

weekly **worker**



**As Jeremy Corbyn's
campaign surges forward,
Burnham begins to panic**

- SWP's Marxism 2015
- Nations and nationalism
- Iran's nuclear deal
- Greece: Syriza crisis

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Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

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**Bureaucratic
centralism
and its
apostates**

LETTERS



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

In other words

Assuming your organisation has any fundamental intention of 'reaching out' to and attracting - and thus at root any real political desire to generate full-scale support from - people such as myself (namely principled, class-conscious, as such 'dedicated', but in any event lifelong and unserving leftwing members of the socially progressive bourgeoisie/intelligentsia), well, I would suggest that you give proper consideration to the points I make in this communication.

In essence, it represents my, albeit distinctly 'untrained' or quasi-Marxist, attempts to analyse the current situation in Greece, and most particularly my wish to understand your internal position within the CPGB/*Weekly Worker*. In other words, your position on what in a glaringly obvious manner is this latest and specific development within the ongoing/inevitable general crises of modern world capitalism.

So, anyway, based upon Eddie Ford's article, 'Austerity in a modified form' (July 9), and in general elsewhere, it seems to me that the following is true of your organisation.

You neither supported participation in the actual referendum itself nor consequently were you able to offer any position whatsoever on which way Greek people should vote - ie, 'yes', 'no' or the 'official' Greek communist party (KKE) position of spoiling the ballot paper.

You neither practically support nor ideologically underwrite the KKE in their 'plan B' stance to "get out of the euro and the EU. Go it alone. National autarky. Permanently maintain capital controls, nationalise everything you can see and hope for the best. A vision of grim, barrack-room socialism ..." (as specifically it is all described and defined in this article from Eddie Ford).

You don't propose or indeed condone any 'support' whatsoever for the Syriza/ANEL coalition, even if strictly on the basis of being 'insiders' who could be both actively and openly critical and thereby purposefully expose Syriza's systemic or core deficiencies/their eventual betrayals, plus inevitable treacheries.

But, on the other hand, neither do you offer any alternative avenues or methods by which the awareness, understanding and class-consciousness of the Greek people can be raised (indeed, whether they be 'workers' or even progressive and open-minded bourgeoisie/intelligentsia).

So my simple, but paradoxically also elemental, question is this. At WW/CPGB, how the hell do you suggest that the working class plus socially aware/progressively inclined bourgeoisie can make progress with their class-conscious ideas or revolutionary development, if even Marxist-Leninist organisations (such as yourselves) don't provide any immediate, relevant or proper guidance? In other words, if you don't provide any practical as well as principled and clear-sighted direct engagement with their current and as such their 'real life' endeavours and indeed urgent attempt at achieving what they (spontaneously and for themselves) regard as both their personal and national 'dignity'; what they perceive as their proper and full 'democracy', etc?

Putting all of that another way: what precisely are you suggesting the people of Greece should do in the 'here and now', and, in detail, how should they do it? For instance, for whom should they vote in their existing electoral set-up and their current socio-political system - in other words, as things stand?

Moreover, when does intellectually 'correct' - aka purist and high-minded - Marxist principle and analysis begin to translate into real involvement with the activities of, and direct participation, in the realities of actual working class life

(most notably under these conditions of hi-tech weaponised, globally super-organised, metadata-monitoring, plus ultra-media-controlled capitalism). Oh, yes, indeed, that being in distinction merely to your organisation alongside any such others lecturing or virtually just 'preaching' from the social or political sidelines about ideological, potential and/or merely future possibilities.

And, of course, those 'sidelines' are precisely where all of genuinely leftwing politics, as well as revolutionary Marxism-Leninism, finds itself right now, here within the first decades of the 21st century.

So, hey, maybe you at WW and CPGB, alongside any and all of those similar others, might like to think things through with a bit more flare; a bit more freshness; a bit more updated flexibility, plus 'rock and roll-style' energy and enlightenment (in other words, you at WW/CPGB simply 'go figure', as proverbially they say in that nonetheless self-delusional/overall and in general American dreaming USA).

