



# weekly worker



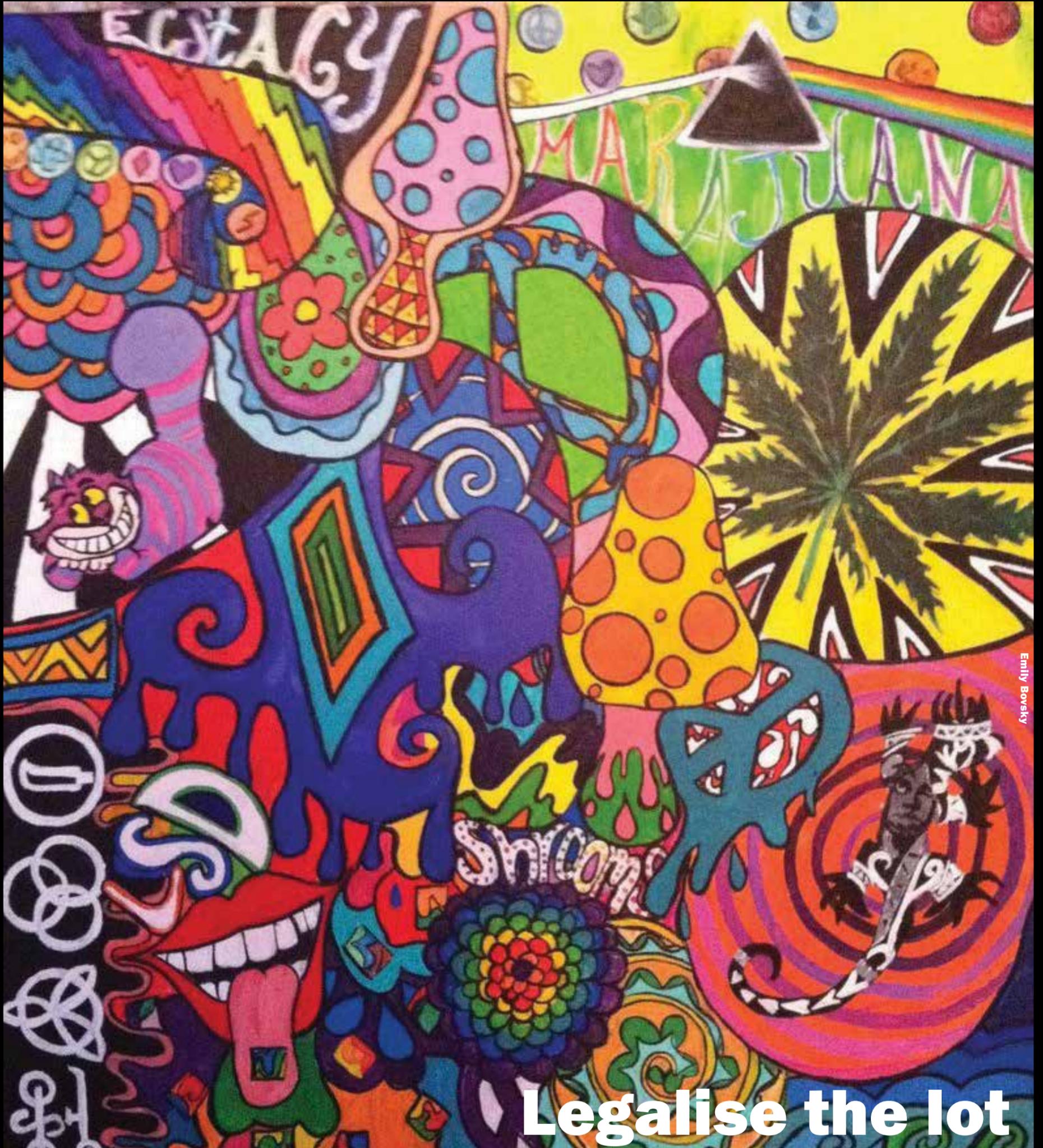
**Ken Loach slams Left Unity  
'madness'. But why back a Tusc  
Labour Party mark two?**

- Greek debt crisis reaches end point
- Moshé Machover on Israel and Iran
- Turkey's general election surprise
- South African NUM congress

No 1062 Thursday June 11 2015

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

£1/€1.10



Emily Bovsky

**Legalise the lot**

# LETTERS



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

## Sectarian stance

The Left Unity London aggregate on Tuesday June 9 was beyond parody. The meeting overwhelmingly rejected any joint list for the Greater London Assembly with the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, with this sectarian position getting the full support of our national secretary, Kate Hudson, our treasurer, Andrew Burgin, Socialist Resistance, the CPGB and assorted ex-SWPers like Tom Walker.

Quite a number of these people recognised that it was unlikely that Left Unity had the financial resources, the number of activists or the popular following to mount a viable campaign that would enable ourselves alone to reach the 5% threshold and elect one GLA member, who could act as the tribune of the working class and oppressed and get a great deal (by our standards) of media coverage for socialism. However, getting somebody elected was not the main point - perhaps not the point at all. The main enemy, it seemed, was not the Tories, not the increasingly anti-working class and neo-Blairite Labour Party (whose leader, Harriet Harman, was relieved by the Tory victory), not the bankers, not the major monopolies, not the UK Independence Party, not the fascists, but, of course, Tusc!

The two figures singled out for denunciation were Dave Nellist and Hugo Pierre - one for not sharing his minuscule slot on a television politics programme with us and the other for placing himself in the centre of a photograph taken in Bethnal Green: clearly crimes the working class will recall for generations to come, when the impact of Osborne's austerity and Cameron's further anti-union laws will be long forgotten.

Of course, Ken Loach was, as so often is the case, a voice of sanity and explicitly referred to *The Life of Brian* and how the working class would perceive this squabble between competing left candidates, and, as somebody with more experience of press work than any of us, told Tom Walker to do his job properly and fight his corner against Dave Nellist, instead of complaining to a London aggregate. However, Ken's intervention was ignored and two of the comrades from Ken's own, Camden, branch made some of the most sectarian speeches of the night.

As I would have pointed out, had I been called to speak, the recent victories in the local elections in Barcelona and Madrid were achieved by the left burying their differences and standing a joint list; where Podemos and Izquierda Unida stood alone and in competition, they did not do anything like as well.

**Toby Abse**  
London

## Those Jews

Daniel Harvey's report of the discussions at the recent Hands Off the People of Iran day school is to be commended, as, unlike in other *Weekly Worker* reports on these hotly disputed issues (for instance after the heresy hunt over the Jewish question last year), comrade Harvey at least tried to be objective ('Islamism, Israel and imperialism', June 4). His report is complemented by the one on the *Communist Explorations* website, particularly in refuting the allegations of untruth by Moshé Machover.

However, on one key thing he is wrong. I am not an opponent of the CPGB *per se*. I am in favour of building a Marxist party, in which free, public exchanges of views on disputed questions are the norm. This is what the CPGB claims to stand for. I am only an opponent of the third camp, Draper-influenced trend that is currently, through its actual practice, destroying what it claims to stand for with suppression of debates for reasons of opportunism toward chauvinist elements that do not support its objectives in any

way. Two pieces of evidence for this are: the very strange article on Rabina Khan's election campaign ('Tower Hamlets: vote Rabina Khan', June 4); and Toby Abse's letter (also June 4).

Regarding the former, it is completely contradictory to endorse the ousting of the twice-elected mayor of Tower Hamlets, Lutfur Rahman, by a judge who was obviously following a racist, anti-Muslim agenda laid down by the ruling class, while at the same time calling for a vote for Rabina Khan, who is standing in his place in the rerun in an attempt to defeat the anti-democratic removal of the original mayor politically.

I am not going to repeat arguments I have already made several times as to why Rahman's ousting was anti-democratic and racist. People can read this on *Communist Explorations*, particularly in my leaflet, 'Blindness to oppression, taking a dive on democracy', which was distributed at the Hopi day school. But the fact is that two different political lines have been argued by different elements of the CPGB over the Rabina Khan campaign.

One was the sympathetic position argued by Simon Wells in his letter of May 7, saying that "The mayoral election will be the 'real' judgement of Pickles' interference, not that of an unelected and unaccountable judge", implying support for Rabina Khan on democratic grounds. The other was argued in the CPGB *Notes for Action* email bulletin (also May 7), which lamented: "Many leftists are queuing up to defend poor Rahman, regrettably now including Left Unity, whose leadership has now decided to support Rabina Khan, Rahman's anointed successor, in June's election." The article supporting Khan's campaign last week, while not defending Rahman and indeed endorsing the judge's actions, is a wretched composite.

It is an example of a practice once associated with the Trotskyist group, Workers Power, which, because the public expression of disagreements was forbidden according to their rules, where strong disagreement existed, repeatedly came up with self-contradictory theses and articles that tried to encompass political lines that were counterposed to each other in principle.

Since the CPGB began forbidding the expression of 'inconvenient' Marxist political views in and around its 'party' project last year, with the proscription of my views, no-one in the CPGB can be sure that they will not be treated the same way by the leading clique. Despite the theoretical existence of the right to disagree within the framework of Marxism, this has been breached. This means dissenters are now under pressure to 'compromise' their views, and hence WP-style, self-contradictory gibberish is likely to occur more and more.

The letter of Toby Abse, with his virulent hostility to LU's support for Rabina Khan and his long-standing, extreme antipathy to George Galloway and Respect, and now those who in LU who either support or have in the past supported Respect, is indicative. If anyone had used the kind of horror-film imagery comrade Abse uses, about 'flesh-eating zombies', about someone associated with Jewish causes, they would be accused of anti-Semitism.

But a Jewish comrade like comrade Abse who holds such views of Galloway, and implicitly anyone else who saw something positive in Respect's real achievements in striking political blows against imperialist wars such as Iraq, is the object of deference despite this highly specific form of 'left' chauvinism. Despite the fact that he does not support the CPGB project and never even endorsed the Communist Platform, the CPGB and the latter body endorsed him even ahead of some of their own comrades in the Left Unity elections.

Thus we really see the opportunism and conciliation of a specifically Jewish form of anti-Muslim chauvinism that drove

the purge last year, whose logic is the destruction of the party project. This was also illustrated by the failure of the CPGB to condemn the concurrent assault on comrade Galloway by a Jewish extremist.

I support the party project. Though, just as there is more than one way to skin a cat, so a genuine Marxist party with an ethos of open programmatic debate in the Bolshevik tradition will most likely need to be built by other forces. Current CPGB comrades should also be involved.

**Ian Donovan**  
email

## Deflections

Comrades writing in the *Weekly Worker* have explained workers' support for immigration controls as "deflected class-consciousness". The term could be useful, the implication being that support for immigration controls is fundamentally different from racism, whose mission - sowing division between workers - in no way expresses class-consciousness. But missing from the analysis is a categorisation of the controls themselves, which would call for programmatic change against the open-borderism of the moralist 'anti-racists'.

False consciousness doesn't become deflected class-consciousness for purely subjective reasons. The insight immanent in the term "deflected class-consciousness" is that the demand for immigration controls has a dialectically contradictory character.

Immigration controls, then, belong to what category? Why, ultimately, they are concessions! Augmenting the industrial reserve army by quasi-open immigration is the non-concessionary capitalist policy. The capitalist state admits fewer immigrants when the 'free' labour market creates economic inequalities so severe that they threaten the system with revolutionary unrest (see data provided by the academician, Peter Turchin). The relative freedom from immigration controls, characteristic of neoliberalism, fits today's weakness of the working class and quiescence of the class struggle. This is why an element of class-consciousness perdures when workers demand immigration controls.

Since it implicates them in the executive functioning of the capitalist state and supporting its militarisation, communists shouldn't support border controls, but that negative argument against the *demand for* immigration controls isn't an affirmative argument for their abolition.

The relaxation of immigration controls is the programme of the plutocrats. Principled programmatic measures to address wage-undercutting are ignored or opposed by open-borderists. Thus, the neglect of the classic Marxist demand to prohibit employers from underpaying foreign workers. Or, in the United States, failure to demand abolition of the guest worker programmes.

These abstentions are the result of open borderism. Consistent open-borderists oppose penalising employers for employing undercutters as, in practice, enforcement would amount to a ban.

**Stephen Diamond**  
USA

## Optimist

Like many on the left, I wonder when it is all going to end - more cuts, banks fined for fixing rates, Mrs Windsor knighted her grandson (blimey, he is already a prince!), the MPs' pay rise, strike rules, UK and USA proxy war in Yemen (come on, the UK is in cahoots with Saudis) and on and on the Tories march.

I believe that the left, although in the doldrums, will reach a point and the revolution will start when the people will say enough is enough. Look at the poll tax riots, the million-plus people who marched against war in Iraq. The Tories will go too far one time and the Winter Palace will be stormed.

**Michael Goodfellow**  
email

## Free Steve

On April 2, the fascist AKP government regime in Turkey illegally raided the İdil Culture Centre (İdil Kültür Merkezi) in Turkey. İdil Culture Centre workers and Grup Yorum members have been arrested, then detained after being dragged from the premises and later tortured. British national Steve Shaw Kaczynski was detained at this time and remains without charge held in severe isolation conditions.

This follows major and continued unrest in Turkey, where the US-backed AKP fascist government continue to arrest and detain without charge any person who does not agree with their ideology and policies. Those who differ from the AKP are labelled 'terrorists', where any dissent is not tolerated and where brutal and violent force is often used. Furthermore, under the AKP government, workers that are unemployed, students that are protesting for free education, traders that cannot obtain enough work, journalists and independent press often have little or no rights and are continually arrested as criminals and terrorists.

Who is Stephen Shaw Kaczynski and what is his crime? He was born on July 5 1963 in Edinburgh, Scotland. He attended Linlithgow Academy and then went on to study Russian and German at the University of Edinburgh in the 1980s. He is currently and has always been a British national. Stephen worked for several years for the BBC World Service, based in Reading, and has also worked as a subeditor for various newspapers. Stephen is a kind and gentle man who abhors violence and has long campaigned for human rights and political freedom. He is a much-loved son, brother and uncle.

In 1996, when Stephen was working for the BBC, he began to learn and understand the struggles against Turkish government oppression, forming friendships and supporting individuals from the Turkish left who were involved in ongoing death fasts in Turkey. Being a man with deep concerns for human rights abuses around the world and also a socialist who has a longstanding affiliation and connection with Turkish culture, he speaks fluent Turkish and has for many years supported the Turkish community living in England, through, for example, translation of official documents, help with employment matters, immigration issues and other general support where needed. Stephen has helped to defend people's rights in many different ways over the years and has participated in symposiums, seminars and panels, especially in relation to the continuation of Turkey's death fast resistance, where 122 individuals have been killed in F-type prisons.

