siding with the right, to the rejoicing of the PG and the executive committee of the Soviet. A protest against their editorial policies from the militant working class Vyborg party district was printed in *Pravda*.

Right-left differences revolved around what the Bolshevik attitude



Would 'old Bolshevism' passively wait upon events?

should be toward the war and the PG. The right gravitated toward a 'revolutionary defencist' position, which, while denouncing any annexationist designs and calling on the government to sue for peace, urged soldiers and sailors to remain steadfast at their posts and answer the enemy "bullet for bullet, shell for shell" (Kamenev's words) in defence of Russia's newly won "revolutionary democracy". The left, on the other hand, regarded the war as no less imperialistic under the PG than it had been under the tsar, and advocated unconditional opposition to the war effort as a whole. The right urged support of the PG *insofar* as it moved to consolidate and broaden revolutionary gains, and opposition *insofar* as it acted as an obstacle. For its part, the left saw the PG as a bourgeois, completely counterrevolutionary government, to be overthrown by the workers and peasants, and not worthy of even the most qualified support.

Lenin returned to Russia in early April as the most powerful and consistent champion of the Bolshevik left, and succeeded, in the face of much initial hostility, in clarifying the left position and winning the party over to

his viewpoint in a month's time.

Lars Lih argues that Kamenev's prediction that the masses and the PG would eventually clash means that he had no real difference with Lenin on this score; that his disavowal of Lenin's revolutionary defeatism during a trial in a tsarist court in 1914, his declaration in *Pravda* that the *April theses* were "unacceptable", and his opposition to Lenin in party conferences at the time were all the result of a misunderstanding. There is, however, another interpretation of Kamenev's prediction of a clash more in keeping with his conciliatory character, attested to by all who knew him: that he felt compelled to modify his position of conditional support for the PG in response to vociferous objections from the party rank and file: ie, that he obeyed his congenital instinct to cleave to the middle of the road. Kamenev's subsequent denunciation, in the Menshevik press on the eve of October, of Lenin's plans for an insurrection, in addition to his efforts to form an all-socialist coalition government, including the Mensheviks, even after the Bolshevik seizure of power, suggests that his disputes with Lenin in April may

have involved something more than a misperception. Kamenev was in this period the most right-leaning of all the Bolshevik leaders.

Lih argues in addition that Lenin, no less than Kamenev, relied on a further development of the revolutionary process for a final break with the PG. He forgets to add, however, that the processes each relied upon were very different. Kamenev anticipated a further movement of the government to the right under mass pressure as an eventuality which could possibly mean a rupture between the government and the soviets, and presumably necessitate the complete withdrawal of support. For Lenin, on the other hand, non-support for the PG was not contingent on any future actions on its part; the PG was completely rotten, as things stood. The only process he thought necessary for its overthrow by the soviets was a campaign of "patient explanation" to persuade the soviet majority and the masses to this view - a task which he was confident would be aided by further objective developments. Kamenev's 'process' was more or less automatic;

Lenin's largely reliant on Bolshevik initiative: ie, agency.

Old Bolshevism

Closely related to the attitude toward the PG was the question of 'old Bolshevism' - the party's understanding of the future dynamics of the Russian Revolution, elaborated by Lenin during and after 1905. Kamenev and other right-leaning Bolsheviks invoked old Bolshevism in defence of their less than categorical opposition to the PG, arguing that the bourgeois phase of the revolution had not yet been completed. Lenin, on the other hand, said that his old formula of the "revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" had been rendered obsolete by the emergence of the soviets as an organ of dual power in 1917.

The party debates on this question are somewhat confusing because they conflate what are actually two distinct questions: (1) was old Bolshevism compatible with the overthrow of the PG by the soviets, as advocated by Lenin?; and (2) was it compatible with the state that Lenin saw as emerging from the overthrow?

Long before 1917, Lenin had held that the Russian bourgeoisie was too fearful of the masses to carry the bourgeois-democratic revolution through to the end. This task fell to the workers and peasants. Hence the need for their democratic dictatorship. Thus if, in 1917, the PG represented the bourgeoisie, and the soviets embodied the power of the workers and peasants, the replacement of the former by the latter was perfectly conceivable within the old Bolshevik framework.

The state power that Lenin envisaged as a result was quite a different matter. The pre-1917 Bolshevik leader had viewed the democratic dictatorship as a short-lived episode. After enacting a series of radical democratic reforms - universal suffrage, the eight-hour day, the breaking up of big landed estates - it would ultimately yield power to a constituent assembly dominated by the bourgeoisie with the support of a peasant majority. It makes no difference whether we employ Lenin's terminology, or Lih's preferred Russian phrase, "revolution to the end". The point is that the end was thought to be in sight. The resulting bourgeois republic would preside over a period of capitalist development, made longer or shorter depending upon the progress of the international revolution. Only during such a bourgeois phase could the Russian proletariat expand its numbers and prepare to take power in its own name.