None of anything covered above is even to mention the endlessly introspective and intransigent 'sectarianism' that exists on the Marxist/Leninist/Trotskyist left wing of politics; that being an obviously deep-running, but also effectively dark mystery that no outsider is able to fathom. (Huh - in fact leaving us utterly and completely unable to decipher the necessity for your visceral and vitriolically held divisions; your lack of any productive cooperation/sensible practical collaboration and/or effective unity of operation amongst and amidst those variously paraded outfits - namely for the purposes of defeating the current elites/overthrowing our mutual ruling class enemy).

Bruno Kretzschmar
email

Sidelines

For me to be singled out for a mention in the CPGB's *Notes for Action* bulletin last week (July 10) was quite a surprise: not necessarily an unpleasant one (fame at last!), but strange, it seemed to me.

There were, after all, three letters on Greece in the *Weekly Worker*, and mine was certainly not the most critical one (July 9). David Ellis was positively scathing of Eddie Ford's proposition that Syriza's current problems stem from the party's decision to take office, while Earl Gilman's reminder of Chile's Pinochet coup resulting from Allende's failure to tackle the military machine is surely a key issue worthy of (positive) comment.

In the circumstances, with Syriza in office, I am interested to hear how the 'stay out of office' position is a guide to preventing another "car crash" (*Notes for Action*).

More important, in my opinion, is the question of how to build a principled solidarity movement on Greece, which was a substantive part of my letter. Perhaps, given the article correctly criticising the dangerous manoeuvres of the Syriza government, the CPGB is also distancing itself away from the necessity to provide solidarity without becoming submerged in a 'broad front' of apologists for Syriza. The pressure will be strong. We can confront it from the start or duck out of the fight and point accusing fingers from the sidelines.

Alan Theasby
Middlesbrough

Game

And so a new game show - or should that be gain show?

We may have thought of the concept before, but hurriedly dismissed it as degradation and paucity of humanity. However, someone has submitted the concept to the BBC as a feasible entertainment. There's going to be a programme, called *Britain's hardest grafter*, that has proletarian members of the lower strata battling it out to win a year's wage (tax-free, I suppose?). Regardless of the fact that the amount quoted is slightly more than a good

number of proletarians earn gross, Machiavelli would have laughed at such a low price of persons.

You may think I am being oversensitive or unrealistic in saying that this display will be buying a person, but I cannot think of a better way to describe the concept of pitting proletarians against one another, so that one of them can triumph and get a modest sum for the denuding of dignity and their willingness as contestants to lower the level of respect they may have had before this plotted exhibition of shameless desperation. It also hides an underpinning identity of the pecuniary low-pay and poverty project the Tories are constructing to reduce freedoms of the working class of Britain.

The people behind the idea have justified the spectacle by saying that it is a project to uncover the low-paid world of proletarians. However, we used to have erudite and measured documentaries for discussion of issues such as the low-wage economy. In fact, certain independent channels still have infrequent investigations into social and economic issues like this. What makes the concept of the BBC programme less than valid and of authentic value is that they are presenting it as an entertainment, thereby trivialising the serious bases of the issue, whilst pandering to the 'real life', so-called reality TV mentality that is plot-led, character-personality based, in the same way that fiction is presented on TV.

The treatment of low-paid economic conditions as if they are merely an entertaining story that has to have a premium quiz show prize at the end as an affirmative reward for grafting merely denudes the issue of real-world referent that informs rather than crassly entertains and becomes propagandist in blurring the distinctions between fact and fiction. It also buys into the presentation of the productivity mentality that is being used in more abstract applications, where no material graft takes place, to gain greater surplus value from the workforce, both willing and forced.

The corporation says that the series will "tackle some of the most pressing issues of our time", including why British productivity is so low, whether the benefits system provides many with a reason not to work, whether immigrants work harder and whether the young really haven't got the work ethic of their

parents. This approach clearly shows that a significant part of the conception of the show is based on 'accepted opinion' that productivity is low and requires improving, despite the last 10 years of office workers being subjected to all sorts of abstract measurement that claims cost unit prices of labour and its so-called output has improved radically.