The fascist AKP government wants to frighten people at all levels of society through the continual slander of innocent people to discourage their ideas, with the systematic goal of trying to pressure people to forget their political identity. The AKP label foreign individuals like Stephen as 'agents' when they try to discredit them. Stephen was in Turkey for the purpose of international solidarity against fascism and was arrested on unsubstantiated claims by the AKP police. Media channels and newspapers commissioned by the AKP informed people that Stephen was an 'agent' and, whilst there is no evidence of this, the court and prosecutors have still not asked Stephen about it. After the raids, the media claimed that Stephen was a 'British agent'. There is categorically no truth in this accusation. Whilst Stephen has been under police custody, the AKP-backed media have portrayed him as a traitor to his activist friends and to the beliefs he has always stood for.

How can we help and support Steve? We, as a committee for Steve Kaczynski's freedom, are supporting our comrade with letters and cards ensuring that Steve feels our love, our solidarity and our respect for him. We do not believe the lies that

have been said against him. We will oppose his illegal arrest and will be his voice in this, his country, and in Turkey. We invite all human rights defenders, our friends and our people to support Steve by writing letters and sending cards to him. We are repeating the slogan that Steve had shouted during his arrest: 'Pressures cannot intimidate us!'

Pressures cannot intimidate. Stephen Kaczynski is our honour. Long live international solidarity. Long live the brotherhood of the people. Freedom for Stephen Kaczynski! You can help by sending a fax to the ministry of justice in Ankara and phoning to ask why Stephen Kaczynski has been unfairly arrested. Telephone: 90 (0312) 417 77 70; fax: 90 (0312) 419 33 70; email: info@adalet.gov.tr; address: 06659 Kizilay/Ankara. Please also support Steve by writing letters and cards to: Maltepe 3 No.lu Hapishanesi, Yabancılar bölümü Büyük Bakkal Köy Mah, Yakacık Yolu Üzeri, No 13 Maltepe - Istanbul.

In the United Kingdom, please contact the following to ask for their support and help with the immediate release of Stephen: Foreign and Commonwealth Office; Prisoners Abroad; Reprieve; Fair Trials International; and Amnesty International.

For more information, please email [steve.ozgurluk2015@yandex.com](mailto:steve.ozgurluk2015@yandex.com).

**Committee for Steve Kaczynski's freedom**  
England

## US problems

I would like to comment on Mike Macnair's 'Hegemon in decline' (*Weekly Worker* June 4).

The first part of this article is, I believe, a very clear and succinct account of the problems of US policy - which cuts through the lies and strategy babble. I might add that those problems seem more or less insuperable to me - but then I am not advised by clever think-tanks.

However, I have a few reservations about the last part of the article, which emphasises that Russia is seen as the great threat to US hegemony. Yet the total GNP or GDP (take your pick) of China is far greater than Russia's, even if the Russian income per head is about double that of the Chinese (all figures from the CIA website). The Chinese economy, moreover, is growing much faster. Of course, the Russians have a lot more nuclear warheads, but these horrible devices cannot really be used, while a minimum number is quite enough to scare off any potential foe. I cannot believe that the security state people in the 'beltway' think Russia is the greater threat, even if it is true that the Chinese are more vulnerable than the Russians as far as energy goes and controlling the oil taps will be of great use to the state department.

I sense there are considerable irrationalities in US policy and, just as generals are always supposed to be fighting the last war, so cold war 'experts' may still be fighting the last cold war - or, alternatively, their policies are thundering on as if on a railway line, unable to veer in a different direction. Who among the bureaucrats will risk preferment by breaking ranks? Of course, I exaggerate. There is a 'China first' faction as well as a 'Russia first' one, but, as Mike suggests, the anti-Russki one may be more powerful.

Finally on Halford Mackinder, whom I have never read. Surely Mackinder's whole thesis is posited on the growth of railway lines which could knit together the 'world island'? This had actually happened on a more minor scale in the 19th century, as the 'iron horse' by its growth had gradually welded countries and perhaps continents together. In 2015, with huge fleets of large airliners, massive road transport and the growing importance of very highly skilled labour, together with the worldwide web, Mackinder seems somewhat less relevant.

**Ted Crawford**  
London

DRUGS

# Legalise the lot

The Tories think it is a good idea to put a blanket ban on legal highs. Paul Demarty wants some of what they're smoking

Writing an article about drugs policy poses, every time, a significant literary burden at the outset. To wit: how do you communicate in words the sheer, teeth-gnashing insanity of the task the 'international community' has set itself - to fight, and win, a war on drugs?

This time, we have got off lightly. Those words have already been written, innumerable times across the front pages of the yellow press in recent times - 'hippy crack'.

Of all the ridiculous moral panics to have blighted the free press of our fair country, this one really takes the cake. At issue is nitrous oxide - a chemical, gaseous at room temperature, used variously as a medical analgesic and to aerate the cream on a childish coffee. It can also be fired into a balloon and inhaled for a very short-lived dissociative high.

With a tag like 'hippy crack', one would expect first of all its primary users to be acid casualties in the crowd at a Grateful Dead show, and secondly for it to be a highly addictive stimulant. In fact, its primary market - so far as I can tell - seems to be teenagers who lack the pocket money for an eighth ounce of bad hash, or the facial hair to get served in a bar. Nor is it a stimulant, or indeed addictive - although, ironically, one of its medical uses is to treat addiction.

It is to be banned - along with amyl and butyl nitrite ('poppers'), popular on the gay scene - as part of a blanket ban on 'legal highs', generally understood to mean chemical compounds similar to popular psychoactives, but different enough to circumvent existing laws, presenting successive governments with an undignified game of legislative whack-a-mole.

The legal high 'problem' first hit the aforementioned terror headlines when two party-goers were found dead, allegedly having taken the then legal stimulant, mephedrone. The latter was banned so rapidly, it was heading for the statute books by the time the toxicology reports came back reporting that not less than five different questionable substances were to be found in the unfortunates' bloodstreams, none of which was mephedrone. Law-making at its finest.

Unsurprisingly, the tide was not stemmed; a month or two later, in fact, your correspondent was offered something almost identical called 'bufodrone' by a friend (fear not, dear reader: I did not inhale), no doubt only one of hundreds of mephedrone clones produced when all that press attention exposed how much money there was in designing your own uppers.

We admit to some suspicion at the push, among more enlightened members of the bourgeois commentariat and many medical professionals, towards 'evidence-based drugs policy'; such initiatives can too often become just another technocratic wheeze for unaccountable quangos. It does, however, get at the most striking feature of actually existing drugs policy, which is that it is utterly resistant to all evidence, and even basic logic.

So we arrive at the Psychoactive Substances Bill, which has been drawn up as widely as possible so as to include the all-but-harmless nitrous oxide balloon. It outlaws "any substance intended for human consumption that is capable of producing a psychoactive effect" - a sentence perhaps intended to promote disbelieving laughter among the historians of a more enlightened future. It then has to have the obligatory and utterly arbitrary exceptions -



Drug seizure

alcohol, tobacco, caffeine - tacked on the end, making it a law that contains within itself the evidence of its own hypocrisy.

In many countries, the line of march is in the opposite direction - Uruguay, Portugal, even some American states have begun decriminalising some drugs, particularly marijuana. Not so Britain: among us, madness prevails.

## Capital and cocaine

Every piece of irrationality, however, has its historical logic; thus must we explain the *prima facie* bizarre historical contingency of puritanical drug laws.

A common mistake among - especially - Hegelian Marxists is to confuse the underlying logical structure of social relations in a given society with the concrete societies that support those relations. This leads, in the extreme case, to the identification of all ideology in capitalist society with the commodity form and the fetishism immanent to it.

To put things concretely: from the point of view of *capital*, the illegality of drugs is nonsensical. Here is a whole sector of productive industry that could be profitably organised on a fully and officially capitalist basis. There is effective demand; the labour and means of production required to meet that demand are not esoteric or exceptionally expensive to employ; and the technical expertise of biochemists is not rare either.

To explain it, we need to look at actually existing capitalist *societies*, and the manner in which they are reproduced. The capitalist class is a *minority*: it cannot rule on its own votes, nor with pure, naked dictatorial force (you need to get soldiers and police from somewhere). Popular support must be obtained, one way or another; and this in turn requires a legitimating ideology, which can be shared by subordinate classes.

Part of that ideology is, of course, 'life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness': a liberal ideology of individual freedom. In Anglo-Saxon countries especially, however, there is equally the ideological and political tradition described in Max Weber's *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*. Capitalism was brought to maturity under the dominance of pietistic Christianity.

We should stress that there was no *necessary* reason for it to have done so; most other limbs on the tree of global religion have proven themselves, in the intervening centuries, perfectly amenable to business-friendly interpretations. Yet we are where we are; the two great recent epochs of capitalism, British and then American imperialism, inevitably take on a flavour of their hegemonic powers.

This puritanical streak in Anglo-American culture, perhaps

surprisingly, has not always been most in evidence among its reactionaries. In antebellum America, particularly, there were substantial overlaps between abolitionism, support for labour organisations and the temperance movement. Their political descendants achieved alcohol prohibition in the 1920s.

By that time, however, the former progressivist leanings among this milieu had all but disappeared. Today, so has the overt religiosity; but there remains, in its place, a deep moral suspicion of *fun*: a taboo in the reactionary mind against indulgence for its own sake, and most especially the sexual and chemical indulgence that so horrified their forebears.

## Self-fulfilling

Despite the obvious and catastrophic failure of alcohol prohibition, criminalisation has ever since been extended to drug after drug, with - if anything - *worse* results. Drug usage, if we insist on viewing it as a problem in itself, does not decrease; indeed, there are more heroin addicts in Britain today since the full criminalisation of the drug (as we would expect after alcohol prohibition in the US, which saw *pre-existing* drunkenness-related offences soar).

That is hardly the point, however. Humans have taken drugs for many thousands of years - perhaps even as long as the species has existed. The essential feature of human consciousness is its reflexivity; it is a malleable material, that can alter itself. What else is education, or the synthesis of experience in memory? Drug use - recreational or instrumental, sacred or profane - is simply one more way to do so.

Banning it, however, becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy - the prohibition itself renders that which is prohibited pathological. Drug users are forced to form enclosed, exclusive subcultures; they thereby, inadvertently, take themselves *out* of the subtle regulation of social and peer pressure. In a crack den, there is no bartender to tell you when you've had enough.

On the side of production, things are far grimmer: the risks of business soar, but so do the potential profits. Unable to rely on the ordinary mechanisms of commercial law, large-scale operators need the ability to apply force themselves. The result is the *militarisation* of the industry, most starkly obvious today in Mexico, parts of which are now essentially lost to cartels who make Islamic State look like the Chuckle Brothers.

Just as inevitably, the state response has to be military. Between the two, tens of thousands of people are murdered every year. If things continue to get worse, Mexico will join a frighteningly long list of failed narco-states, from Colombia to Afghanistan - each one a bloody rebuke to drug prohibition.

If nothing so terrible is likely to befall British society when this fatuous, incompetently-drafted bill - with dreary inevitability - makes it to statute, it is only because the pre-existing illegal highs will take up the slack. We can be quite sure that the journalists and MPs so keen to lock Britain into a war against human nature will face no great difficulties obtaining their Colombian marching powder; only the downtrodden suffer for this madness.

The communist - the rational - answer is simple: *legalise the lot* ●

paul.demarty@weeklyworker.co.uk

## ACTION

### CPGB podcasts

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

### London Communist Forum

**Sunday June 14, 5pm:** Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by open discussion and *Capital* reading group. Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. This meeting: Vol 2, chapter 3: 'The circuit of commodity capital'. Organised by CPGB: [www.cpgb.org.uk](http://www.cpgb.org.uk).

### Radical Anthropology Group

Introduction to anthropology  
**Tuesday June 16, 6.30pm:** 'A key myth from Claude Lévi-Strauss - the hunter Monmanéki and his wives'. 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>.

### Save Thanet A&E

**Thursday June 11, 7pm:** Rally, Kings Theatre, King's Place, Ramsgate. Speakers include John McDonnell MP.  
Organised by Thanet People's Assembly: [www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk/thanet](http://www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk/thanet).

### Radical Bradford

**Saturday June 13, 2pm:** Political history walking tour. Assemble at Independent Labour Party mural, junction of Leeds Road and Chapel Street, Bradford BD3. Free bottled water provided.  
Organised by Wakefield Socialist History Group: [www.theredshed.org.uk/SocialHist.html](http://www.theredshed.org.uk/SocialHist.html).

### Swansea defiant

**Saturday June 13, 12.20pm:** March against government cuts and bedroom tax. Assemble Swansea Guild Hall, The Guildhall, Swansea, SA1, for march to rally at Castle Gardens.  
Organised by People's Assembly: [www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk](http://www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk).

### Politics in the park

**Sunday June 14, 3.30pm:** AGM, Somerset and South Wilts Left Unity, Royal Victoria Park (south lawn), Marlborough Lane, Bath BA1. Followed at 4pm by picnic and political discussion.  
Organised by Left Unity: [www.leftunity.org](http://www.leftunity.org)

### Celebrating our culture

**Sunday June 14, 1pm:** Community Gala, Concert room, Wardley Club, Palmers Hall, Palmers Bank, Wardley NE10. Followed by social, 5pm.  
Organised by Miners Advice: [www.minersadvice.co.uk/events.htm](http://www.minersadvice.co.uk/events.htm).

### Bedford on the map

**Tuesday June 16, 7.30pm:** Inaugural meeting for Left Unity branch. Quaker Meeting House, 5 Lansdowne Road, Bedford MK40.  
Organised by Bedford LU: [www.facebook.com/events/1619998031580949](http://www.facebook.com/events/1619998031580949).

### After the election

**Wednesday, June 17, 7pm:** Public meeting on the need for an alternative party of the left. Quaker Meeting House, 40 Bull Street, Birmingham B4.  
Organised by Birmingham Left Unity: [www.facebook.com/pages/Birmingham-Left-Unity/456415421100960](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Birmingham-Left-Unity/456415421100960).

### Socialist Forum

**Wednesday June 17, 7pm:** Open planning meeting, Central United Reformed Church, 60 Norfolk Street, Sheffield S1.  
Organised by Sheffield Left Unity: [www.facebook.com/sheffieldleftunity](http://www.facebook.com/sheffieldleftunity).

### Lenin in London

**Friday June 19, 8pm:** Benefit performance, Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. £5 - all proceeds to Marx Memorial Library Development Fund.  
Organised by Marx Memorial Library: [www.marxlibrary.org.uk](http://www.marxlibrary.org.uk).

### Marx in Soho

**Saturday June 20, 8pm:** Play, The Casa, Hope Street, Liverpool L1. £8/£6.  
Organised by The Casa: [Theatre@The Casa](mailto:Theatre@TheCasa).

### End austerity

**Saturday June 20, 12 noon:** National rally, Bank of England, Queen Victoria Street, London EC4 (nearest tube: Bank). No more budget cuts.  
Organised by People's Assembly: [www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk](http://www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk).