Both Lenin and every faction and shade of the Bolshevik Party realised that Lenin's call in April for the establishment of a commune state (on the model of the Paris Commune) - without a standing army, a bureaucracy or a police force hostile to the workers; a state that would nationalise the land, introduce strict control over the banks and the industrial cartels, get out of the war and grant self-determination to all nations within the Russian empire - made impossible the ceding of the reins to the bourgeoisie, as in the earlier scenario, because the measures Lenin advocated entailed the destruction of everything Russian capitalists held dear, and hence a total negation of their already weak class power. The Bolsheviks understood that what Lenin was now calling for was nothing less

than a proletarian dictatorship. In this respect, old Bolshevism was completely upended. As the trade union leader and rightwing Bolshevik, Mikhail Tomsky, argued against Lenin in April, "The democratic dictatorship is our foundation stone. We ought to organise the power of the proletariat and peasants, and we ought to distinguish this from the commune, since that means the power of the proletariat alone."⁴

It is true that Lenin, never a stickler for scholastic consistency, at this time spoke alternately of a workers' government and a government of workers and poor peasants. And peasant support was clearly indispensable. But he was also clear that winning the peasants to his programme was the task of the proletariat and its party, and that only the working class, vastly inferior in numbers though it was, would form a solid basis of support for the socialist measures he deemed necessary, as well as for thoroughly internationalist foreign policies. The workers would lead, the poorer peasants would follow. This was the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Kamenev also objected to the April theses on the grounds that the tasks of the democratic revolution - eg, land redistribution - were not yet complete. But Kamenev here assumed a false correspondence between tasks and regime. Although it was true that many of the desiderata of the bourgeois revolution had yet to be accomplished, Lenin was arguing that, under then existing historical circumstances, they could only be attained under a dictatorship of the proletariat supported by the poorer peasants. It also went without saying that the resulting state and society, in its chaos and economic backwardness, would bear little resemblance to what Marx and Engels called socialism. Socialism and the proletarian dictatorship are not the same thing. But by taking initial steps in a socialist direction, the dictatorship would demolish any strict temporal divide between the two. There was now to be no turning back from a trajectory leading ultimately to socialism, regardless of the time it took or obstacles encountered on the way. Eliminated from the whole equation was the discrete phase of capitalist development envisaged in the 'democratic dictatorship' formula.

Lih to the contrary notwithstanding, old Bolshevism not only failed fully to arm the party for the challenge of the February revolution: its retention of a theory of stages, however superior to the Menshevik version, proved an obstacle, creating confusion even in the minds of the most radical of Bolsheviks and making them unable to answer convincingly the arguments of the party's right. It took the boldness of Lenin to cut the Gordian knot by declaring: "The person who now speaks of a 'revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry' is behind the times; consequently, he is in effect gone over to the petty bourgeoisie against the proletarian class struggle; that person should be consigned to the archive of 'Bolshevik' pre-revolutionary antiques..."⁵ Lih concedes that I "[point] out some of the changes required by the old Bolshevik outlook..." Among these "changes" was the discarding of their entire previous prognosis for the course of the revolution.

How did Lenin reconcile his call for a proletarian dictatorship with what he previously saw as the ultimate barrier to such an objective: the existence of an overwhelming Russian peasant majority, which Marxists regarded as fundamentally a small property-owning class, hostile to socialism? Lih emphasises Lenin's (incorrect) belief in a strategy of mobilising poor peasants against rich ones as opening up the possibility of a collectivist solution to the agrarian question. This was indeed an important part of Lenin's thinking at the time. But this is

only half the story (or perhaps less than half). Lenin also regarded the Russian Revolution as the first wave of a vast international upheaval resulting from World War I, which he was confident (also wrongly, as it turned out) would end in the conquest of working class power in other European countries.

One may infer from Lih's reference in one of his talks to the "deus ex machina of the international revolution" that he does not take this expectation very seriously. Lenin did. He hoped that aid from more advanced European revolutionary regimes would allow Russia to acquire the bases of mechanised agriculture, which, supplied to model collective farms, could induce peasants to join voluntarily. This was, of course, no more than a wish in April of 1917. Lenin knew that the course he was proposing was fraught with enormous difficulty. But there was no choice in his eyes. Bolshevism's leading thinker perceived that history, perhaps getting ahead of itself, had posed a problem that could only be resolved in one of two ways: a massacre of workers and peasants or a proletarian conquest of power. He further thought that capitalism would present a similar dilemma to the workers of Europe and beyond. He believed that the revolution that began in Russia could end in Warsaw, London or Berlin. In Lenin's words, "You can't say who will begin and who will finish".

Prophet misconstrued

I contend that the events of April in Petrograd are accurately retold by Leon Trotsky in his *History of the Russian Revolution*. I also think that the theory of permanent revolution, first elaborated formally in Trotsky's 1906 book, *Results and prospects*, is as prescient a medium-term historical prognosis as any ever made. To repeat what I wrote in my March 5 letter, Trotsky asserted that the coming Russian Revolution could not end in the temporary, self-limiting worker-peasant dictatorship that Lenin anticipated. It would rather flow uninterrupted into a proletarian dictatorship supported by the peasantry, which would be forced to take a series of irreversible socialist measures.

Lih, while allowing that Lenin moved some distance toward Trotsky's position in 1917, argues that Trotsky was also forced to modify his positions in that year. But Lih bases this claim on a caricature of Trotsky's views that echoes attempts by the triumvirs (Kamenev, Zinoviev, Stalin) and, later, the duumvirs (Bukharin and Stalin) in the 1920s to paint him as the "enemy of the peasant".