Such easy inclusion of subjectivity as if it is objective fact fails and becomes propagandist in presenting a contrived, competitive exhibition as denotative rather than merely a connotative referent that requires further investigation and discussion. This statement of intent also couches some severe preconceptions that will be seen and not heard in the kerfuffle of activity in trying to win a prize. Surely a more measured, documentary approach would deal with such preconceptions better, rather than reducing the seriousness and the necessary sober consideration of the elements of the purported 'social experiment'. Could you see the same happening at the other end of the social and political scale?

"The five-part BBC2 series will pit contestants against each other in a series of jobs and tasks with the 'least effective workers' asked to leave until one is crowned champion." Sadly, the analogy with *The hunger games* franchise of films talks of this degrading entertainment as for the wealthy citizens, but, like the existing *Benefits Street* genre propaganda programmes, the audience will mainly be the proletarians - there but for the grace of corporatism go they.

Also, who exactly are going to be arbiters of the "champion"? What criteria will they use to identify the golden boy or golden girl of the proletariat? We've already seen too many self-appointed judges of others' abilities and talents gaining celebrity status without necessarily having any qualities comparable to those they are valuing.

We need the BBC to continue to ask serious questions, not play with the lives of vulnerable people in our society.

The Inconsequential
www.theinconsequential.com

Drivel

Tony Roberts really is talking a lot of narrow drivel, almost to the point of parody (Letters, July 9). The very idea that the Rolling Stones, of all bands, have no political significance is so silly it

doesn't really need any further comment. Indeed, Roberts himself disproves this in his second paragraph with talk of Mick Jagger and "super-large capitalist music corporations", which presumably has value some kind of political significance.

If Roberts really is a "lefty", then he doesn't know much about the subject, given that Marx, Engels, Trotsky and even Lenin found the time to discuss art and artists, without any hint that this might be a specialist enterprise in terms of their other activity. No doubt their time could have been much better spent in leafleting, making tokenistic appearances at picket lines, creating 'networks', talking about how 'ordinary' they are, or any of the other self-deluding crap that the contemporary left involves itself in.

And where, in the name of all that's holy, did I suggest that I wanted to encourage anybody to join hands with the Rolling Stones in their current state? Actually, I suggested precisely the opposite.

Howard Phillips
email

Free Steve

Let me first of all state my agreement with Gerry Downing of Socialist Fight and the Committee for Steve Kaczynski's Freedom in demanding that comrade Steve must be released by the Turkish authorities immediately.

I knew comrade Kaczynski during his brief membership of the CPGB during the 1990s, when he wrote the occasional article for the *Weekly Worker*. I remember him as a sincere and committed communist, and the idea that he is a "British agent" (or alternatively a "German agent"), as Turkish sources state, is absurd.

Steve took a particular interest in Turkey and felt strong solidarity with the struggles of the Turkish working class and the oppressed people of Kurdistan. I understand that he learnt to speak Turkish fluently - not surprising, since I knew him as a talented linguist with a good command of French and German. But the idea that he was putting those talents at the disposal of the British state is ludicrous beyond words.

Istanbul must either charge comrade Kaczynski with a specific offence or - better still - release him forthwith.

Peter Manson
editor, *Weekly Worker*

Summer Offensive

You looking at me?

Just under halfway through this year's Summer Offensive - the CPGB's annual fundraising campaign - and we are ticking along pretty nicely, with an extra £1,957 rolling in this week. This means we have a sturdy £12,605 running total towards our £30k minimum target - to be achieved by August 22, the last day of our Communist University summer school. And there are plenty of potential donors still out there waiting for a phone or email prompt from our comrades.