### The war you don't see

**Wednesday June 24, 6.30pm:** John Pilger film showing and discussion, Unity Hall (small hall), 277a Upper Street, London N1.  
Organised by: North London Stop the War: [www.facebook.com/events/355506474655423](http://www.facebook.com/events/355506474655423).

### Progressives and the budget

**Wednesday June 24, 2.30pm:** TUC-hosted event, Congress House, 23-28 Great Russell Street, London WC1.  
Organised by TUC: [www.tuc.org.uk/events/how-should-progressives-respond-budget](http://www.tuc.org.uk/events/how-should-progressives-respond-budget).

### Cooperative Congress

**Saturday June 27, 10am to Sunday June 28, 5pm:** National congress, Town Hall, Victoria Square, Birmingham B3.  
Organised by Co-operatives UK: [www.uk.coop](http://www.uk.coop).

### CPGB wills

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

**LEFT UNITY**

# Standing in London's elections

Left Unity has been discussing and voting on its approach to the 2016 GLA and mayoral contests.

Daniel Harvey reports

About 70 members attended Left Unity's first London aggregate on June 9. The last-minute stand-in chair, Doug Thorpe, began by explaining that there is no role laid out in the constitution for the meeting, so any decisions taken could only be indicative to advise the London regional committee. Such decisions would, however, be seen as a very strong indication of the way forward, he said.

The primary issue under discussion was Left Unity's intervention in the Greater London Assembly elections of 2016. But before that there was a brief regional report from Simon Hardy who explained that London LU presently has 549 members on its books with just over a hundred regularly attending 11 branches.

A procedural intervention from Nick Rogers of the Independent Socialist Network meant that three motions dealing with elections were taken together and that there would be a full debate, instead of two separate sessions.

Liz Davies began by introducing the motion that she had proposed with Terry Conway of Socialist Resistance and Luke Cooper. The comrade said she had previously written a report for the NC. In her assessment the elections next year were incredibly important for building the profile of LU. It was necessary for a serious party to stand in elections - otherwise "What exactly would we be for?" She reminded us

of the different components to the GLA elections. Assembly members are elected in two different ways: half come from very large constituencies using 'first past the post', which means only Labour or the Tories can win; and half are elected using a proportional-representation list system, in which minor parties can gain seats more easily. The Greens regularly get between two and three seats this way. The deposits are £1,000 for the constituency seats and £5,000 for the list, both with a 2.5% threshold for retention, and £10,000 for the mayoral race, where there is a 5% threshold.

The most important thing for comrade Davies was that European Union citizens are allowed to vote in these elections and we should actively play to this by emphasising our position on questions like migration. Luke Cooper followed this up by explaining that the motion also laid out a strategy of possibly acting alongside the other broad left parties in Europe - he named Podemos, Syriza and the Front de Gauche. Preliminary discussions had already taken place he said, and these parties seemed to be in favour in principle, but the campaign itself would be determined by what responses were received.

After this two other motions were introduced. The first was from Dave Landau and Nick Wrack, which was pushing the ISN line that Left Unity should "make every possible effort" to secure "an alliance" with the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition. In reality, of course, that would mean standing under the Tusc umbrella - as most of our candidates did in the May 7 general election.

However, comrade Landau said that this was not like the general election in one crucial respect. We could not get by with non-aggression pacts. In the PR list and the mayoral election there was no other choice but to either cooperate or compete. He said that the competing Hackney motion was mistaken on this - intra-left competition in elections is an

the meeting. In any case, the Hackney motion left open the possibility of not standing in the mayoral race in favour of someone like Diane Abbott, if she ran on the Labour ticket, for instance.

But the key distinction between LU and Tusc, she continued, was that LU is a party in the proper sense, rather than just an electoral front for the Socialist Party in England and Wales and the Socialist Workers Party. LU is therefore an organisation that can build on the basis of genuine democracy without vetoes given to union bureaucrats, as in Tusc. The other point was LU's principled positions on open borders and the EU, where on these decisive questions Tusc is either pandering to anti-migrant attitudes in the working class by only opposing "racist immigration controls", or is silent, as with the EU. Both the SWP and SPEW are for a withdrawal from the EU on a left-nationalist basis under the familiar refrain about it being a "bosses' club" (unlike the UK and practically everywhere else supposedly). These questions are critical, she said, and therefore LU will have to remain organisationally distinct from Tusc in order to fight for its politics.

## Divisions

In the discussion which followed it seemed that LU in London had split into three broad camps. There were those who supported LU standing on its own on a pro-migrant and pro-European basis. This group was made up of the leadership in the form of Kate Hudson and Andrew Burgin, as well as Socialist Resistance speakers like Terry Conway. The CP lent its support to this grouping. Then there were the ISN speakers, who promoted Tusc on the basis of "socialist unity". Finally there was a quite backward grouping, around Simon Hardy and the Workers Power and ex-WP milieu, which also had on board the likes of Ruth Cashman of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty and some ex-SWP speakers, who felt that elections were a waste of money and what LU should really be doing is "building the movement".

Nick Wrack's intervention came near the start of the discussion, where he made it clear that he was in favour of LU standing in as many elections as possible. He said that he and the other members of the ISN had been raising the issue of free movement regularly and that he had probably written more critical articles on Tusc than anyone. But his position was based on a strategic orientation towards building a new socialist party involving both Tusc and LU. He thought that the voting public would not forgive us if we choose sectarianism. He promoted the letter from Tusc asking LU to join the coalition and praised its federal structure which gives independence to the SWP and SPEW. He said that because of this structure if Left Unity stood under the Tusc umbrella it would not be tantamount to "liquidating ourselves".

LU's media officer, Tom Walker, chimed in at this point by saying that he thought that Tusc's political approach in the election was sectarian. He claimed that Dave Nellist of Tusc had been furious at the idea of sharing a platform on the *Daily Politics* TV show with Left Unity when the offer was made from the BBC. In his opinion LU candidates who stood jointly with Tusc in the general election did in practice "become Tusc candidates", and it appeared to many voters that LU only stood three candidates of its own. He said he would much rather have a distinct party that

reflects his own politics this time around. Another speaker, Sarah Parker of Haringey, agreed, but said we should have something to say to people if they asked why the left was divided in the election. She supported the pro-migrant and European stance, but thought that Podemos and Syriza candidates were not necessarily best if anti-racism was our prime concern.

Leading the section that did not want LU to stand candidates at all was trade union officer Oliver New. He said that he did not think there was even a majority in the party for standing in elections (clearly erroneous if the voting at this meeting was anything to go by). He also thought that LU should adopt the line of Britain pulling out of the EU because of its "anti-working class" character. He counterposed uniting with the left and uniting with the working class. To do the latter, he said, LU needed to concentrate not on elections but supporting struggles like those of the bus and rail workers and campaigns on housing.

This sentiment was echoed by the AWL's Ruth Cashman, who thought that getting five percent of the vote was highly unrealistic based on the left's general election results. Ensuring that half of LU's candidates are non-native British people, as suggested by the Davies-Conway-Cooper motion, was a bit of a gimmick, as was getting populist European parties involved. Simon Hardy agreed with this later. He jokingly started by giving his name and "188 votes for socialism" in reference to his campaign to become MP for Vauxhall. He thought £30,000 was too much for LU to raise on its own - it was twice as much as was raised for the general election. He did, however, see the EU referendum as a very serious matter, for which we needed to take a strong position. But he echoed comrade New's vague aspiration for movement building "from below", which he counterposed to running in elections.

This formed the basis of what he thought was the "real content" of the meeting in the second part, when he presented a motion from Lambeth which was full of a lot of motherhood and apple pie statements about the various campaigns LU should support in London. Joana Ramiro echoed this, and thought only joining these campaigns would really give her a reason to write about LU in the *Morning Star*, where she works as a journalist. The fact that this seems to say more about the character of that paper did not really seem to register with her.

Ken Loach decided to enter the discussion. Whereas he usually takes more of a back seat in LU, now the gloves came off. He thought the Hackney motion was "madness" and that it would lead people to invoke the Monty Python 'People's Front of Judea' sketch - especially with LU's name being what it is. We would be "laughed out of the room" if we adopted the Hackney motion, he said. The comrade also thought there should be more centralisation of electoral work - leaving the decision on whether to stand in the general election to the branches had been chaotic. He thought that a broad alliance on the left with European parties, but also with Tusc, was a good idea and would make the left seem much more mature. He chastised Tom Walker for not having fought hard enough against Dave Nellist to get Left Unity some airtime.

Nick Rogers welcomed comrade Loach's support for the ISN position and thought that Tusc would not object to a strongly pro-migrant campaign, and

that it was possible to negotiate with the coalition about a political platform that would work for both groups. This negotiation would form the basis of a new political regroupment and would give LU a means to challenge what we do not like about the Tusc platform.

Terry Conway, however, said that she found from her experience in Bow that cooperation with Tusc was very difficult. She said that SPEW representatives were very reluctant to discuss anything, let alone a common platform, and in as much as they were involved in the joint LU-Tusc campaign there they only really appeared to have their photo taken. The whole experience left her feeling that the SPEW attitude was very cynical.

Towards the end of the discussion Jack Conrad of the Communist Platform and Camden and Islington branch, said it was unlikely that there would be a breakthrough in the UK in the next few years. His approach was for patience. He also thought that counterposing the resources for elections and for other activities was the wrong way to think about the problem. What we need to do is "get out and inspire people", he said. He went on to say that in reality the money is small change, or should be for an organisation like LU. He emphasised that the Hackney motion does not call for us to stand against Tusc candidates, and we do need a long-term strategy for building unity on the left. That could mean getting two hundred votes or less at first, he continued - "that is realistic". We should also be realistic, he went on, in relation to Tusc's proposition to LU and see it for what it is: an invitation to join the coalition. On that basis we just have to consider whether we support Tusc's campaign for a Labour Party mark II, with no membership, a veto for union bosses and everything else that goes with it.

Of course, that is not LU's strategy or politics at all. Which is why we have to maintain complete organisational independence from Tusc.

## Votes

When it came to the voting, the Communist Platform had been unsure as to whether to support the Davies-Conway-Cooper motion or abstain. However, because of the large number of comrades who were advocating downplaying elections and relying on local campaigning and movementism, it was necessary to support those who were putting forward a political approach. This motion was obviously populist and gimmicky and not one that the CP would have put forward itself. But it won 34 votes, with 21 against and six abstentions. Nick Wrack was unhappy to see the ISN motion fall overwhelmingly, with only 11 votes in favour, but the Hackney motion clearly passed, although there was some confusion as to whether it won 25 or 27 votes, while there were definitely 21 against, plus a few abstentions.

Nick demanded a recount, despite the vote only being indicative and the fact that it had been successful, whether the winning total has been 25 or 27. He has since denounced the meeting on Facebook, commenting that it seems "madness prevails in London Left Unity" - an echo of Ken Loach's intervention.

The Lambeth motion on movement building in London passed later on, but the debate was pretty unmemorable and the chair even forgot to take a count until prompted by Simon Hardy to do so. The CP abstained in line with normal procedure as far as the asinine is concerned ●



Ken Loach: madness

"unifying spectacle" for ordinary people and will marginalise all of us.

Then, introducing the Hackney motion, Sarah McDonald from the Communist Platform laid out the case for an independent position for LU. She said she welcomed comrade Davies's motion, but thought it was necessary to ask why we stand in elections. This has to be on the basis of raising the profile of LU because that is how you can attract the attention of more people. She did not object to standing against George Galloway in the mayoral race, which are run under the supplementary vote system, where you can vote for two candidates in order of preference, and it would be wrong to step aside in favour of Galloway - a position advocated by Ian Donovan in

SHEFFIELD

# Heat, light and confusion

Sheffield LU comrades have been debating with Tusc. Mike Copestake reports

Unusually for a left event where more than one group is present, the purpose of the Left Unity Sheffield public meeting, which featured a speaker from the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, was not for one left group to ignore all the others, to pretend not to exist at all for the sake of running a 'front' group, or to diplomatically tip-toe around our political differences. Most unusually the declared purpose of the meeting was to seek a way forward for the utterly abject and decayed position of the far left and meet the crying need for unity against the background of the recent general election results.

It was this background which dominated the discussions, however, rather than the question of socialist or Marxist unity, although afterwards it was agreed by most present that it had been a useful discussion, and that we should aim for a local open socialist forum that can host discussions amongst socialists in Sheffield belonging to any group.

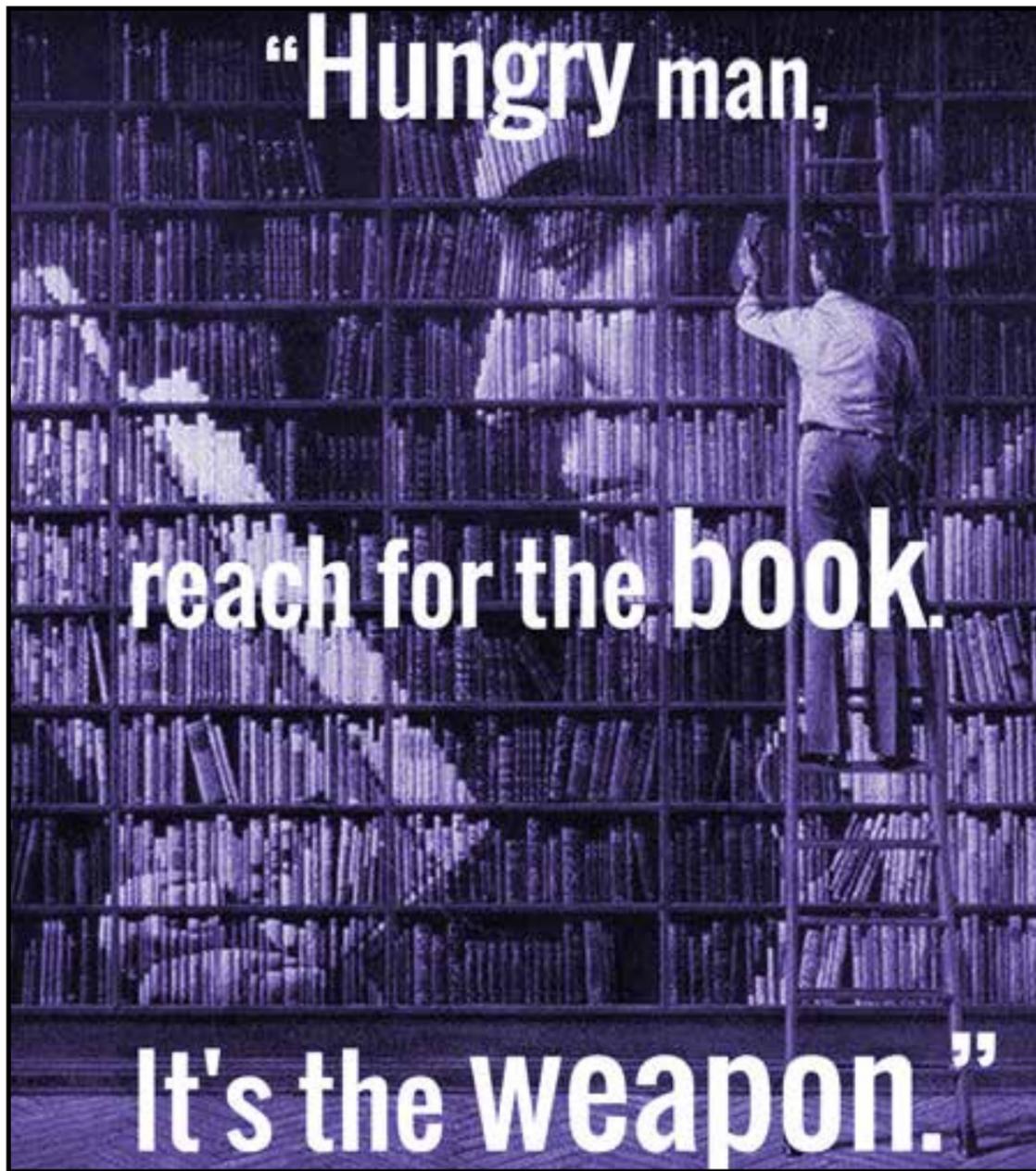
The meeting, organised by the Left Unity student society at the University of Sheffield, took place in a bright, light and spacious room. It was addressed by local Socialist Party in England and Wales member Alistair Tice, who spoke for Tusc, and by Left Unity national speaker Pete Green, who had travelled up from London for the occasion.