In one of the talks by Lih on the *Weekly Worker* website, he characterises Trotsky's position in this way: the revolution will not be supported by the peasants, but let's have it anyway. In his letter of March 26, Lih reproduces an unreferenced quotation from Trotsky (which I am sure is authentic)⁶ predicting war with the peasantry if the revolution is not supported internationally, and suggests that Trotsky favoured going ahead with it, "unfazed" by such a horrendous outcome and urging the workers to hold on until they were "forced out". Lih also seems to think that the socialist steps Trotsky believed a revolutionary government would be compelled to take included "forcing socialist measures" on the peasantry.

All of the above represents either a profound misunderstanding or a wilful misrepresentation of the thinking of the October revolution's presager and second-in-command. Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution did not conceive of the Russian Revolution as the result of an act of will, which one could decide either to have or not to have. *Results and prospects* was an attempt to analyse the class dynamics of a revolution that the

author considered inevitable, and to foresee some of the dilemmas it was bound to face, dictated by its deepest driving forces. The necessity to take socialist measures despite peasant preponderance, and the conflict within the revolution that may have entailed, were contingencies thrust upon the working class by history, not the result of decisions of leaders, who could only guide the historical process, not determine its contents. Like Lenin, Trotsky believed that the worker would stand before the peasant as his emancipator and attract his support during the revolution's initial phases, but that the regime would later experience a conflict with the peasantry, which only the international revolution could abate. No-one in 1917 - not Lenin, not Trotsky, nor any other Bolshevik - believed the revolution could survive without the aid of the international working class. But instead of serving up a somewhat obscure quotation about what Trotsky feared might be the more dire consequences - by which he was never "unfazed" - of the revolution's isolation, Lih may have cited a less sensational passage:

The proletariat will find itself compelled to carry the class struggle into the villages and in this manner to destroy that community of interest which is undoubtedly to be found among all peasants... From the very first moment after its taking power the proletariat will have to find support in the antagonisms between the village poor and the village rich, between the agricultural proletariat and the agricultural bourgeoisie. While the homogeneity of the peasantry creates difficulties and narrows the basis for a proletarian policy, the insufficient degree of class differentiation will create obstacles to the introduction among the peasantry of developed class struggle, upon which the urban proletariat could rely...⁷

Not only does the Trotsky of 1906 predict the early attempts of the soviet power to stimulate class struggle in the countryside, but also points to the factors that will make this attempt extremely difficult.

Finally, Trotsky no more than Lenin ever advocated trying to collectivise agriculture by force. Such an attempt was not among the socialist measures he predicted a workers' government would have to adopt, which involved the inroads on private property necessary to combat employer lockouts and unemployment. Even after the revolution had for the time being failed to spread, the platform of the Left Opposition, which Trotsky led, advocated a series of fiscal policies and other economic incentives to persuade the peasants to join collective farms voluntarily. The forcible 'solution' to the city-country stand-off that developed was launched in 1928 by the man who only a few years earlier denounced Trotsky as the *muzhik's* arch-foe - Joseph Stalin. Lih, in short, claims that Trotsky had to modify his prognosis in 1917 by retreating from a reckless indifference to consequences which there is no evidence he was ever guilty of.

Disinterested?

Lars Lih asks why I am so fervidly anti-old Bolshevik, and answers that it is because I seek to make my "hero", Leon Trotsky, look good at the expense of other members of Lenin's party. But let me ask another question: why does Lih go to such lengths to deny credit where credit is clearly due to the theorist who predicted the course of the Russian Revolution more accurately than anyone else?

Lih presents himself as a disinterested scholar without a political agenda. His recontextualising of the Lenin of *What is to be done?* is impressive. But his myth-debunking

efforts (some of which are aimed at real myths that need to be debunked) display a certain tendency. Most of them end up by blurring right-left distinctions - whether between Lenin and Kautsky or between Lenin and Bolshevik 'moderates'. Could there be more to Lih's rethinking of Lenin, and disparaging of Trotsky, than an excess of myth-demolishing zeal?

Despite its debasement at the hands of epigones, the name of Leon Trotsky remains vaguely synonymous with revolutionary Marxism - as opposed to Stalinism and social democracy - in the contemporary political vocabulary. But this connotation is not always positive. The western left of recent decades has largely abandoned any hope of revolution and become the left flank of liberal reformism.

We already suffer from a number of mythical Lenins. There is the infallible founder-leader Lenin of Soviet-Stalinist manufacture and the ruthless, power-mad

Lenin of bourgeois demonology. Could it be that Lars T Lih - consciously or unconsciously - is attempting to fashion yet a third Lenin, softer in profile, shorn of revolutionary edges and dissociated from Trotsky, in order to make him less objectionable to the left-reformist political sensibilities of today? ●

Notes

1. Letters, March 26.
2. Letters, March 5.
3. 'The Bolsheviks were fully armed' *Weekly Worker* February 26.
4. Quoted in P Le Blanc *Lenin and the revolutionary party* New York 1993, p261.
5. VI Lenin *CW* Vol 24, Moscow 1980, p45 (emphases in original).
6. Editor's note: The reference was in fact provided by Lars T Lih, but was too lengthy to be included in a letter. It was: R Day and D Gaido (eds) *Witnesses to permanent revolution: the documentary record* Leiden 2009, p576. Lars Lih had added: "For further discussion of Trotsky's 1905-06 scenario and the 'axiom of the class ally', see LT Lih, 'Democratic revolution in permanenz' *Science and Society* 76: 4 (October 2012), pp433-62."
7. L Trotsky *Results and prospects* New York 1974, pp76-77.