Might that 'potential donor' category perhaps include you, comrade reader? Over past years, I have to say I have been pleasantly surprised on a pretty regular basis by the number of activists I encounter - from a huge variety of political background, ages, nationalities and levels of experience in the movement - who express a degree of sympathy with the paper that this organisation supports and the project it has championed. Of course, comrades will offer this praise with varying degrees of reticence or enthusiasm - but even the most mealy-mouthed 'I will say one thing for the *Weekly*

Worker...' backhanded compliment is taken as encouragement by us, let me assure you.

A recent example came from a comrade on a stall at the annual Marxism school of the Socialist Workers Party. Explaining why he liked the paper, he offered the interesting observation that it "treats its readers as adults". It is gratifying that the comrade picks this out as one of the *Weekly Worker*'s defining features: we agree with him. The *Weekly Worker*, like *The Leninist* before it, speaks to Marxists and advanced workers in the movement. It treats them, and through them the class itself, seriously. (Certainly we will never express the opinion - as one leading Socialist Party in England and Wales member once said to me - that differing views, extended polemics and articles exploring complex theoretical debates ought not to appear in a socialist newspaper, as they would "confuse the workers".)

CPGB comrades will be raising money for this paper - in the form of regular standing orders, as well as one-off donations - and this will be

added to our Summer Offensive total. (All cash generated during the SO period for the various campaigns and organisations our comrades are active is counted as part of the Summer Offensive).

Deserving a special mention this week are two MMs. The first a comrade whose regular £40 payment brings his total contribution to this year's campaign to £240; while MM2 has taken a chunk out of his SO pledge with a fantastic £450. Also, many thanks to comrade BB, who generously added a £40 donation to his £60 sub.

If you think what we fight for and the way we fight for it deserves some support, why wait for us to get in touch with you? Just do it. By cheque or standing order (you can find a form on the CPGB website) - whatever way is best for you. Let's close in on £15k by next week, comrades!

And, yes, we are looking at you! ●

Mark Fischer

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

LABOUR

Fear of a Corbyn victory

Surging support for Corbyn is terrifying both the media and the right of the party, writes Charles Gradnitzer of Labour Party Marxists

On July 5 Unite the Union announced that its executive committee had voted to advise members to give Jeremy Corbyn their first preference in the leadership contest.

One can imagine the head-scratching that must have occurred at Unite's EC meeting: do we back the candidate who supports our policies or do we back Scott Tracy's doppelganger who was booed by all of our members at the union hustings? Decisions, decisions.

Unite follows other affiliated unions, such as Aslef and Bfawu, in giving their support to the Corbyn campaign. Unaffiliated unions like the FBU and RMT are also backing him, although in their case it will be a little more difficult, as their members can only sign up as registered supporters rather than affiliated supporters, which will cost them £3 instead of being free. The RMT was disaffiliated by the Labour Party in 2004 for allowing individual branches to support the Scottish Socialist Party and, though it continued to send in its affiliation cheques, this money was rejected.

There are also rumours that the GMB will endorse Corbyn,¹ but it has yet to announce this decision. Unison appears to be sitting on the fence nationally, though individual branches have passed sometimes unanimous motions of support for his leadership bid and are active in rallying support.

With the weight of the unions behind him, his enormous grassroots support, his popularity at every hustings and months to go before the election takes place, Corbyn is in a position to seriously challenge for the leadership. Luke Akehurst predicts that Corbyn could win on first preferences, only to lose on transfers from supporters of the other candidates, who are hell-bent on preventing a leftwinger being elected.²

Attacks

With his campaign gathering momentum, even the liberal *The Guardian* has begun to panic - senior editor Michael White wrote: "Unite gets carried away over Jeremy Corbyn."³ For his part, Jon Craig, chief political correspondent of Sky News, wrote that the "Labour leadership race sinks deeper into farce"⁴

Joining the media hacks were the usual suspects from the Labour right. Jonathan Reynolds MP tweeted: "... if Jeremy was leader the Tories would win a majority of at least a 100, and possibly more". John Mann MP wrote that Corbyn's support signalled Labour's "desire never to win again".⁵ In the *Daily Mail* one unnamed "senior Labour MP" promised to throw himself under a bus, should Corbyn win the contest.⁶ One can only hope.