Comrade Tice opened first, effectively summarising the immediate aftermath of the Conservative victory and other broader factors, and took heart from the marches and protests that occurred soon after the result in numerous towns and cities across the country. Similarly, he looked forward to the June 20 People's Assembly demonstration in London. According to the comrade, we have "a weak government" with a narrow social base and only a slim majority, which was likely to be faced with another economic crisis within the present parliamentary period.

As for 'what next?', comrade Tice believed that there would be a large upswing in single-issue campaigns, and perhaps something like the re-emergence of an Occupy-type phenomenon, or rioting. He did not expect a lead on anything to be taken by the trade unions, whose leaders are disoriented and timid. As for 'what we need' it was, of course, an anti-austerity, "anti-capitalist" party - a statement which was echoed almost word for word by Pete Green, who agreed with much of the analysis presented by comrade Tice.

Such a party would, continued the SPEW comrade, provide a bigger sea in which Marxists could swim. It may or may not be Tusc, he added, whose aim is to help bring about, or catalyse the formation of, a "new workers' party". SPEW had never claimed that Tusc is the finished product. It had existed only since 2010, and the creation of such a party would require either massive new class struggles or important developments in, say, the trade unions, involving a break with Labour. Praising the joint ticket with Tusc that most Left Unity parliamentary candidates had stood on, he repeated the call for LU to join Tusc, taking advantage of its federal nature.

Emphasising that some of his comments would be made in a personal capacity, comrade Green began by agreeing with the broad political picture drawn by comrade Tice. He did, however, disagree that we could assume that the present government is weak and referenced the SWP's notoriously incorrect call to this effect about the last government. Both speakers agreed that



A quote from Bertolt Brecht

Labour was in dire straits at present, with a gag-inducing array of likely leaders, but, given the prospect of the Conservative Party overseeing the next five years of austerity, comrade Green doubted that Labour would undergo "Pasokification" during this period - a process which he speculated would be a necessary prerequisite for creating a broad left, Syriza-type party in the UK.

He criticised the *Weekly Worker* for characterising the Greens as a "petty bourgeois" party, which he said is both a meaningless term and in any case should not be applied in a broad-brush manner to the tens of thousands of largely young, leftist-inclined people who have recently flooded into its ranks. Thankfully though, he was against Left Unity merging into the Greens, even if some of our members had now left to join it. For this he blamed the platform debates within LU as "off-putting". Like comrade Tice, comrade Green called for the creation of an "anti-capitalist" party, in which socialists would be active, not a specifically socialist party.

## Mixed

A mixed debate followed, both in subject matter and quality. For Alison Higgins of the local Marxist reading group the two speakers had been too Britain-centric, and had not analysed the rise of the UK Independence Party and anti-mass migration sentiments in general.

Tina Becker of Sheffield Left Unity and the Communist Platform thanked both of the speakers for giving us, for once, a degree of political interaction on the left. Moving straight to the question

of unity and 'what next?', comrade Becker criticised Tusc's refusal to adopt a democratic structure and its policy of allowing a veto to the four participating organisations (not least the RMT union), most obviously on vexed political issues like immigration. This, along with the question of Europe, is only going to grow in importance over the coming period - a situation which does not credibly allow silence. Contrary to comrade Tice's SPEW orthodoxy, she insisted that Labour is still a bourgeois workers' party, no matter how fallen from its supposed social democratic heights. Quite clearly it remains the principal UK political party based on integrating the working class as a class into capitalism, however distasteful we may find this, and is thus by definition a bourgeois workers' party. Rather than seeking to create a pointless and improbable federal Labour Party mark II, Marxists needed to unite within a single, fully democratic party.

For Richard Belbin a problem with Tusc was its purely electoral nature - he noted that people in single-issue campaigns will only listen to you if you stick around year on year. He emphasised that the left must face up to and argue for the principle of free movement, but without lapsing into simply screaming 'racist' at people who disagree.

SPEW comrades naturally disagreed with the comments made by others regarding Tusc, but I cannot say that the quality of their contributions was outstanding. More than once they were highly disappointing. Comrade

Alan Munro resorted to a repetition of various 'traditional' sectarian clichés. Yes, apparently, the left has "too many meetings" in "dark, stuffy rooms", where we "slag each other off" and engage in worthless "theoretical masturbation" instead of getting out there and talking to working class people about "what matters to them", which is, of course, "bread and butter" issues. In other words, the line with which the Labour right bashes the Labour Left was repeated almost verbatim by the comrade.

In the first place, the left simply *does not* sit in meetings with each other and talk politics *at all* - more likely there is diplomatic silence. Additionally, as far as the left press is concerned, for *The Socialist* it is as if the SWP just does not exist most of the time. Vice versa for *Socialist Worker* in relation to SPEW. Indeed, this was the first political discussion of its kind that I can remember between left groups in many years. The charge of "theoretical masturbation" is interesting, as one can only masturbate with ideas if one has any. (As an aside, the level at which the debate was conducted was entirely undeserving of being credited as "theoretical" in any way, never mind masturbatorially so.) Ironically, the only comrade who could take any pleasure from comrade Munro's contribution was comrade Munro himself - proving once again how fatal is the separation of theory and practice.

For Alison Higgins it amounted to throwing the baby out with the bathwater. She neatly countered

comrade Munro's lines about "bread and butter", using the pertinent local example of Maxine Bowler's relatively good vote in the Burngreave ward, which originated as a *political vote* against the Iraq war, not for bread and butter. From history we should point out that what Marx identified as the first working class movement in history, Chartism, was a *political* movement, not an economic one. And if you hate "theoretical masturbation", then you had better chuck away all your political heroes: Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg - all suffered lifetime addictions to it.

A SPEW comrade called Terry made a much more coherent, comradely and spirited response. He contested the idea that Tusc closes down outside election periods, saying that the coalition's materials regularly featured on the Socialist Party's own stalls. Of course, you cannot actually *join* Tusc, so this is undoubtedly of limited value. He also recommended that, given the small political differences between the two organisations, it made sense for Left Unity to become a federal part of Tusc, which could then pave the way for "the next step". After the debate I asked him if by "next step" he meant a democratic rather than a federal party, but got no definite answer.

An odd episode followed, when comrade Becker stressed again the value of having a single, united socialist party by pointing to the benefits which have accrued to groups like Die Linke and Syriza, which for all their political faults are a picture of strength and health compared to the sect wilderness in the UK, and which have shown in practice that you can have different platforms and open democratic debate inside a united party. All Marxists, she argued, can and should be in the same party.

Immediately following this, Anna from SPEW, who by her own admission was rendered incoherent with rage, attacked those present for arguing with each other despite our largely similar views and for supposedly contending that we could not all be in the same party - the exact opposite of what comrade Becker had said. When this was pointed out - ie, that we *should* all be in one united party - she exclaimed in frustration: "But there are *already* parties". No-one quite knew what to make of this.

Summing up, comrade Tice gave a reasoned response to both Pete Green and the discussion. In his view, Tusc does not fudge its line on immigration. Tusc activists have argued on thousands of workers' doorsteps - far more than its critics in the room - against anti-migrant sentiments, for the defence of migrants and asylum-seekers, and for seeing the capitalist system as responsible for the shortages of housing, low wages, the failing NHS services - not foreigners. Could we make the same claim? Addressing the use of the veto in Tusc and the upcoming EU referendum, comrade Tice thought it was likely that Tusc would not be able to run a united campaign because of the differing viewpoints within it, in which case the Socialist Party would run a leftwing 'no' campaign.

The meeting ended with a more positive tone and all of those present - even those most irritated by the supposed left wrangling - agreed that it would be worth attempting to set up an open discussion forum in Sheffield for all the city's socialists, of any party or none. Hopefully, we will see the comrades again on June 17, when we plan to discuss the practicalities of this in more detail ●

## MIDDLE EAST



Israeli-made Super Heron drone

# US imperialism and Israel's role

The 'unsinkable aircraft carrier' is central to the US military-industrial complex, observes **Moshé Machover**<sup>1</sup>

Let's start by recalling four recent dates. In December last year Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu engineered a cabinet crisis, well before a general election was due - he had a mandate of about two more years for his government, but called an election for March 17 2015. The election itself is the second date and the third was March 3, exactly two weeks before polling day, when Netanyahu appeared in front of the US Congress and gave a warmongering speech against Iran.

What is the connection between these three dates? Some people, including people who should know better, concluded that Netanyahu's appearance before Congress was to serve his electoral campaign in Israel. They failed to explain exactly why there had to be a cabinet crisis in December. There was no obvious cause for it. There was a coalition government and, of course, there is always going to be friction between the various components. In my opinion the cause relates to a fourth date: the March 30 deadline for the interim agreement in the negotiations between the P5+1 and Iran.

This was the reason why all the other dates happened. That is to say, Netanyahu wanted to do his utmost to sabotage the agreement with Iran. For this he had to appear in Congress and overtly take sides in the dispute within the US elite on this question. This was a departure from the traditional Israeli policy of, at least on the face of it, being bipartisan and certainly not publicly offending the White House. This traditional policy was supported by the two ministers whom he sacked from

his government in December. In other words, without sacking those ministers he would not have had the cabinet authorisation to make that speech.

Of course, in political life almost nothing is uncausal. There was also an internal Israeli electoral calculation that did not quite work out for him. The main reason, however, was to make a significant turn in Israeli policy *vis-à-vis* the United States: departing from bipartisanship and openly siding with the hawkish element of the Republican Party. I say the hawkish element, because even the Republican Party is not unanimous in the view that the deal with Iran should be subverted. For example, one of the candidates for the presidential nomination, Ron Paul, is definitely against subverting the deal and is generally against military intervention in the Middle East.

However, Netanyahu deliberately insulted the White House. In an unprecedented slight to Obama he came at the invitation of the Republican speaker of the House of Representatives without even informing the US president. Diplomatically this is a slap in the face. A couple of days earlier the Israeli ambassador had been speaking to Obama at the White House and did not mention that his prime minister would be coming. So clearly Netanyahu was out to subvert the negotiations with Iran.

I have long been saying that, while there are some similarities in the interests of the US and Israel in relation to Iran, they do not coincide. Israel is clearly much more hawkish towards Iran, whereas the establishment in the US, which takes the mainstream line, would be prepared to make a deal with

Iran under certain conditions. Israel is much more inimical to such a deal.

These reasons are not transient and will operate whether or not the deal goes through (it probably will be struck, although nothing is certain). The final deadline is the end of June, so there is still time for all kinds of machinations from the Republican hawks in alliance with Netanyahu's government.

### Israel v Iran

Although Iran probably cannot be the regional hegemon, Israel believes that Iran could become a considerable power in the Middle East. If there is an agreement between the US and Iran, then it is possible - if not under this regime then another - for Iran to become an important power in the region. This would, relatively speaking, reduce the status of Israel as the top (in a very special sense) American ally in the Middle East.

First of all Iran already is, after Israel, the main local power. Israel is a big power in terms of its military, including military production, and is the only modern capitalist country in the area. However, Iran - under the carapace of the theocratic regime - is also one of the most advanced capitalist countries in the region. It has about 10 times the population of Israel, it is huge territorially and it has a large army. The total military forces of Iran number something approaching half a million.

Only Egypt has a similar-sized population and army, although, compared to the Iranian army, it is very much second-rate. Egypt has not won any war in living memory, except the surprise war of 1973 against

Israel, which it initially won, but went on to lose after Israel received a huge injection of military aid. Egypt also lost in Yemen, and it lost decisively against Israel in 1956 and 1967. By contrast, the Iranian army is hardened by its war against Iraq, which it basically won, although at an enormous cost.

Israel is a military giant compared to its size and in a sense in absolute terms, since it is a nuclear power. However, Israel has about 170,000 persons in active service, both professional and conscripts, and it is able to mobilise reserves of up to 450,000 for a short period. This means Israel is only able to fight short wars. The whole of Israeli strategy is geared to fighting such short wars because you cannot mobilise half a million people of military age for long before the economy grinds to a halt.

Iran is a different story - it has the same number of people *in active service*. Iran is also the only country in the region other than Israel to possess a substantial military industry. Compare Iran to Turkey (a country of similar size): Turkey has a relatively small military industry. The difference is due to the isolation of Iran and the incorporation of Turkey in Nato. Turkey has received a lot of hardware from Nato and so has not felt the need to build a large military industry, although it has been catching up since the 1980s. In some branches of military production Iran is ahead. Israel occupies a special niche: it does not produce much that requires heavy industry, instead modifying what it receives from the US and other states. However, Iran has a certain amount of heavy military production, partly

based on Russian and partly on domestic technology.

Do not misunderstand me. It is not a question of Israel being afraid that it would lose in a military confrontation with Iran. (Such a confrontation would only be on the cards if Israel attacked Iran - stories about Iranian nuclear weapons threatening the existence of Israel are rubbish and are exposed as such by Israeli military intelligence officials, when they are speaking professionally.) However, the existence of Iran's military strength gives it clout. You know the old reference to gunboat diplomacy: you do not actually need the guns to shoot. You just need to show a big stick, as Theodore Roosevelt once said. And the military industry is also an *economic* asset, which Israel knows well from its own experience. So Iran is an important potential competitor to Israel in terms of the region.