Lars T Lih replies



and his "congenital instincts" and thus is able to dismiss this editorial. He also seriously suggests that Kamenev believed that Bolsheviks could rely on automatic processes without bothering to take any initiative. I can state with assurance that Creegan knows next to nothing about Kamenev's outlook, because there is no serious research in English on Kamenev's Bolshevism. In fact, the existing scholarship about the Bolsheviks in spring 1917 consists very largely of recycled one-liners and piquant anecdotes.

Lenin: Creegan is incorrect to suggest that Lenin did not use the phrase, 'to the end'. As it happens, he used it often, as did other Russian Social Democrats. His use of the phrase is obscured by existing translations that for some reason employ various paraphrases. More importantly, Lenin did not argue in 1917 that only workers would support "steps toward socialism" (as Creegan suggests), but just the opposite. The steps toward socialism envisaged by Lenin were policies adopted by a large majority of the population; in fact, they were already advocated by moderate socialists.

Trotsky: Creegan thinks he can make my Trotsky evidence disappear by labelling it "obscure" or "sensational". I do not understand this: if Trotsky wrote it, then he wrote it and presumably meant it. I should mention that this revealing document was recently made available in English by two great admirers of Trotsky, Richard Day and Daniel Gaido. But the status of this particular evidence is hardly the point. The heart of Trotsky's 1905-07 scenario is the assertion that, without international revolution, the proletarian regime will go down in flames. And why will this happen? Principally because the proletariat will be compelled by its class nature (Creegan usefully stresses Trotsky's inevitabilist rhetoric) to introduce collectivist measures in the countryside and thus alienate its main class ally. Here is the relevant link to the same chapter from which Creegan takes his very partial citation: www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1931/tpr/rp06.htm.

I did not accuse Trotsky, the revolutionary statesman, of "reckless indifference to consequences"; in fact, I complimented him for not acting in the manner predicted by his own earlier scenario, as Creegan himself documents ●

Jim Creegan provides a solid base for future discussion. On the one hand, adherence to the 'old Bolshevik' outlook did not stand in the way of replacing the "bourgeois" Provisional Government regime with "soviet power" (*sovetskaya vlast*). I am glad to see this point acknowledged. On the other hand, the new soviet regime pursued various goals not foreseen a decade earlier. We can all agree on these points.

Creegan says, rather hopefully, that if my "strongest textual evidence is [Kamenev's] editorial," then I have not made my case. As it happens, the Kamenev editorial is only one small piece of evidence. I regret that my more heavily documented academic essays are harder to access, but, alas, at present that is the way of this wicked world. I will be happy to supply relevant articles to anyone who contacts me directly. Creegan spends much of his present article trying to explain away the evidence I provided. He might as well get used to this exercise, because I can assure him that more and more such evidence will be put into circulation. Let us take a look at his evasive procedures.

Kamenev: Creegan suggests that the translated *Pravda* article represents a position that the pliable Kamenev only adapted under pressure from below, because his earlier pro-government stand was unpopular. This explanation does not work, because the editorial was Kamenev's first publication and appeared in *Pravda* the day after he arrived in Petrograd. But there is a larger point here. Creegan thinks he has a good handle on Kamenev's real outlook

LEFT UNITY**Safe spaces: kills honest debate and enquiry**

How not to arm ourselves

Yassamine Mather looks at the problems resulting from the attempt to create ‘safe spaces’ in universities and student unions

We live in terrible times. Horrific wars in the Middle East seem endless, with atrocities committed by imperialist allies as well as jihadists. Throughout the world and even in advanced capitalist countries, inequality and poverty are so widespread that even bourgeois economists are concerned about the gap between rich and the poor. The future of our planet is in doubt because of the destructive, wasteful and polluting logic of capitalism. In most societies, sexism, racism and xenophobia are widespread, and prospects for many can be worrying and depressing.

In the words of Friedrich Engels, “If the whole of modern society is not to perish, a revolution in the mode of production and distribution must take place”; or, as Rosa Luxemburg put it, we are witnessing a “regression into barbarism”. However, in the midst of all this despair and disaster some of us still know it is possible to change the world. It is possible to fight imperialism’s warmongering in the Middle East without supporting reactionary jihadists; it is possible to fight Islamophobia without becoming soft Zionists; it is possible to fight for socialism, while rejecting reformist or Keynesian solutions.

We are not bourgeois politicians. We openly confront international, national and local evils. More

importantly we are not in the business of combating these evils with reform here, legislation there: we want a new kind of society, not just here in Britain, but for the world. That is precisely why in our political activity, in our political organisations, we cannot hide from reality - we cannot and should not seek ‘safe spaces’.

We do not believe human beings are born racist or sexist - they are made so by the social conditions they inhabit. We believe that ultimately only a minority whose class interests are served by exploitation, war and destruction will resist change. We are confident in our ability to persuade the majority. We are convinced that the best way to fight nationalism and xenophobia, for example, is to explain the history of colonialism and imperialism to those who have been duped into believing such divisive nonsense. We know that the best way to deal with xenophobia, misogyny or Islamophobia is to confront it head on.