Of course, no media campaign against Corbyn would be complete without the Eustonite warmongers accusing him of being a crypto-Islamist and anti-Semite, with their desperate 'guilt by association' arguments. Nick Cohen calls him "Hezbollah's man in London",⁷ rehashing Alan Johnson's argument that Corbyn is a totally unsupportable fascist because his opposition to Zionist settler-colonialism has led him speak on platforms alongside Islamists.

Cohen goes on to argue that Corbyn supports "goose-stepping Shia militias slaughtering Sunni Muslims". While Cohen's new found support for Sunnis is heart-warming, it is somewhat at odds with his continuing defence and support for the Iraq war, which killed at least half a million people



Don't give him your second preference

and featured US-backed Shia death squads ethnically cleansing Sunnis in Baghdad (an acceptable price for toppling Saddam Hussein, according to Cohen⁸).

The attacks from the Eustonites, started by Alan Johnson on James Bloodworth's *Left Foot Forward* website, have now found their way into the mainstream media. With the *Daily Mail* and other sites now hosting a video, for which Johnson originally provided the link, of Corbyn referring to Hezbollah and Hamas as "friends".

Tactical voting

Labour First, the secretive rightwing group within the Labour Party run by Luke Akehurst,⁹ sent out an email stating:

We clearly do not share Jeremy Corbyn's politics and believe these would destroy Labour's chances of electability. We would therefore encourage supporters of Andy, Yvette and Liz to transfer votes to each other at CLP nomination meetings so that as few CLPs as possible make supporting nominations for Jeremy.¹⁰

This campaign to use transfers to ensure that Corbyn does not win the leadership demonstrates, as I previously noted, that he "represents a line of political demarcation within Labour"¹¹: he has turned the leadership contest into a straight-up battle between a resurgent left and the right that has dominated the party for decades.

Although the Unite NEC is advising members to give Corbyn their first preference, you cannot expect Unite to take a sensible decision without ruining it in some way: it also made the decision to advise members to give Andy Burnham their second preference. This is the man who supports the benefits cap, favours deficit reduction against the advice of such leftwing organisations as the International Monetary Fund, and claims that we need to celebrate the "wealth-creators" and "entrepreneurs". This led to the *Daily Mail* claiming that Unite advised members to give Burnham their second preference to avoid "making him look like he is a union stooge".¹²

That is a difficult allegation to sustain in any case, given that he has appointed Katie Myler - the director and senior consultant at Burson-Marsteller from 2010 to 2015 - as his communications

director. Burston-Marsteller's clients include Ineos, the company that owns the Grangemouth oil refinery, which was shut down temporarily by Ineos after a long-running dispute with Unite. It was only reopened after the union agreed to a three-year strike freeze, a three-year pay freeze, massive pension 'reforms' and the abolition of full-time union convenors.

Ineos then hounded Stephen Deans, who had served as the Unite convenor at Grangemouth for 25 years, out of his job. The Blairite think-tank, Progress, along with their friends in the rightwing press, ran a vicious campaign against Deans and Unite, claiming they had attempted to rig the Falkirk parliamentary selection. Unite was eventually cleared by an internal Labour Party investigation and a separate one conducted by the police, but not before the smear campaign led the Labour Party to hold a special conference, resulting in the weakening of the historic link between the party and the unions.

Burnham, just like Kendall and Cooper, does not represent the interests of Unite in any way. Unite members should not give him their second preference and the Unite NEC should rescind its decision to give Burnham any support at all.

Supporting nominations

Constituency Labour Parties will be holding their 'supporting nomination' meetings until July 31. Any member or affiliated trade unionist is entitled to attend them, and there is no freeze-date in place to stop recent members/supporters from attending or voting. The guidance from Labour HQ recommends that these be all-member meetings, but they could be held as delegate-based general council meetings in less democratic CLPs that would like to stitch up the nomination process.