The imperialist arrangement in the region is not straightforward - there is no linear hierarchy. Each country has its own role in the complex. That of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, aside from oil production, lies in being a source of capital and a hub through which capital dominates the Arab east and north Africa - read Palestinian Marxist Adam Hanieh's wonderful books on this. In the case of Israel, its role is very different: it is Israel's military might that is the important factor. The main role of Israel is not primarily economic, but that of the watchdog of imperialism (although it goes beyond this - I will return to this later). Israel needs this domination of the region in order to protect its conquests of Palestinian territory. It

needs to dominate militarily in order to intimidate its neighbours and preserve its acquired territory (with further expansion always a possibility).

So what is likely to happen in the next few months? The worst case is that the Iran-P5+1 deal fails and the 'crazies' have their way. That may even lead to a nuclear attack on Iran, though I seriously doubt it. Some kind of Israeli strike is possible, however, and it would lead to Iranian retaliation and a major conflagration in the region.

As a by-product of such a conflagration Netanyahu may well try to carry out large-scale ethnic cleansing in the West Bank. This is not mere speculation: there are known plans for this, as explained by Martin van Creveld in an article published in April 2002 in connection with the run-up to the invasion of Iraq.<sup>2</sup> Netanyahu himself is on record as having advocated, when he was a junior minister, large-scale ethnic cleansing in the West Bank, using an international crisis as a smokescreen. This is the worst-case scenario.

What is the least-worst-case scenario? The deal with Iran goes through. Perhaps the Republican ascendancy in the US, upon which Netanyahu is banking, is reversed and the Democrats retain the presidency and perhaps even win back congress (though this seems unlikely). In this event Netanyahu would have lost his gamble. Would he be punished by the US in this scenario? I say, do not hold your breath. The role of Israel for the US, regionally and globally, is founded on very solid foundations. Israel would still be the favoured junior partner in the region and Netanyahu would still be in a position to cause trouble in the longer term and to try and undermine the US-Iran relationship, so as not to cede Israel's position as sole favoured junior partner.

## Military-industrial complex

So what is the basis for this relationship? There has been a lively debate over this since 2006, initially sparked by an article and then a book by two US political scientists of the realist school, John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt.<sup>3</sup> They basically argue that US policy towards the Middle East is dictated by the pro-Israel lobby. Judiciously they do not refer to the 'Jewish lobby' because they recognise that the majority of this lobby is not in fact Jewish. There are many more Christian fundamentalist supporters of Israel than Jewish ones. An important institution in this lobby is the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (Aipac), which is a coordinating committee for mobilising support for Israel.

Is the Mearsheimer-Walt analysis correct? There are some on the left today who put forward a similar analysis - Jean Bricmont is one and a very crude version is put forward by James Petras, a retired US academic who writes well about Latin America, but in relation to Israel suddenly becomes an American patriot, claiming 'we are colonised by Israel'. This view I call 'Itwad' - the Israeli Tail Wags the American Dog. Ian Donovan is another proponent of this theory, according to which Israel determines US policy, at least towards the Middle East (if not beyond it, which would make Israel the most powerful country in the world, because who else is stronger than the US?).

Another part of this theory is that the Israeli lobby influences US policy in a way that is against the real interests of the United States. Petras is especially sharp on this, as are Mearsheimer and Walt. But this theory shows both a deficiency of materialism and a deficiency of dialectics.

Donovan has put forward a sort of materialist explanation: he argues that this is all the doing of US Jewish-

Zionist capitalists, who are in the vanguard of imperialism. This theory sounds materialist because of its reference to capitalists. He is correct when he says Jews are overrepresented among the US capitalist class. The proportion of Jews (depending on how you define them) among the general US population is around 2.5% and among American capitalists the figure is certainly higher (Of course, Jews in America are not the only ethnic or religious group overrepresented among the capitalist class).

However, do these Jewish capitalists actually need to influence US policy in such a way? Do US capitalists who are Jewish have interests distinct from US capitalists in general? Do they have a special *material* interest in Israel? There is no evidence for this. (As an aside, the idea that the foreign policy of imperialist states is dictated by rich individuals is ludicrous.)

Take, for instance, the famous case of Sheldon Adelson, a big capitalist and big supporter of Israel. Does he have any investments in Israel? He does: he invests in a free daily newspaper, *Israel HaYom*, which is a propaganda sheet for Netanyahu. But this is done as a political contribution - he has no material stake in Israel, but is a Las Vegas gambling magnate. Not a very strategic position from which to be influencing US policy on the Middle East.

What part of capital actually has influence on US policy on the Middle East? We know it from the horse's mouth: the military-industrial complex. President Dwight D Eisenhower's parting address to the nation in 1961 warned that the military-industrial complex has "unwarranted influence" on policy and must be stopped (in connection with the Middle East I would add oil corporations). It is corporations, not individual capitalists, that exert hidden influence on policy and there is plenty of evidence that the military-industrial complex has a stake in Israel. Sheldon Adelson may not have a material stake, but this section of US capital does and Israel is strongly integrated with it.

The most concentrated collection of evidence for this can be found in the report published in 2011 by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy authored by Robert Blackwill and Walter Slocombe. A summary of the report was published in the *Los Angeles Times*. But there is older evidence. Israeli expert Yoram Ettinger, chair of special projects at the Ariel Center for Policy Research, wrote in 2005 that the relationship between Israel and the United States was not one-sided. Israel provides important services. He quotes former US secretary of state and ex-Nato commander Alexander Haig, who said he supported Israel because it is "the largest American aircraft carrier in the world that cannot be sunk, does not carry even one American soldier [this is no longer true by the way], and is located in a critical region for American national security".

What Ettinger mainly concentrates on is the contribution of Israel to the military-industrial complex - especially in terms of modern IT and robot technology. Israel is a pioneer of drone production and in the use of drones for surveillance and assassination - particularly relevant now drones are becoming an important tool of US global domination. In this niche Israel has played a vital role for the military-industrial complex. The vice-president of the company that produces the F-16 fighter jets is quoted by Ettinger as saying that Israel is "responsible for 600 improvements in the plane's systems, modifications estimated to be worth billions of dollars, which spared dozens of research and development years".<sup>4</sup> This is where Israel specialises in the absence of its own heavy industry. The US companies provide the hardware, but Israeli companies provide vital

scientific and electronic expertise and have been responsible for many improvements. These modifications are worth billions of dollars.

He continues:

Israel's utilisation of American arms guarantees our existence, but at the same time gives US military industries a competitive edge compared to European industries, while also boosting American military production, producing American jobs and improving America's national security. Japan and South Korea, for example, preferred the Hawkeye spy plane and the MD-500 chopper - both purchased and upgraded by Israel - over comparable British and French aircraft.

This is the international role of Israel and its link to US global domination. It is nothing to do with Jewish-Zionist capitalists: it is to do with the military-industrial complex.

## Israeli contribution

Now let me quote from the Blackwill and Slocombe report. First of all, they make a very pertinent point which I have also made myself, using different words: the US relationship with Israel is different from those it has with any other country in the region:

In a political context, it is important to note that Israel - unlike other Middle Eastern countries whose governments are partners with the United States - is already a stable democracy, which will not be swept aside by sudden uprising or explosive revolution: a fact that may become more important in the turbulent period ahead.<sup>5</sup>

This is a reference to what happened in Iran, whose regime was a 'partner' of the US, but was swept aside by the revolution in 1979. They continue:

Moreover, for all our periodic squabbles, Israel's people and politicians have a deeply entrenched pro-American outlook that is uniformly popular with the Israeli people. Thus, Israel's support of US national interests is woven tightly into the fabric of Israeli democratic political culture - a crucial characteristic that is presently not found in any other nation in the greater Middle East.

They then go on to detail the various ways in which Israel helps the military-industrial complex. This is from the summary of the report in the *Los Angeles Times*:

Through joint training, exercises and exchanges on military doctrine, the United States has benefited in the areas of counter-terrorism, intelligence and experience in urban warfare. Increasingly, US homeland security and military agencies are turning to Israeli technology to solve some of their most vexing technical and strategic problems.

This support includes advice and expertise on behavioural screening techniques for airport security and acquisition of an Israeli-produced tactical radar system to enhance force protection. Israel has been a world leader in the development of unmanned aerial systems, both for intelligence collection and combat ['combat' here means assassination], and it has shared with the US military the technology, the doctrine and its experience regarding these systems. Israel is also a global pacesetter in armoured vehicle protection, defence against short-range rockets, and the techniques and procedures of

robotics, all of which it has shared with the United States.<sup>6</sup>

And here comes a very remarkable passage. I have quoted Haig referring to Israel as an unsinkable aircraft carrier without US soldiers on it, but this is no longer the case apparently:

In missile defence, the United States has a broad and multifaceted partnership with Israel. Israel's national missile defences - which include the US deployment in Israel of an advanced X-band radar system and more than 100 American military personnel who man it [the first admission I have seen of US troops stationed in Israel] - will be an integral part of a larger missile defence spanning Europe, the eastern Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf to help protect US forces and allies.<sup>7</sup>

And so it goes on and on - we can see that Israel's role as a US ally is not just regional. Note that there is a very intimate synergy between the Israeli military industry and the American military-industrial complex. If you believe that Eisenhower was right, and I do, then this provides a material basis for the very special relationship between these two states.

I want to quote from another source: a leftwing commentator, William Greider, discussing a recently released report from the Institute for Defense Analyses in Washington dating from 1987. He notes that the report implicitly confirms the fact that Israel has nuclear weapons; this is, of course, a non-secret that everyone knew. He says:

However, the IDA's most powerful message may not be what it says about Israel's nukes, but what it conveys about the US-Israel relationship. It resembles a technological marriage that over decades transformed the nature of modern warfare in numerous ways.<sup>8</sup>

Note the global implications of this. The article continues:

The bulk of the report is really a detailed survey of Israel's collaborative role in developing critical technologies - the research and industrial base that helped generate advanced armaments of all sorts. Most Americans, myself included, are used to assuming the US military-industrial complex invents and perfects the dazzling innovations, then shares some with favoured allies like Israel.

That is not altogether wrong, but the IDA report suggests a more meaningful understanding. The US and Israel are more like a very sophisticated high-tech partnership that collaborates on the frontiers of physics and other sciences in order to yield the gee-whiz weaponry that now defines modern warfare. Back in the 1980s, the two states were sharing and cross-pollinating their defence research at a very advanced level.

Today we have as a result the 'electronic battlefield' and many other awesome innovations. Tank commanders with small-screen maps that show where their adversaries are moving. Jet pilots who fire computer-guided bombs. Ships at sea that launch missiles over the horizon and hit targets 1,000 miles away ... These experts were talking in the 1980s about technological challenges that were forerunners to the dazzling innovations that are now standard. The Middle East wars became the live-fire testing ground, where new systems were perfected: "Scientists at Rafael [another Israeli centre] have come up with an ingenious way of using the properties

of a glow discharge plasma to detect microwave and millimetre waves," the report said. "The attractiveness of the project lies in the ability of the discharge to withstand nuclear weapons effects."

This observation gave me a chill because the earnest defence scientists have yet to find a way for human beings "to withstand nuclear weapons effects".

## Dialectics

Now I have mentioned materialism and the material basis of the US-Israel relationship, but what about dialectics? Nobody can deny that the American pro-Israel lobby has immense political influence in the United States - it is an observable fact. The question is, why is it allowed to have this power? Is it beyond the power of the real engines of American capitalism to mobilise, if they wanted to, enough funds to counteract this lobby? After all, corporations are now regarded as persons for the purposes of political contributions in the US. If the military-industrial complex felt the Israeli lobby in the US is against American interests, it could surely counteract it. However, they have no interests at all in doing so. What Aipac and other such bodies are doing is simply to silence dissent against US Middle East policy and American support of Israel, in the interests of the real engine of American capitalism.

What about the claim that this policy contradicts US interests in other ways? Blackwill and Slocombe deal with this question dialectically, as it happens - though, of course, they are not Marxist in any way. They say, 'OK, the US has conflicting interests. This happens in relation to Israel and in relation to any other of our allies in the Middle East.' Especially nowadays (although it has always been the case to some extent), the interests of any imperialist power are not entirely coherent. There is no such thing as *the* American interest: it is about conflicting interests, which have to be balanced. Blackwill and Slocombe show that in no way does American support for Israel damage US interests to such an extent that it is counterproductive. The contradiction with other American interests is a matter of the dialectics of interests of any power.

This does not simply apply to states, by the way. No class or any other power in the world has interests that are entirely monolithic and coherent. There is always some conflict that has to be resolved one way or the other.

So my conclusion is that Israel will remain for the foreseeable future America's top ally in the Middle East and will continue to make trouble regarding its relationship with Iran ●

## Notes

1. This is an edited version of the speech delivered by comrade Machover to the May 30 day school organised by Hands Off the People of Iran in London.
2. See M van Creveld, 'Sharon's plan is to drive Palestinians across the Jordan' *The Sunday Telegraph* April 28 2002.
3. 'The Israel lobby' *London Review of Books* March 23 2006: www.lrb.co.uk/v28/n06/john-mearsheimer/the-israel-lobby. The full academic article, 'The Israel lobby and US foreign policy', is in the Faculty Research Working Papers Series, Harvard University, March 2006 (https://research.hks.harvard.edu/publications/workingpapers/citation.aspx?PubId=3670). Or see J Mearsheimer and S Walt *The Israel lobby and US foreign policy* New York 2007.
4. Y Ettinger, 'American and Israeli military interdependence': www.freeman.org/serendipity/index.php?archives/46-Yoram-Ettinger-AMERICAN-AND-ISRAELI-MILITARY-INTERDEPENDENCE.html.
5. R Blackwill, W Slocombe *Israel: a strategic asset for the United States* Washington 2011, p14: www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/Blackwill-Slocombe\_Report.pdf.
6. *Los Angeles Times* October 31 2011.
7. This is a reference to the US-operated twin towers near Dimona, which are the world's tallest radar towers. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dimona\_Radar\_Facility.
8. W Greider, 'It's official: the Pentagon finally admitted that Israel has nuclear weapons, too' *The Nation* March 20 2015.

## TURKEY

# Erdogan's ambitions halted

Esen Uslu hails the success of the HDP-led opposition

The general elections held on June 7 might prove to be a milestone in the troubled history of multi-party democracy in Turkey. As readers may be aware, that democracy was a product of the circumstances prevailing after World War II and was fashioned in accordance with the requirements of the cold war.

During the following decades, when it was expedient, multi-party democracy was cut short several times through the intervention of Nato's second largest army, and put on hold. Following which, there would be attempts to initiate a more 'controlled' arrangement, intended to keep any opposition to the regime in check. The last of those vain attempts was the constitution designed by general Kenan Evren, the recently deceased military dictator, and his henchmen. This 'democracy' was designed to keep traditional enemies of the regime of Republican Turkey - ie, the working class (the communists in their parlance), the Islamists and the Kurds - in check.

There was to be a two-party 'democracy': a party of power supporting the aims of the military in civilian disguise; and a party that would remain in perpetual opposition, but loyal to the state's official ideology. Such an arrangement would ensure the maintenance of the 'security and stability' required by Turkey's rapidly developing capitalism.