We are not in the business of falsifying reality. We reject the idea that racism and sexism can be fully defeated under capitalism and we refuse to go along with the notion that that we should aim to create little zones free from racism or sexism in an unjust capitalist world. On the contrary, we argue that the system relies on divide and rule, that racism and sexism are by-products of the

prevailing economic order. We are not a religious sect that seeks to isolate its members from reality. We are determined to fight the barbarism created by the continued existence of capitalism and it is in this respect that we call ourselves revolutionaries rather than reformists. We believe that better jobs with better pay cannot be achieved by keeping out immigrants. The problem is capitalism and we see it as our responsibility to explain this to those sections of the working class that blame foreigners for job losses, low wages, poor housing and cuts.

We do not seek to create non-racist zones in impoverished areas, where migrants can be protected from racist or chauvinistic attitudes. We want to change the world, not escape from it. Unlike social workers we do not aim to help workers find individual temporary relief. We are for a collective fight and we need comrades prepared to fearlessly study and discuss questions of history, economics and philosophy, to engage in arduous debate. How can we expect them to do so if they are constantly engaged in self-censorship, if their main concern is to avoid forceful argument for fear of offending others?

LU and NUS

Last year, in opposition to calls for Left Unity to adopt a safe spaces policy, I wrote an article explaining

the adverse effects of such policies on, for example, US campuses.¹ Like other fashionable ideas, the concept of safe spaces has crossed the pond and is now prevalent in the UK, particularly in student unions. So this article will look at its implementation and show that its record is hardly more encouraging than in the US.

As amusing as some of these examples are, we should not forget that organisations like the National Union of Students are not of the left - they are not in the business of advocating thoroughgoing change, never mind revolution. In that sense, the fact that they succumb to the notion of safe spaces is understandable. But that is not the case for an organisation that *does* stand for a new society. First and foremost it would be an admission that, rather than changing society, we are prepared to settle for advance on an isolated island, creating an echo chamber for our own members and supporters, a safe space from the realities of the society they seek to change.

The NUS is not even a trade union: it aims to represent students from diverse social and political backgrounds. Its bureaucratic leadership is often dominated by Labourites and it has never been in the forefront of the struggle for change. Even at the height of the radicalisation the student movement, the NUS

remained conservative (with a small c) and in recent decades it has acted as a training ground for rightwing politicians. In other words, not an institution whose policies should be imitated by organisations of the left. Yet at the February 28 meeting of LU’s national council it was suggested that, as the NUS is the only national institution that implements a safe spaces policy, it should be studied with a view to following suit.

The NUS’s policy is supposed to cover every aspect of the union’s activities across the country: “The principal values are to ensure an accessible environment in which every student feels comfortable, safe and able to get involved in all aspects of the organisation, free from intimidation or judgement.” The original intentions were worthy: the union was trying to create an “inclusive and welcoming environment for a growing student body, and attract more students from minority and/or vulnerable backgrounds”. However, the problem was that, as the policy evolved from its original focus on LGBT rights, it turned into its exact opposite, becoming divisive, discriminatory and abusive.

The latest episode in a long list of safe spaces disaster stories come from Goldsmith University. In February 2015, the student union advertised the film *Dear white people* as suitable

What we fight for

“for BME students”. In case anyone was in doubt, the poster advertising the film specified it was for students of “African, Caribbean, Arab, Asian and South American ethnic origin”, and student union officials used social media to clarify that the screening was to be a “BME-only social happening”. In other words, a policy that claims to work against discrimination ended up advocating a racially segregated ‘safe space’.

The same university gave us another example. The Feminist Society had booked a comedian, Kate Smurthwaite, to perform a gig. The booking had been endorsed by a vote taken at a meeting of the society, but a group of students took exception to Smurthwaite’s support for the Nordic model of sex work, which criminalises the customers of prostitutes, not the sex workers themselves. Smurthwaite and supporters of the Nordic model argue that the policy cuts down on prostitution without targeting sex workers, but their opponents argue it drives prostitution underground, making it more dangerous. Some feminists at Goldsmiths argued that Smurthwaite’s support for the Nordic model made her “whorephobic” and she was therefore in violation of the student union’s safe spaces policy. They announced they would picket the film show, and the organisers, in conjunction with university security, decided to cancel the event.

‘Free from judgement’

At Bristol University, the student union explains that its safe spaces policy aims to achieve “an accessible environment in which every student feels comfortable, safe and able to get involved in all aspects of the organisation, free from intimidation or judgement”.² The policy is not about preventing criminal action (which one assumes is a matter for the police and the judicial system). It is about ‘freedom’ from ‘unsafe’ language - students should not have to hear words or phrases they might find insulting. This could be anything from ‘It is so gay’ to name-calling. Some students unions have gone so far as to recommend a dress code, encouraging students to choose ‘appropriate’ clothing.