At the time of writing, Corbyn has already secured supporting nominations from 34 CLPs and, with many more yet to hold their meetings, this support could grow further, so it is important for the left to attend them to make the case for Corbyn and win as many supporting nominations as possible.

As Andy Burnham wrote in a recent email to members, "Your local party's nomination could easily swing on just one or two votes - please don't miss your chance to play a potentially huge role in deciding the future of our party." ●

Notes

1. See www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/labour/11717428/Unite-and-GMB-join-forces-to-back-Jeremy-Corbyn-to-teach-party-a-lesson.html.
2. www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/labour/11720055/Jeremy-Corbyn-is-a-close-second-in-Labour-leadership-race.html.
3. www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/jul/06/unite-jeremy-corbyn-labour-leadership.
4. <http://news.sky.com/story/1513709/labour-leadership-race-sinks-deeper-into-farce>.
5. <https://twitter.com/johnmannmp/status/610403164714627072>.
6. www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3126320/Crazy-decision-include-hard-left-socialist-Jeremy-Corbyn-Labour-leadership-contest-sparks-furious-backlash.html.
7. <https://twitter.com/NickCohen4/status/618391575786299392>.
8. www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/mar/03/10-years-right-invaded-iraq.
9. www.leftfutures.org/2012/02/the-labour-right-and-democracy.
10. www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-33504201.
11. 'It can still be done' *Weekly Worker* June 6 2015.
12. www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3150016/Boost-Jeremy-Corbyn-giant-Unite-union-backs-hard-left-candidate-Labour-leader.html.

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 July 19, 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.

Why do we need Left Unity?

Thursday July 16, 7.15pm: Launch meeting, Teesside Left Unity, St Mary's Centre, Corporation Road, Middlesbrough TS1. Guest speaker: Terry Conway, LU national nominating officer. Organised by Teesside LU: www.facebook.com/events/1015241495166664.

Right to strike

Thursday July 16, 7pm: Meeting to discuss opposition to new anti-strike legislation being proposed in parliament on the same day. Room 541, Birkbeck, Malet Street, London WC1. Organised by Right to Strike: www.facebook.com/righttostrike.

Support Diane Abbott

Friday July 17, 7pm: Meeting, Seven Dials Club, 42 Earlham Street, London WC2. Speakers include Labour leadership contender Jeremy Corbyn in support of Diane Abbott's campaign for London mayor. Organised by Diane for London: www.diane4london.co.uk.

The Chartists and the democratic deficit

Saturday July 18, 1pm: Meeting, Red Shed, Vicarage Street, Wakefield. Speakers include: Ken Rowley (former vice-president, NUM), Shaun Cohen (Ford Maguire Society). Free admission, including buffet. Organised by Wakefield Socialist History Group: www.theredshed.org.uk/SocialHist.html.

Don't bomb Syria, hands off Yemen

Saturday July 18, 2.15pm: Anti-war meeting, Bloomsbury Baptist Church, 235 Shaftesbury Avenue, London WC2. Speakers include: Jeremy Corbyn MP, Kim Sharif, Diane Abbott MP, Ahmed Al-ashaf Yemenis. Organised by Stop the War Coalition: <http://stopwar.org.uk>.

No to anti-union laws

Tuesday July 21, 7pm: Public meeting, BMECP Centre, 10 Fleet Street, Brighton BN1. No to the Tory anti-union laws. Organised by Brighton and Hove Trades Union Council: <http://brightontradesunioncouncil.blogspot.co.uk>.

Ska against war

Thursday July 23, 7pm: Anti-war fundraiser, Passing Clouds, 1 Richmond Road, London E8. Performers include Captain SKA. Vegetarian Egyptian food on offer. Organised by North London Stop the War: www.stopwar.org.uk.

Wakefield against the NF

Saturday July 25, details tbc: Anti-National Front counter-rally, Wakefield. Organised by We Are Wakefield: www.facebook.com/pages/Wakefield-LMHR/39182603748.