The regime was aware that it could not stop the formation of unwanted parties even in a sham democracy, so it devised built-in ways and means that would exclude them from parliament, and therefore mainstream politics. To keep such parties marginalised, election law entailed a system of brutal electoral thresholds (the 'electoral barrage', to translate the Turkish phrase literally). If an unwanted political party survived despite the threshold, then the rigged court system would be brought into play.

The junta's attempt at social engineering failed and its 'controlled multi-party democracy' project collapsed in 1983. However, some of the basic tenets of the intended regime had quite a long life, and the electoral barrage has lasted up to now: before a party is declared to have won a parliamentary seat in any electoral district, it has to get more than 10% of the votes cast in the whole country.

## Kurds

The electoral threshold and other means of political control were unable to hold back a growing Kurdish freedom movement. There was a brief period of representation in parliament starting in 1991, when 21 representatives of the legally recognised HEP (People's Labour Party) were elected on SHP (Social Democratic Populist Party) lists in Kurdish provinces. Shortly after the election they resigned from the SHP to form their independent group, but in 1994 they were stripped of parliamentary immunity and the most prominent representatives were imprisoned for 10 years.

During the next general election in 1995, the Kurdish freedom movement tried a similar ploy in conjunction with left parties, but this time they were unable to reach the electoral threshold. Although they had achieved some success in local elections a year earlier, their vote remained well below the barrage. The 1999 general elections and successive elections up to 2007 produced similar results. In that year 26 seats were won, and those 26 members put in great work in parliament in parallel with the



HDP co-chairs Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ

other means of carrying forward the freedom fight.

In the 2011 general elections the 'independent' candidates put forward by the Kurdish freedom movement in cooperation with some smaller Turkish left parties gained 36 seats. Later developments produced a situation where a party based on the Kurdish movement has managed to gather sufficient strength to challenge the threshold in the 2015 election.

Since the inception of the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) in the late 70s, the principal aim of the movement's programme has been the independence of Kurdistan in four countries, together with unification. But the new programme put forward by Abdullah Öcalan marked a major shift from the old call for an independent Kurdish state. It envisaged democracy for all the peoples living in the region.

The new programme was not immediately understood by Kurdish cadres, since shortly after its publication comrade Öcalan was forced out of his hiding place in Syria, and undertook a perilous journey. Eventually he was detained by US forces in Kenya and handed over to the Turkish authorities in 1999.

He continued to elaborate his strategy in prison, opening the way towards a possible negotiated settlement. His ideological leadership over the most prominent cadres in command and control of the guerrilla organisation was exceptional, and even the most avid opponents of the new programme were obliged to toe the line.

The new strategy was required in order to create an inseparable bond with Turkish radical democrats and socialists, so that the Kurdish freedom movement became more and more a movement encompassing all progressive opposition forces in Turkey; that is, anybody and everybody prepared to move towards a major change in the politics of Turkey.

The response of different trends of the Turkish left to Öcalan's new line was mixed. Some were supportive, but most distanced themselves from such novel ideas (in 2012 I tried to summarise the differing political

programmes on the national question in a series of articles in the *Weekly Worker*<sup>1</sup>).

This week's electoral success of the HDP (People's Democratic Party) is living proof of the correctness of the general direction of comrade Öcalan's political line. Through the so-called Oslo peace process negotiations which were later sabotaged by the state, and then through the Imrali negotiations which ended in a tacit truce, Öcalan's programme started to make inroads among even the most nationalistic sections of Turkish society.

Öcalan gradually started intervening in mainstream politics through, for example, his public speeches on the Newroz (new year) celebrations, as well as at press conferences. He expressed a firm commitment to a ceasefire, and negotiations towards an eventual peaceful resolution of the conflict.

However, as the possibility of negotiations beckoned, the AKP government got cold feet and started to deviate from the agreed direction. As the government became more and more authoritarian in relation to the Syrian war and the unprecedented advances of organised Sunni Islam reaction under the guise of Islamic State, the only successful defence against the onslaught of IS came from Kurdish guerrillas in Kobanê.

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his party abandoned the negotiated agreements and resorted to blackmail tactics attempting to force Kurds to support the AKP in the presidential elections. But the Kurdish freedom movement refused to accept such a dictate and fielded its own candidate. The presidential elections became a catalyst for the HDP and one of its co-presidents, Selahattin Demirtaş, as the affable face of the movement in day-to-day politics.

The HDP had made clear its intention to run as a party in the general election, and initially this was considered to be a risky 'all or nothing' tactic. Those who were not ready to risk losing the reduced representation obtained by putting forward 'independent' candidates in a single challenge resisted the idea.

However, Öcalan and the leadership of the HDP saw this as an opportunity to draw the Turkish left into a joint

effort, and insisted on a party list for the election.

## Vote shift

Having identified the possibility of mobilising the Turkish left - even some of its nationalistic segments - a campaign of persuasion was launched. The increasingly authoritarian rule of the AKP and the aspiration of Erdoğan to become an all-powerful elected dictator in the guise of president alienated large swathes of the public. The opposition to such an abhorrence was reflected in the approach to the Turkish left. Many groups were drawn to take part in the HDP campaign.

Despite these efforts some sections of the Turkish left opted to remain aloof. The main group that did not join the HDP effort was the June Movement, which is an amalgamation of parts of the recently split legal Communist Party around the axis of the ODP (Freedom and Democracy Party), which is nothing but the rump of the Dev-Yol (Revolutionary Path) movement of the 70s and 80s. Despite overwhelming pressure from other segments of the left, they remained uncommitted, and did not call on their supporters to vote for the HDP.

Another important sector of the opposition to the AKP government which was not prepared to vote HDP was the Alevis of central Anatolia. The years of indoctrination and official ideology bore fruit and the nationalist MHP (Nationalist Action Party, the party of the infamous Grey Wolves) increased its share of support among Alevi voters, while the Kemalist opposition party, the CHP (Republican People's Party), managed to hold on to its vote.

The Alevi and Kurdish population of working class districts in the big cities switched from the AKP to the HDP in a big way. It is estimated that the AKP lost 8% of its votes in those areas, while 15% of Alevi votes were cast for the HDP. But the figure is still quite low, indicating that there is much to be done to win over the Alevi opposition. However, comparing the polls before and right after the start of the election campaign, the results indicate a considerable shift

of opinion among Alevis during the electioneering period.

Yet another big shift took place in the Kurdish provinces. The tribes and tribal confederations, including those who took part in the dirty war on the Turkish side, changed their allegiance from AKP to HDP. In the Kurdish provinces the votes and consequently the seats won by the AKP were negligible. There were some counties in those provinces where the HDP got more than 90% of the votes.

The Öcalan programme for democracy demanded that the HDP approach the different oppressed sections of society and encourage them to take part in the elections. A principal drive was in relation to women. The HDP maintained its initial position of appointing women co-presidents at every level of the organisation, and almost succeeded in standing as many women candidates as men. During the election campaign women played a great role, and the HDP got a substantial vote from educated urban women.

Prominent members of the Armenian, Roma and Ezidi communities, as well as Alevis, were selected for electable positions on HDP lists. A similar approach was used for well known members of former left organisations, as well as present-day groups.

A general voting drive was carried out among Turkish citizens living abroad, and it paid dividends. For example, in London, despite a low turnout (29%) the HDP got 60% of the vote. The votes cast abroad eventually won the HDP one additional seat.

## Possibilities

The outcome of the election was a success despite the physical attacks on meetings, the beatings and killings, the burning of vehicles employed during the campaign. The worst atrocity was the planting of two bombs in a Diyarbakır square, which was timed to explode during an election rally. It killed four people and injured hundreds of others. Such provocations were, however, diligently avoided for the most part by the calm and sober attitude of HDP rank-and-file members as well as leaders.

The HDP is now the third party in parliament, but this success has brought new responsibility and new tasks to the fore. The incident in Diyarbakır shows how perilous is the road ahead. The possibility of an Erdoğan dictatorship has been avoided, and the AKP has lost its parliamentary majority, but the rightwing parties can still form a majority bloc.

The HDP must find ways to maintain the momentum of the election in rallying other forces around it. First and foremost, it has to deal with its own shortcomings as a party formed in such haste. It has to reorganise itself by adopting proper rules based on individual membership and ensuring internal democracy, transforming itself from an amalgamation of various groups, which produced a great deal of internal bargaining and the existence of rival disciplines instead of coherence.

The HDP must open a wide-ranging debate about the programme needed for the movement as a first step. Also it has to plan ahead for joint activity in support of comrade Öcalan, who is still a prisoner, and the leadership of the guerrilla movement based in the Qandil Mountains of Iraqi Kurdistan. They must aim for a negotiated settlement of the Kurdish question through the democratisation of Turkey and other countries ●

## Notes

1. See *Weekly Worker* August 16, September 6, 13, 20 and 27 2012.

GREECE

# Smacking of desperation

Will Athens submit to the 'institutions' or get booted out of the euro zone? Eddie Ford looks at the latest negotiations

With time and money running out, on June 9 Greece submitted new proposals to its creditors. They consisted of two short supplementary documents - one outlining how Greece intends to cover the fiscal gap and the other suggesting a plan for making the country's debt "sustainable". As our readers will know, Greece's total public debt stands at €320 billion following bailouts in 2010 and 2012, which amounted to €240 billion from the European Commission-International Monetary Fund-European Central Bank 'institutions' (née troika).

The first document, cut down from 47 pages to a mere three, concedes again to the demand for an increase in the primary surplus targets - with the Greek government proposing surplus equal to 0.75% of GDP this year and 1.75% the next, compared to its previous offer of 0.6% and 1.5% respectively. Athens is now pushing the idea of three value-added tax rates, perhaps raising the two lower brackets from 6.5% to 7% and 11% to 12% (maybe even 13%). The top rate will remain at 23%, it seems. The bottom rate will apply only to medicines, books and theatre tickets. Basic foodstuffs, fresh produce, utilities and hotel accommodation will be among the products in the middle bracket.

The government is aiming or hoping to raise around €1 billion from these VAT changes, and another €350 million is expected from the scrapping of the 30% reduction on VAT for the Aegean islands. Additionally, there are plans to increase pensioners' contributions to their health insurance, possibly from 4% to 6% of their retirement pay - bringing in about €500 million. It does look, however, as though the Syriza government has resisted calls, at least for the time being, for a rapid rise in the effective retirement age, restricting early retirement applications by hundreds of thousands of Greeks. In the extremely unlikely event that these proposals satisfy the institutions, the final tranche of €7.2 billion in bailout funds that has been held up since last August will be unlocked.

As for the other document, this apparently suggests the European Stability Mechanism buys the €6.7 billion of Greek bonds held by the ECB, which mature in July and August. In other words, Alexis Tsipras now wants to extend the current bailout programme until March 2016, when the IMF's participation formally ends. In turn, this extension would more likely than not be a preparation for what is widely known as the 'big agreement' - ie, a third bailout of between €40 billion-€50 billion to hypothetically keep Athens afloat for the next few years. According to Greek sources, the idea of an extension was mooted at the highest level of German policy making several months ago.

## Rupture

Margaritis Schinas, the EC's spokesperson, assures us that the latest proposals from Athens are being assessed with "diligence and care". Forever optimistic, Tsipras told *Corriere della Sera* that "we're very close to an agreement" on the primary surplus, though there needs to be a more "positive attitude" towards the anti-recessionary proposals put forward by Athens.

However, the problems with the proposals - insofar as we have all the details - are obvious. First, and principally, they amount to a massive capitulation to the institutions: Syriza,



Alexis Tsipras and Angela Merkel: is a deal possible?

after all, was elected on a platform of total opposition to all austerity measures - which by definition meant rejection of any further bailouts predicated on slash-and-burn economics and massive assaults on the living conditions and rights of the working class. Lest we forget, Syriza also wanted repayment of the remaining debt to be tied to economic growth (not the Greek budget), a "significant moratorium" on debt payments, the purchase of Greek sovereign bonds under the ECB's €60 billion monthly programme of quantitative easing, a European debt conference modelled on the write-off of half of Germany's post-World War II debt - not to mention a halt to privatisation, such as the port of Piraeus. But now the Syriza government says it will "respect" tender processes that are already underway.

Anyhow, Athens' new proposals represent a virtual abandonment of the Thessaloniki programme adopted last September - which was described as "not negotiable" by Tsipras only in January. Well, it has now been negotiated out of existence - and, of course, the Thessaloniki programme itself represented a significant dilution of Syriza's original radical intentions, like the repudiation of the entire debt, nationalisation of the banks, and so on. The party's progressive ambitions are being shredded, Salami-style.

Inevitably, discontent runs deep inside Syriza, especially within the Left Platform grouping led by energy minister Panagiotis Lafazanis. At the party's 2013 conference it won 30% of the overall vote and 60 seats on the party's central committee. Then in March the LP won four seats on the party's political secretariat. It is also important to recall that the Syriza left as a whole is underrepresented in parliament, composing about a third of its MPs. This section of the party is adamant that Tsipras should not compromise any further, and should instead seek a "rupture" from its creditors.

For instance, prominent CC member Stathis Kouvelakis has challenged the timidity of the Greek prime minister.

Replying to a May 31 article by Tsipras in *Le Monde*, Kouvelakis demanded that the government should "proceed to a counterattack", with an alternative plan based on Syriza's "pre-electoral pledges" and the government's "programmatic announcements".<sup>1</sup> This "counterattack" should be structured along the following set of measures to be "implemented immediately": the nationalisation of the banks "with all necessary accompanying measures" to insure their function along transparent, productive, developmental and social criteria; the "immediate termination" of every grid protecting the country's scandal-immersed oligarchy; the "substantial taxation" of wealth and large properties, as well as top earners and high corporate profitability; and the "full reintroduction", as well as the "safeguarding and practical implementation", of labour legislation laws and rights to trade union organisations. Overall, Kouvelakis concluded, the Greek government's "priority" should be to default on the debt, as the "greatest disaster" facing the country would be the imposition of a new memorandum that would "signify the end of any hope for an alternative to the neoliberal shock therapy".

Obviously, the current Syriza leadership will not accede to such demands ... at the moment. If it did, the institutions would almost certainly pull the plug and Greece would be booted out of the euro zone.

Pressure mounting, Tsipras on June 9 told the political secretariat that negotiations with lenders were at a "most crucial stage" - nor was he considering early elections. Perish the thought, just as the Thessaloniki programme was "not negotiable". Later in the day he urged his MPs to back "whatever deal" his negotiators secure. But, even though it has become a hoary cliché, the clock is ticking. Greek coffers are almost completely empty and Athens desperately needs the remaining bailout money or it will find itself unable to pay government salaries and pensions.