According to *The Guardian*,

Oxford University cancelled a debate on abortion because protesters objected to the fact it was being held between two men; the Cambridge Union was asked (but refused) to withdraw its speaking invitation to Germaine Greer because of her views on transgender issues; officials at London South Bank took down a ‘flying spaghetti monster’ poster because it might cause religious offence; UCL banned the Nietzsche Club after it put up posters saying ‘equality is a false god’, and Dundee banned the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children from their freshers’ fair. *The Sun* is banned on dozens of campuses because of page 3...²³

In November 2014 the University of Liverpool’s LGBT Society complained that the Islamic Society was violating the union’s safe spaces policy because they had invited a speaker, the cleric, Mufti Ismail Menk, who held homophobic views. It should be noted that this was a private meeting for members of the Islamic Society, but that did not stop the LGBT Society from claiming the event would impinge on their “freedoms and happiness” and calling on Liverpool Guild of Students to ban the event.

Then there is the University College London Union’s Nietzsche reading group. According to *Spiked Online*, UCLU banned the group, arguing

that it was promoting “a far-right, fascist ideology” which threatened the “safety of the UCL student body and UCLU members”.⁴ We can all have our opinions about Nietzsche and this particular reading group. However, the idea that university students are so vulnerable that they must be protected from ‘unacceptable’ ideas is absurd. The declared intention here is to make sure the students feel ‘safe’, but in reality the policy leads to a far more sinister situation - at best dumbing down serious debate, at worst silencing critical views. The purpose is to discourage critical thought, creating the kind of bourgeois conformity cherished by modern capitalism - one that discourages rebellion. Do we seriously want to imitate this trend in LU?

University lecturers wary of new, campus-wide regulations about safe spaces have started adding warnings to their lecture notes. Students have to be warned in advance if what they read contains words or phrases they might find offensive. It would all be a bad joke if it was not so serious, adversely affecting our ability to study, engage with ideas and understand the past. How are students supposed to study history if descriptions of wars, genocide, pillage and rape are censored? In literature, poems and prose contain homophobic, sexist language. There is misogyny and violence in the classics, while science is not free from ‘offensive’ notions. See this from Louise Pennington: “How many times have I heard students refuse to read about the holocaust because the thought of it upsets them? And those who want learn about the V2 rockets, because machines are cool, and not the thousands of slave-labourers who died building them, because it made them sad...”⁵

Of course, the real offence is not to be found in the study of the holocaust, but in the funding by military suppliers of research into science and engineering. Firms such as BAE sponsor university departments where research into the manufacture, development and testing of weapons of mass destruction is not covered by safe spaces policies, whereas reading the views of some philosophers is taboo. Priorities are truly distorted when free speech, free enquiry and the pursuit of academic development are inhibited. To quote *Spiked Online* again,

The idea that students are in need of a ‘safe space’ in which to carry out their studies presents them as fragile and vulnerable. And, when you think students are too fragile even to take part in reasoned debate, and their welfare must be upheld above all other concerns, then academic freedom will inevitably wither away; cast aside in the name of a comfortable, unchallenging and, above all, ‘safe’ education.⁶

University authorities and their security officers have been known to use student union safe spaces policies to ban free speech on campus. The London School of Economics demands the screening of speakers and a list of those attending events on its campus to make sure the safe spaces policy is not violated. For some universities a number of subjects are considered too sensitive, too controversial for debate. The subjects range from animal experimentation to sexual abuse of children and paedophilia, to abortion, and “where the subject matter might be considered to be of a blasphemous nature”.⁷

Staff in academic institutions have voiced their frustration, yet the madness continues. Christopher Beckett, writing on the *Index on Censorship* website, notes:

It’s a far cry from the tradition out of which the theory of liberal education and the modern university was born. The period of

the enlightenment was led by the rallying call of Immanuel Kant - *Sapere aude!* - dare to know and dare to use your own understanding in the creation and formation of your own opinions. However, this is the reverse of what we are seeing today, as debate is closed down and speech is censored on campus, all in the name of safety. If we are to recapture the campus, lead the progress of human knowledge, and create an active and engaged citizenry towards progressive social change, it’s free speech and expression we must engage in.⁸

Radical feminist blogger Louise Pennington adds her own complaints:

Earlier this week, I was asked to put a trigger warning on an article I published on *A Room of Our Own*. The request wasn’t to include a trigger warning about domestic violence or self-harm or rape or the consequences of limited options of women living in a patriarchy. It wasn’t about the reality of male violence. I was asked to include a trigger warning on a post written by a woman who regrets having an abortion. Apparently, a feminist space which includes a very personal post by a woman who regrets her abortion - an abortion she was effectively forced into - isn’t a ‘safe space’. The violence this women experienced did not require a trigger warning, but regretting an abortion does.

... Seemingly, this one article, where a feminist spoke of her regret, was enough to invalidate the entirety of the blogging network.⁹

Currently, a ‘safe space’ seems to mean one where nobody ever disagrees with anyone else. There have been attempts to prevent student unions from saying anything critical about the sex industry because such criticism creates an ‘unsafe space’ for students who are involved in it - the fact that students may actually be unsafe when engaged in such work seems to be of no consequence. Apparently some student unions would effectively bar support for a woman wanting to give up sex work if she so chooses.

Phobia

The examples I have given - and there are dozens more - all deal with institutions of higher education. These institutions are part of the existing

order and do not pretend to play any part in seeking to change society. Yet even there the concept and practice of safe spaces has provoked censorship and controversy, not to mention a certain phobia over debate.