Looming ominously, June 11 sees a meeting of the Eurogroup countries,

senior officials saying they need a deal agreed by then for it to be presented to finance ministers at their next scheduled gathering a week later - the latter being regarded as the last possible date, leaving enough time for Greece to legislate and implement new economic reforms and still receive funding before the bailout officially expires on June 30. On that very same day, Athens is due to make a bundled set of four loan repayments totalling €1.5 billion to the IMF - the latter taken by surprise last week when Athens announced it was to make use of a little known clause or loophole adopted in the late 1970s, under which indebted countries "can ask to bundle together multiple principal payments falling due in a calendar month". Surely a fiscal manoeuvre that smacks of desperation.

If things were not daunting enough, two Greek bonds totalling €3.5 billion are due to be paid on July 20 to the ECB - which purchased them back in 2010 in an effort to stabilise the euro zone debt markets. Even if Athens is able to pay the €1.5 billion IMF bill in June without a deal, next to nobody believes it will be able to make the ECB payment without another bailout.

## Paperology

But Tsipras's chances of securing a deal, even the massively compromised deal now on the table, is doubtful. According to the *Financial Times*, the mood of "cautious optimism" that has surrounded the talks in recent weeks is "rapidly giving way to fear and suspicion" - with the paper also commenting that the latest document exchange between Athens and Brussels has become such a mind-numbingly familiar process that the EC has even given it a sobriquet: "paperology" (June 9).

Reflecting the growing despondency, Jeroen Dijsselbloem, the Eurogroup president, told the Dutch RTL Nieuws TV station that the optimistic chatter from the Greek side is an "underestimation of the complexity of what's being asked of them". Sounding even more grumpy, the oddly named Finnish prime minister, Alex Stubb, declared that

"our patience is running out". At the time of writing, creditors do not appear to be budging on the surplus targets - rejecting the 0.75% on offer and wanting Athens to commit to a primary surplus of 1% of GDP this year. Schinas told the press that the ball is "clearly" in Greece's court, saying the latest proposals "fall short" of what Athens had previously promised.

Perhaps inadvertently, Tsipras himself has supplied us with a distinct clue as to the darkening of the mood. In the same *Corriere della Sera* interview, he took issue with the idea that a Grexit would be easily manageable. Instead, he argued: "I think it's obvious. It would be the beginning of the end of the euro zone. If the European political leadership cannot handle a problem like that of Greece, which accounts for 2% of its economy, what would the reaction of the markets be to countries facing much larger problems, such as Spain or Italy, which has two trillion of public debt?"<sup>2</sup>

Yes, Alexis, but you have grasped the wrong end of the telescope. By the very same token, the institutions cannot come to any meaningful deal or compromise with Athens. If, for example, they agreed to write down or write off a large proportion of the Greek debt, then Spain and Italy - not to mention Portugal and Ireland - would want precisely the same treatment, and Brussels knows this. But Italy is too big to bail out - impossible. Not even Berlin's coffers would stretch that far. When all is said and done, Athens has to stick to the terms of the bailout agreement, embrace austerity and economic 'reforms' - or get out as a warning to others. Do not screw around with the euro zone project.

This hardening attitude towards Athens manifested itself at the G7 summit in Krün on June 7-8, where the country was repeatedly cautioned against resisting the demands of the institutions. Barack Obama effectively put Athens on notice that it needed to accept the inevitable and prove it is "serious" about making "important reforms", putting the onus squarely on Tsipras to "follow through" and make "tough political choices". Obama's comments must have dashed the hopes of some in Athens that the White House would intervene in their favour - or at least tilt the odds slightly back in that direction. No chance. One more potential escape route for Athens has been closed down.

Indeed, the Syriza government appears to have seriously miscalculated right from the very beginning. Countries like Spain and Ireland have not come to their rescue - quite the opposite: they have spat extra venom at them, if anything. Athens does seem to have prolonged the negotiations for as long as humanly possible, and then some more, out of the belief that its creditors would eventually blink and agree to grant wholesale debt relief and new bailout cash with far less strings attached.

Maybe summing it up, one senior euro zone official at the negotiations told the *FT* that Athens "doesn't understand we're not back in 2012, when the Europeans were willing to just throw money at the problem". Brussels will not blink, he added ●

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## Notes

1. www.jacobinmag.com/2015/06/greece-tsipras-kouvelakis-syriza-eurozone-debt.  
2. www.corriere.it/economia/15\_giugno\_09/tsipras-interview-greece-5bf9558c-0e65-11e5-89f7-3e9b1062ea42.shtml.

## SOUTH AFRICA

# Another blow against the loyalists

The grip of the SACP over the unions continues to weaken. Peter Manson comments on the congress of South Africa's NUM

In an astonishing few days for the Congress of South African Trade Unions, the top leaders of Cosatu's main pro-African National Congress affiliate, the National Union of Mineworkers, have been replaced by oppositionists. Meanwhile, the main anti-ANC union has lost its latest legal bid to be allowed to attend Cosatu's forthcoming special national congress.

The loyalist leaders who were turfed out by union delegates were Frans Baleni, general secretary of the NUM, and his deputy, Tshimane Montoedi. The NUM, the largest Cosatu affiliate following the expulsion in November 2014 of the oppositionist National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa), had been regarded as the most reliable and dogged supporter of the pro-ANC alliance that is cheered on by the South African Communist Party. Baleni, a member of the SACP central committee, had been the most outspoken amongst the Cosatu leaders in favour of expelling Numsa for the 'crime' of withdrawing support from the ANC/SACP in December 2013.

In the early hours of June 6, at the very end of the NUM's 15th national congress, Baleni was defeated by the narrowest of margins by David Sipunzi, the union's secretary in the Free State, who picked up 354 votes to Baleni's 345. Soon after his election, Sipunzi said: "We need to unite the labour movement. We will talk to Numsa ... There is a need for a bilateral between ourselves and the Numsa leadership."<sup>1</sup> He also referred to the popular former general secretary of Cosatu, Zwelinzima Vavi, who was dismissed from his post for being too outspoken in his criticisms of the ANC: "You can't talk unity within Cosatu without Numsa and Vavi. Vavi is a prominent leader. You need to engage him."

Vavi himself, together with Numsa general secretary Irvin Jim, were jubilant over the change at the top in the NUM. Vavi tweeted: "Election of David Sipunzi as GS of NUM is an extremely significant development which may change course of history." He added: "I hope election of the new NUM leadership may be what we need not only to save NUM but Cosatu from destruction."

Remarkably, at the start of the congress only two of the NUM's regions were known to be opposed to Baleni, whereas at the mineworkers' previous congress in 2012 there were four who wanted him out. So most commentators assumed that Baleni, who had been general secretary since 2006, was a certainty for re-election. The NUM has been regarded as an unbreachable stronghold of the SACP - the party has traditionally dominated all the Cosatu unions, but its control seemed virtually absolute amongst the mineworkers. With most delegates marshalled by SACP bureaucrats, it seemed unthinkable that Baleni would lose.

But it appears that the SACP had miscalculated the support felt amongst the rank and file for Cosatu's former general secretary. Sipunzi had said: "I am tired of being shouted by members asking when is Vavi coming back. I can no longer close my ears to those calls."<sup>2</sup>

According to the International Marxist Tendency,

there was a clear attempt by the bureaucracy to doctor the congress in favour of smaller regions which were seen to be supporting Baleni. This was evident on the first day of the congress, when a dispute over credentials delayed the start ... The

PWV and North East regions were complaining that smaller regions were allocated more delegates than some of the bigger regions.<sup>3</sup>

### Still in charge

The IMT may be right about this, but it is certainly wrong to imply, as its article does, that the left has now taken over the NUM. While oppositionists gained three very important top posts, most of the national officers were re-elected unopposed and the loyalists are still in a clear majority. This is evident in the NUM's post-congress statement, which expresses exactly the opposite view from that of the newly elected general secretary: "Congress fully supports the decision taken by Cosatu to expel Numsa and Zwelinzima Vavi respectively," it reads, and adds ominously: "... congress is calling upon the Cosatu leadership to remain resolute in enforcing discipline."

The statement continues the pretence of particularly the SACP that Numsa was expelled not just for opposing Cosatu support for the ANC, but also for "poaching" the potential members of rival unions by announcing it was trying to recruit workers from outside as well as inside the metal industry. The NUM majority states: "... should Numsa reverse its December 2013 resolution that undermines the federation's founding principles of 'One industry, one union', the NUM will be the first union to call for Numsa's reinstatement."

The problem with this is that just about every other Cosatu union has branched out beyond its original remit, but this has hardly been the cause of inter-union rivalry - trade unionists account for only around 30% of all employed workers and the main difficulty is recruiting them to any union. But the NUM statement goes on to refer to the tiny Liberated Metalworkers Union of South Africa (Limusa) set up by Cosatu loyalists to replace the 350,000-strong Numsa as an affiliate. It states without a hint of irony: "Congress warmly welcomes the acceptance of Limusa to the Cosatu fold as a new home of metalworkers of South Africa. Congress further calls on all metalworkers to join a Cosatu union: join Limusa."

What was that about 'One industry, one union'?

And, if there was any doubt about who still controls the NUM leadership, here is what they have to say about first the SACP and then the ANC:

Congress reaffirms the SACP as the only vanguard party of the working class capable of prosecuting the struggle for socialism and ultimately for communism. Congress believes that the SACP's five-year programme, the *South African road to socialism*, is the best method in taking forward the SACP's programmatic slogan, 'Socialism is the future: build it now'.

Our 15th national congress reaffirms the ANC-led alliance as the best-placed organisation to lead radical economic transformation currently underway. Against this background, the NUM shall campaign across the country for the ANC's landslide victory in the forthcoming local government elections in 2016.<sup>4</sup>

If Sipunzi or the new deputy GS, William Mabapa, are allowed to represent the NUM on Cosatu's central executive committee, then it is true, as the IMT states, that this

would change the balance within the federation. But, taking into account the above statements and the two new officers' known opposition to them, that is a big 'if'.

In its own statement the SACP congratulated the NUM on a successful congress, which it thought augured well for the "tasks and challenges to rebuild a strong NUM". The party laughably claims it "did not have any preferences or favour one candidate over another in terms of the positions which were contested" and instead declared:

As the SACP we wish to condemn in the strongest possible terms the factionalist, divisive and opportunistic posturing by the former general secretary of Cosatu, Zwelinzima Vavi, on the outcomes of the NUM congress ... it is irresponsible in the extreme for Vavi to be celebrating the election of a section of the NUM leadership, instead of encouraging the unity of its entire leadership and membership as a whole.<sup>5</sup>

The Young Communist League also wished to "welcome the outcomes of the National Union of Mineworkers' national congress", while at the same time speaking out against "the misplaced triumphalism by the sworn enemies of our revolution, who see the election of the new national office-bearers as their victory". After all, "it is the resolutions and policies that make an organisation, and not individuals, as some would like to have us believe." And anyone can see that the NUM still supports Cosatu's loyalist leadership. So "Let us not be misled by the self-defeatist triumphalism of these political opportunists, who want to divide the workers and profile themselves as their messiahs."<sup>6</sup>

### Start of a process

We can conclude that, while the left has most definitely not taken over the NUM, last week was part of a wider a process of change. While discontent is palpable in other loyalist-led unions, within the NUM there is a deep internal crisis following the devastating loss of around 100,000 members over the last three years, relegating it to the second-largest union (after Numsa).

That was very much linked to the failure of the NUM to represent its members in any meaningful sense. Under the 'guidance' of the SACP and its concern not to derail the ANC-led "national democratic revolution" (NDR) by making 'excessive' demands on employers or pushing disputes too hard, there was a mass revolt amongst the union's membership, especially in the platinum belt. As a result, thousands defected to a newly formed rival union and the NUM was forced to lead a militant strike itself, which culminated in the police massacre of 34 miners at Marikana in August 2012.<sup>7</sup>

Greg Nicolson, writing in the online *Daily Maverick*, quotes the NUM's defeated general secretary as saying: "The Marikana story has obviously been a big problem for us." Nicolson goes on:

That's an understatement. The NUM has been accused of being partly responsible for both systemic and direct causes of the Marikana massacre. NUM was labelled the 'National Union of Management'. Workers claimed local and national union leaders failed to represent their interests and looked to use their

positions to advance a company or political career.

The Marikana commission of inquiry heard local NUM leaders failed to take up the grievances of the rock-drill operators and even fired on the workers when they marched to the union offices on August 10 2012 - the first shootings in a week that left 44 people dead. NUM president Senzeni Zokwana had to address workers from a police vehicle because it wasn't safe to stand in front of them ... Not only did the NUM lose its credibility in the platinum belt to the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (Amcu): a number of its members were killed that week and in the reprisal murders that followed.<sup>8</sup>

Last week's congress was the first since the events of 2012 and in one sense can be seen as a delayed (and evidently insufficient) response to Marikana. The dissatisfaction has begun to make itself felt at the very top of the union.

It needs to be stressed that it is SACP control of the union in the service of the NDR that is the underlying cause of this crisis. While this has left NUM members with poor wages and bad conditions, the tops have greatly benefited. NUM leaders have found lucrative careers, the most well known being Cyril Ramaphosa, South Africa's deputy president and committed capitalist, renowned for his directorships of some of the biggest companies in the country.

### Legal setback

Meanwhile, Numsa's jubilation at having found new allies at the top of the NUM was tempered on June 9 by the failure of its latest legal move in the battle for control of Cosatu.

Numsa had sought to reverse its expulsion through an "urgent application" in the high court, challenging the right of the Cosatu leadership to exclude it from next month's special national congress. The judge ruled that the application was not urgent at all, as it could have been made months earlier. He struck the case off the roll and ordered Numsa to pay Cosatu's costs.

Perhaps this will make the rebels think twice about relying so heavily on the courts, which had ruled in favour of the oppositionist unions in two previous cases. Firstly, led by Numsa, they had forced Cosatu to reinstate Vavi to his post of general secretary in April 2014 after the loyalists had been found to have improperly suspended him (he was later dismissed). Then last month the high court ordered Cosatu and the oppositionist unions to agree the details of the July special national congress (SNC) to discuss the ongoing crisis - Cosatu president Sidumo Dlamini had claimed he would convene an SNC in line with the constitution after over a third of the federation's affiliates had demanded one, but in practice nothing had happened.

But now, following the latest ruling, Numsa will not be able to attend the congress and it seems certain that the loyalists will (for the moment at least) retain control. And to think that just a day before this reversal Numsa, together with the eight other Cosatu affiliates backing the legal move, had been so confident.

In a statement issued at the

June 8 press conference by the rebel nine unions Numsa declared it felt "emboldened by the revolutionary and principled articulation by [the NUM's] newly elected general secretary, comrade David Sipunzi, on forging maximum unity within the progressive trade union movement, particularly Cosatu".