How a leftwing organisation engaged in the class struggle can operate, if its members (male, female, transgender, white, black ...) are isolated from any view they might find offensive, is a mystery. Neoliberal capitalism has brought us this banal adoption of ‘capitalist consensus politics’ in the form of safe spaces, which is an insult to one’s intelligence.

Whether we like it or not, the whole concept of safe spaces is now bankrupt. The Left Unity conference in November 2014 voted clearly against the adoption of this policy, and there are dozens of other, sane ways of protecting women, minorities, LGBT comrades, the young, etc in an organisation of the left. A proper code of conduct can cover most eventualities. Adopting a safe spaces policy will stifle debate, and create endless divisions and needless disputes. It would be wishful thinking to believe that an LU safe spaces policy would avoid the pitfalls that are so obvious from the examples I have given from universities. In fact, it is easy to see how it could make Left Unity a laughing stock.

Let me repeat: we are not in the business of creating a therapeutic, safe environment for our members. We are for revolutionary change and for this we need discipline, and familiarity with, not protection from all the evils of the capitalist order - from war and exploitation to by-products such as racism, sexism and homophobia ●

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Notes

1. ‘The tyranny of safe spaces’ *Weekly Worker* November 20 2014.
2. www.bristol-su.org.uk/pageassets/activities/societies/roomandequipmentbookings/Safe-Space-Policy-motion.pdf.
3. www.theguardian.com/education/2015/feb/06/safe-space-or-free-speech-crisis-debate-uk-universities.
4. www.spiked-online.com/freespeechnow/fsn_article/banning-nietzsche-why-its-time-to-end-no-platform#.VS7QhvnF-pc.
5. www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/louise-pennington/triggering-jazz-hands_b_6940116.html.
6. www.spiked-online.com/freespeechnow/fsn_article/university-should-never-be-a-safe-space#.VS7S4PnF-pc.
7. www.indexoncensorship.org/2014/04/university-safe-place-safe-ideas.
8. *Ibid*.
9. <http://elegantgatheringofwhitesnows.com/?p=2372>.

Fighting fund

Not complaining

“Forward to cybernetic communism!” RB scrawled on the top of the resubscription form he sent us this week. He was so inspired by that prospect, it seems, that he felt he had to top up his resub cheque with an extra £40. Not that I’m complaining!

There were another two donations by cheque - thanks also to comrades RT (£25) and PL (£20) - plus a couple of handy contributions via PayPal in the shape of a tenner each from KF and CJ (they were among 4,180 online readers last week, by the way). Not forgetting comrade TS, who handed over a crisp £50 note at last weekend’s *Critique* conference.

But, as usual, the bulk of donations came in the shape of standing orders - thanks go to AD (£40), TB (£25), DW (£20) and AN (£10). And, speaking of which, two new SOs have been pledged - from JM (amount as yet unknown) and KB (£20 a month).

But, there again, long-time supporter AD has been forced by hard times to cut her monthly donation by the same amount. Every pound you have donated has been appreciated, comrade!

And the same applies to all our supporters. But I just wish that one or two more of them would follow the example of JM and KB, and fill in a standing order form.

This week exactly £250 was added to April’s fighting fund, taking the running total to £719. But I’m afraid that’s below the going rate if we are to reach that elusive £1,750 monthly target. We still need another £1,031 in two weeks. We’d love to hear from you! ●

Robbie Rix

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

weekly worker

**Will Havana
embark on a
Chinese road?**

New era for Cuba?

The April 11 talks between the presidents of the USA and Cuba, which were followed by a joint press conference, represent a highly significant step towards the ending of the US blockade and the 'normalisation' of relations between Washington and Havana.

The meeting between Barack Obama and Raúl Castro took place during last weekend's Summit of the Americas, held in Panama. Two days earlier US secretary of state John Kerry had met Cuban foreign minister Bruno Rodríguez - the first such meeting between top state representatives since Richard Nixon (then vice-president) met Fidel Castro, Raúl's older brother, in 1959.

This in turn followed the December 2014 announcement that the two countries would seek to re-establish diplomatic relations. But, according to *The Daily Telegraph*, agreement on the necessary concrete steps had not progressed, because Cuba is "still raising other issues, such as demands for the closure of America's Guantánamo Bay naval base on the island".¹ How unreasonable!

Prior to the summit, there had been speculation that Cuba was about to be removed from the list of four countries - the others being Iran, Syria and Sudan - said to be a "state sponsor of terrorism", as recommended by the US state department. However, the widely predicted announcement to that effect did not take place in Panama, but was made three days later on April 14.

According to Obama, "This shift in US policy represents a turning point for the entire region" - although, paradoxically, Venezuela was declared in March to be an "extraordinary and unusual threat to US security". But on April 7 the White House declared that this was not actually the case - apparently it was all down to a faulty template, upon which the statement announcing sanctions against seven Venezuelan officials had been drawn (their assets in US territory have been frozen).

So, leaving aside the limited sanctions imposed on Venezuela, the latest moves do signify a marked change in US policy. As Obama himself explained, "The cold war's been over for a long time. I'm not interested in having battles that frankly started before I was born." He added that the days are over when "our agenda in this hemisphere so often presumed that the United States could meddle with impunity". And now he was abandoning the "failed policies" of previous administrations.

Those "failed policies" actually date back to 1960, when US sanctions were first imposed. Over the following half-century Washington did everything in its power to weaken, undermine and overthrow the Cuban regime - the most notorious action being the infamous Bay of Pigs invasion of 1961 - a CIA operation that president John F Kennedy claimed was a rebellion by Cuban anti-communist patriots.

Then there were the numerous attempts to assassinate Fidel Castro. In 1975, the Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities substantiated no fewer than eight of them between 1960 and 1965. They



Barack Obama meets and greets Raúl Castro

involved poisoned or exploding cigars, an infected scuba-diving suit, a booby-trapped conch, a poisoned ballpoint pen ... Castro is said to have remarked: "If surviving assassination attempts were an Olympic event, I would win the gold medal."

But now a substantial section of the US ruling class wants to put all that behind them - much to the fury of the Republican right. According to them, the US does not "meddle" in the business of others states, but merely acts to further its own vital interests. Didn't Obama know that Cuba was still a dictatorship? Florida Republican representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen said the move will "only undermine US national security and send a signal to the Cuban people that, instead of

disapproving of the Castro regime's methods, the US is rushing to embrace two decrepit tyrants in their twilight".

Another Republican representative, Scott Garrett, called Obama's move "misguided, dangerous and offensive to the families who have been torn apart because of Cuba's active participation in terrorist activities". The Castro regime is harbouring a number of "terrorists", many of them fugitives from the United States, claimed Garrett. They include Joanne Chesimard (aka Assata Shakur), who was granted asylum by Havana in 1979 after escaping from prison, where she was serving a sentence for first-degree murder. Shakur, a supporter of the Black Liberation Army, was found guilty of killing a state trooper in 1973

following a shootout. She claimed she had her arms raised in surrender when the trooper was shot and that the trial was a set-up. But, according to the FBI, Shakur espoused "revolution and terrorism against the United States".

In reality, however, the complete ending of the blockade (which would actually require the repeal of cold war-inspired legislation before it can be implemented) is in the interests of US capital. This largest of the Caribbean islands offers enticing investment prospects - not least in relation to tourism, not to mention the tobacco and rum industries. And Cuba is a low-wage economy, controlled by a dictatorial regime.

At present there is a two-tier currency system - the humble peso for ordinary Cubans and the convertible peso (CUC) for tourists. Both circulate freely, but the imported goods available in special shops can only be purchased using CUC - which the government now intends to withdraw and then float the peso against the major currencies.

In other words, none of this should come as a surprise. As we pointed out three years ago,

... the embargo is an increasingly embarrassing anachronism. It is a relic from the cold war days, when Cuba represented an agent of the Soviet Union just a few miles off the coast of the USA. Soviet dominance and the concomitant rule of Castro's Communist Party of Cuba was broadly accepted by a Cuban populace sick of being an American plaything.

The Soviet Union, however, is gone. To any sensible American policymaker, the political threat posed by a small and impoverished island state is negligible. To an American bourgeois, with half an eye on China, Vietnam and the other extant Stalinist countries, the embargo is basically an obstacle to otherwise lucrative business opportunities - opportunities that look even more attractive with the ascendancy of Fidel's 'reformer' brother, Raúl.²

For the pro-Cuban left, however, "socialist Cuba" has won a tremendous victory, thanks to the dogged determination of its government and people. The comrades from the Cuba Solidarity Campaign were so overcome that they enthused not only about the "historic handshake" and "historic press conference" within the first two lines

of their April 14 emailed circular.

For the Revolutionary Communist Group and its *Fight Racism, Fight Imperialism* paper, "These developments represent a victory for the Cuban revolution" and its "revolutionary government".³ Mind you, that was written in response to earlier US moves and published in the February-March edition of *FRFI*. The RCG, like those other, equally dozy, Castro fans, the comrades from Socialist Action, have yet to comment on the latest developments, as I write.

Strangely enough, the same applies to the *Morning Star* and its Communist Party of Britain. The *Star* has made no editorial comment and its only feature article on the Panama summit was taken directly from the US Communist Party's *People's World*. Even though this article was published in the *Star* four days after the summit ended, it was written before it took place and so does not even mention the Obama-Castro talks.⁴

It goes without saying that the ending of the blockade will be something to celebrate. Just like the imperialist sanctions on Iran, the blockade has imposed untold suffering on ordinary citizens, while the elite has been largely unaffected - in the case of Iran, at any rate, some at the top of the regime have actually gained substantially from their ability to influence the black market.

But, if anything, US-Cuban normalisation is likely to result in a speed-up of Chinese-style developments: ie, the coming into being of a thriving capitalist and state-capitalist sector. Cuba never was, and cannot be, "socialist". The Castro regime can rightly claim some achievements, not least in health and education, but many of these resulted from the huge subsidies poured in by the Soviet Union at the height of the cold war and are characterised by numerous bureaucratic defects. Genuine socialism can only be international - it can only result from the democratic action of the global proletariat, first and foremost in the advanced capitalist countries ●

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Notes

1. *The Daily Telegraph* April 11.
2. *Weekly Worker* February 2 2012.
3. 'US opens talks with socialist Cuba' *FRFI* February-March 2015: www.revolutionarycommunist.org/americas/cuba/3891-us120215.
4. 'Panama summit is no place for Che's killers' *Morning Star* April 15.

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