In regard to the following day's court action it confidently stated:

We are certain that we will once more emerge victorious, and such a victory will be appreciated by all class-conscious workers, as we continue our revolutionary task of reclaiming Cosatu to be an independent, worker-controlled, democratic, class-orientated, anti-capitalist and militant federation of workers - as opposed to a paralysed conveyor-belt of neoliberal, anti-working class policies that serve the interests of the wealthy and powerful in our society.<sup>9</sup>

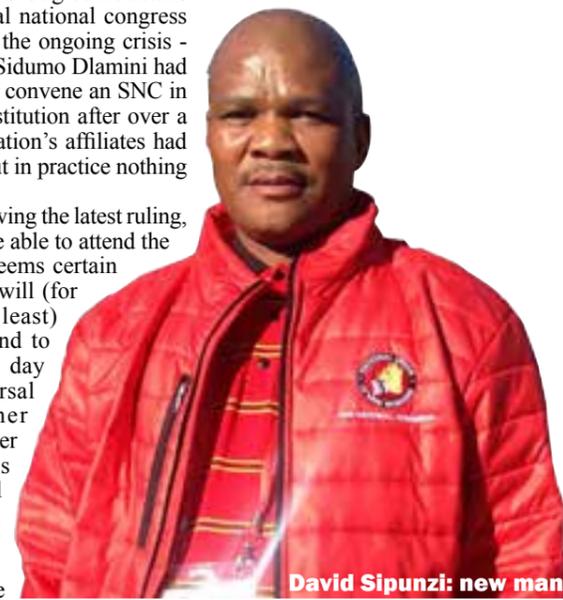
Obviously these are very militant and left-sounding phrases, but it has to be said that revolutionary rhetoric is no substitute for sound, principled theory. Numsa may have seen the light over the SACP's absurd claim that loyalty to the ANC in the name of the "national democratic revolution" is the "most direct route to socialism" in South Africa, but it is still under the illusion that that answer lies in the social democratic platitudes contained in the Freedom Charter of old.

The unions are, one by one, gradually freeing themselves from the stultifying grip of the SACP and ANC loyalists, but where is the principled, Marxist alternative? Its absence is the real challenge that needs to be taken up in the South African working class movement ●

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### Notes

1. <http://mg.co.za/article/2015-06-06-new-num-leaders-have-a-mountain-to-climb>.
2. <http://m.ewn.co.za/2015/06/08/New-NUM-General-Secretary-vows-to-unite-his-union>.
3. [www.marxist.com/south-africa-frans-baleni-kicked-out-a-heavy-defeat-for-the-cosatu-and-num-right-wing.htm](http://www.marxist.com/south-africa-frans-baleni-kicked-out-a-heavy-defeat-for-the-cosatu-and-num-right-wing.htm).
4. NUM statement, June 7 2015.
5. SACP statement, June 9 2015.
6. YCLSA press statement, June 7 2015.
7. It is worth noting here that president Jacob Zuma is still refusing to release the report of the official inquiry into the Marikana massacre, despite having received it more than two months ago, on March 31, and the outcry from many sections of South African society demanding that he do so.
8. [www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2015-06-07-num-the-end-of-the-age-of-frans-baleni/#.VXWz2M89Vikp](http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2015-06-07-num-the-end-of-the-age-of-frans-baleni/#.VXWz2M89Vikp).
9. Numsa statement, June 8 2015.



David Sipunzi: new man

REVIEW

# Beginnings informed by the past

John Summers *All for nothing* Studio1.1, 57a Redchurch Street, London E2, June 5-28 2015, Wednesdays to Sundays, 12 noon to 6pm



Untitled

The invitation I received to view John Summers' new exhibition featured a collage of brutalist building and ends with the slogan, "All hail the new brutalism!" I, for one, was sold.

Of course, on reading the rest of the publicity it became clear that the exhibition is not actually about brutalism, but building from destruction, stoical survival and the past in the service of the future. It is about "building for a hard-won future that could no longer pretend to modernism's utopia". The commentary continues: "As we live in new ruin, as art also loses its innocence in self-consciousness and self-parody..." I am not sure that art was ever that innocent, but there is certainly plenty of "self-consciousness" and "self-parody", from Grayson Perry to David Shrigley. Indeed, there is a wealth of humorous artwork that lovingly mocks both itself and the society that shaped it.

*All for nothing* is not a quirkily humorous exhibition, but it does deal with some social, cultural and aesthetic 'big questions' and is well worth a look. The gallery space is small and it gets darker, the further in you go. This is accentuated by the industrial-grey carpeted walls and shiny grey painted floor. The carpet is crudely nailed into the walls - the emphasis on the utilitarian materials and overt reference to the means of construction are an homage to brutalist architecture. The artist, John Summers, told me that he had initially intended to use the brutalist collage image that was on the publicity for the show on the walls, but it just did not look right.

There are only three pieces in the show. Two are towers of sliced blocks of air-drying clay, dipped in PVA to seal them. The clay was once moulded into figures, which now indicate little

of their previous form. Oddly they look like lumps of flesh in their own right - folds of fat and skin with a grey, shiny, unhealthy pallor. They are encased in a glass and metal cabinet which resembles a tower block, its clay/flesh lumps residing within. The exposed red wire of the lighting (which casts its light above each clay form) running down the inside is the only aspect of colour; mirrors underneath each lump of clay illuminate it again from below (there is a lot of consideration given to lighting in the show as a whole).

In addition to the encased flesh forms, there is another piece, more recognisably figurative. This comprises of two cocooned figures (the exhibition blurb likens them to the frozen crew of Stanley Kubrick's 2001 *Space odyssey*); plaster casts and light. All the component materials are visible. The inside is made of earth, its core still damp and, slowly drying, it emits a slight smell. The earth is wrapped in chicken wire to hold its form and coated in lumpy plaster. In some sections the earth or the chicken wire poke through, exposed. The faces have glass eyes embedded in them, casting a somewhat creepy dead stare. In juxtaposition, there are smoother plaster casts of the artist's torso and limbs. The torso lies aside the piece, while an arm and leg form a part of it. The foot is broken and looks almost cloven; the arm appears from one angle as through it is embracing the other figure and from another as though it is blocking it.

In the corner of the room a perspex wheel rotates in front of a bulb, casting changing colour onto the figures, which adds an air of fantasy to the work. John initially intended this to be the only light on the piece, but it made it difficult to see the cracks in

the plaster and exposed wire that are integral to the concept (I infer that this 'new brutalism' must emphasise and expose the materials and processes of the artwork).

What is key to the work is the idea of a beginning - forms that have yet to come into their own, but whose material components can still be celebrated. Interestingly, there is very little information to offer the viewer insight into the pieces. They have no titles and no explanation of the materials used. John says he had chosen not to title the works so as not to be too instructive - the viewer may

interpret the pieces differently from the artist. The works are still in a process of becoming - they may change or evolve through the process of being displayed.

This is very much in contrast to brutalist architecture, which can be criticised for being *too* instructive. If we take, for example, the tower blocks of brutalist architect Ernő Goldfinger, they are designed to be communal, to collectivise domesticity with laundry rooms, children's play areas, social space for the elderly and youth, etc. But it is prescriptive in its approach, arguably overly paternalistic. John Summers' exhibition is the opposite: there is no guidance on how to read the work and there are no concrete examples (if you'll excuse the term) of the materials used. Speaking to John about his materials and processes illuminated the work for me. It became much deeper, more thought-provoking as a result.

Overall, this small exhibition does deal with some big artistic concepts. The pieces deliberately expose their raw materials rather than seeking to create a perfect visual illusion of their subject. The exposure and celebration of their utilitarianism, their functions and their limits is the most direct reference to brutalism.

There is a recognition that the viewer, by his or her own interaction with the piece, brings something to the work. As Trotsky commented on the relationship of both artist and the viewer to a work,

... the form of art is, to a certain and a very large degree, independent, but the artist who creates this form and the spectator who is enjoying it are not empty machines ... They are living people, with a crystallised psychology representing a certain unity, even if not entirely harmonious. This psychology is the result of social conditions.

The work of art does not exist above or apart from its own experience, even when its subject is fantastical. Summers' work has an eerie, futuristic feel about it, but the utilitarian presentation sets its essence in the present. The concept of the work is about beginnings - but beginnings that are informed by the past and set in the context of the present ●

Sarah McDonald

## Fighting fund

### Inspired by success

"It is good to see that the fighting fund is now achieving its target," writes comrade EW. "Long may it last!" And just to show how much he's been inspired by success, he goes on: "It has been too long since I made a cheque come your way, so here it is!" A cheque for a mere £125, note!

Well, something like that always provides us with a big psychological boost, as well as a cash one. It has really helped to keep us set up for a third success in a row in making what previously might have seemed an elusive monthly target - £1,750. With a third of June now gone, we have so far received £639, so that's not too bad at all.

But EW wasn't the only one to

make a cheque come our way, as he puts it. FD did the same thing with his £50 donation. Then there were standing orders from CG (£30), GD (£25), DG and DV (£20 each), RK and SM (£10). And finally we received three PayPal donations, from NW (£20), NC (£10) and BY (£5) respectively (those three were among exactly 3,500 online readers last week).

Thanks to all who helped over the last seven days. Will others play their part and ensure another success? ●

Robbie Rix

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

## What we fight for

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# weekly worker

**Demand your  
Labour MP  
nominates him**

## It can still be done

Mobilise to put Jeremy Corbyn on the ballot paper, urges **Charles Gradnitzer** of Labour Party Marxists

**W**ith only four days to go until the nominations for Labour leader close on June 15, it is vital that the left does its best to contact Labour Party MPs in order to get Jeremy Corbyn on the leadership ballot.

Anybody who has been following the leadership hustings, from the Fabian Society to the GMB union congress in Dublin, knows that Corbyn represents a real political trend within the Labour Party, enjoying huge support. It is a simple matter of democratic representation that his participation in the leadership debate be secured.

Moreover, we need to mobilise to get Corbyn on the ballot paper because he represents a line of political demarcation within Labour around which a socialist left could potentially coalesce. Corbyn is not simply the 'most leftwing' or 'least worst' candidate among a selection of Blairites and Brownites: he is an unashamed socialist. When asked at the Fabian Society hustings if socialism is alive, he did not fudge the answer, but noted the difference between statism and socialism, before concluding that we need to "defend the principle of 'From each according to their abilities; to each according to their needs.'" Sadly this is something of a bold statement, not just in the Labour Party, but in many organisations on the left.

The demand for democratic representation of all political tendencies in the Labour Party in the leadership debate is not just a gimmick for the Labour left or supporters of Corbyn. Staunch Blairite Luke Akehurst has also called for Corbyn to be on the ballot.<sup>1</sup> To his credit, Akehurst states that Corbyn represents a real political trend within the party and it would be undemocratic and divisive to exclude him.

Not every rightwing Labour Party journalist has been as confident to debate their ideas. Enter *The Daily Telegraph's* Dan Hodges. The man who described the future of the Labour Party as "bleak" because Jim Murphy resigned has the temerity to accuse Corbyn and his "acolytes" of being in denial.<sup>2</sup>

In his article Hodges mocks Owen Jones for pointing out that Corbyn could turn things around in Scotland, dismissing such claims as being the same as a conspiracy theorist meticulously combing through video footage of 9/11 to find evidence of controlled demolition.

But Corbyn's main problem in getting on the ballot paper is that many of the MPs who had been most likely to support him, such as Left Platform signatory Katy Clark, were Scottish Labour MPs who were wiped out in the last election. In fact five of the Left Platform signatories and one member of the Socialist Campaign Group lost their seats in Scotland. Combined with other leftwing, anti-austerity MPs, they would have been enough to put Corbyn on the ballot.

Even in Hodges' own terms of simply winning elections by jettisoning all political principles for the sake of being in power, it does not make sense to elect his favoured candidate, Yvette Cooper, because to do so Labour would



'From each according to their ability ...'

need Scotland. It was conceded by all sections of the party during the Scottish referendum that it would be impossible to win a parliamentary majority without the support of Scotland. With Scotland sending 56 Scottish National Party MPs to Westminster on May 7, it might appear to be very difficult to ever form a Labour majority government again. How, exactly, he plans to do this with candidates to the right of Miliband is anybody's guess.

If Hodges thinks that the seats lost in Scotland can be won back by people who support austerity, Trident and Nato, then he is sorely mistaken. Corbyn is the only candidate who not only opposes these things, but has done so consistently since he was elected in the 1980s, earning him the title of most rebellious Labour MP.

### Nominations

So far 14 MPs have nominated Corbyn: Jon Trickett, Clive Lewis, John

McDonnell, Michael Meacher, Ronnie Campbell, Diane Abbott, Kelvin Hopkins, Richard Burgon, Dennis Skinner, Grahame Morris, Frank Field, Kate Osamor, Cat Smith and Corbyn himself.

There are a further 13 MPs who immediately spring to mind as potential leftwing supporters of Corbyn's leadership bid. These MPs fall into three camps: the three remaining Socialist Campaign Group MPs, four signatories of the Left Platform, and six of the 10 newly elected MPs who wrote a letter calling for the end to austerity after the election.

The members of the Campaign Group who have not yet nominated Corbyn are: John Cryer, Ian Lavery and Ian Mearns. Both Lavery and Mearns have indicated they will nominate Burnham, but, given their common membership of the SCG with Jeremy Corbyn, they are the most likely of Burnham's supporters to lend their

nominations.

The signatories of the Left Platform who have not nominated Corbyn are Alan Meale, Ann Clwyd, Chris Williamson and Dave Anderson. Two of them, Meale and Anderson, have also indicated they will nominate Burnham, but could be persuaded to switch.

The newly elected anti-austerity MPs are Harry Harpham, Imran Hussain, Jo Stevens, Louise Haigh, Rachael Maskell and Rebecca Long Bailey. All except Hussain have indicated they will nominate Burnham. However, with 50-odd indicative nominations, he is already guaranteed to be on the ballot, and his anti-austerity supporters in the PLP ought to switch their nominations to the genuinely anti-austerity candidate.

If you are a member of the Socialist Campaign Group, or a signatory of the Left Platform or the anti-austerity letter, then it should be inconceivable to support any candidate other than

Corbyn. Burnham, who bizarrely enjoys the support of the trade union bureaucracy and is widely regarded as the leftwing candidate, is nothing of the sort. As shadow health secretary he refused to reverse the privatisation that had already occurred under the Health and Social Care Act and refused to end the private finance initiative. More recently he has declined to oppose a benefits cap.

At a meeting of its executive on June 9, Unite agreed to lobby its remaining MPs to get Corbyn on the ballot, but even with their support this only brings Corbyn up to 27 nominations.

So it really is up to the left to convince MPs who have not yet done so to nominate Jeremy Corbyn ●

### Notes

1. <http://labourlist.org/2015/06/why-jeremy-corbyn-should-be-on-the-leadership-ballot>.
2. [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/general-election-2015/politics-blog/11654167/Jeremy-Corbyn-and-his-acolytes-are-simply-in-denial.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/general-election-2015/politics-blog/11654167/Jeremy-Corbyn-and-his-acolytes-are-simply-in-denial.html).

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