Hands off our headgear

Saturday July 25, 10am: Rally, Waggon Way, Stainforth, Doncaster. at the roundabout near the pit gates. Organised by Hatfield Main Colliery Community Heritage Association: hatfieldmaincollieryheritage@yahoo.co.uk sec:07836359962

Israel, Palestine and football

Tuesday July 28, 7pm: Public meeting, Ealing town hall, New Broadway, London W5. Gareth Edwards and Geoff Lee discuss the controversy over racism, segregation and sport. Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.palestinecampaign.org.

Shut down Yarl's Wood

Saturday August 8, 1.30pm: Demonstration, Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre, Thuleigh Road, Clapham, Bedfordshire. Organised by Movement for Justice By Any Means Necessary: www.facebook.com/movementforjustice.

Solidarity with Palestine and Latin America

Saturday August 22, 9.30am to 6pm: Public meeting, Methodist Central Hall, Storeys Gate, London SW1. Organised by *Middle East Monitor*: www.middleeastmonitor.com.

Lobby the TUC

Sunday September 13, 1pm: Rally, Grand Hotel, 97-99 King's Road, Brighton BN1, followed by lobby of TUC Congress. Organised by National Shop Stewards Network: <http://shopstewards.net>.

No to the Tories

Sunday October 4, 12 noon onwards: Demonstration outside Conservative Party conference, Manchester Central Convention Complex, Windmill Street, Manchester M2. Organised by People's Assembly: www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk/demonstrate_at_tory_party_conference.

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.

LABOUR



Jeremy Corbyn: now the front runner

Everything to play for

Jeremy Corbyn is looking more and more like a winner in the leadership race - much to the anger of the right. **Paul Demarty** reports

We are now a month into the Labour leadership campaign, and we find ourselves feeling a little bit sorry for Liz Kendall.

It was all going so *well!* She has done it all right: head girl at school, history at Cambridge (first class), stints as a think-tank paper-shuffler and a special advisor, and ultimately a well-lubricated entry to the Commons front bench. She could be forgiven, looking at the sort of desiccated wonks that have lined up for the leadership in recent history, for thinking that she had at least given herself a chance.

The last month, suffice to say, will have been a real wake-up call for the contest's only unabashed Blairite. Indeed, she may well be distinguishable from those other ultra-Blairites who played a 'Will they, won't they?' game over nominations - Chuka Ummuna and Tristram Hunt, for example - simply by the fact that she stuck the course; maybe they knew something she did not.

Because on the evidence so far the average Labour Party member would rather eat a bag of cold vomit than elect an avowed continuity Blairite. Andy Burnham and Yvette Cooper have had to talk, on and off, in a more traditionally Labourite language to get much attention (frankly, at this point we are struggling to understand why both are running, so similar are their perspectives); alas, poor Liz Kendall is too 'brave' to do so. She alone will confront the 'hard truth' that Labour's woes can be put down exclusively to not having exactly the same programme as the Conservative Party; she alone has the pluck and courage to genuflect uncritically before the rightwing press. All the others are content to retreat to the reassuring 'comfort zone' of being daily ridiculed and vilified as McCluskey puppets, communist sympathisers and 1970s nostalgists.

This is the story told by constituency party nominations. At time of writing,

Kendall has a whopping five nominations from CLPs; Cooper has 28, and Andy Burnham is way in the lead with 48. The big story, of course, is left candidate Jeremy Corbyn, who is currently in second place with 34. Given the sort of bureaucratic shenanigans that has come to dominate internal Labour politics so completely since the Blair era, this is really quite something.

It has certainly come as a surprise to many. As nominations (by 15% of MPs) closed on June 15, with Corbyn squeaking in at the very death, the bookies were offering 40/1 for him to get the job. By the end of the day, that had been cut to 20/1. As I write, the odds have shortened again - to 8/1 (and still, somewhat improbably, behind Kendall). Indeed the *New Statesman* is boasting of having access to two private polls by rival campaigns which predict that Corbyn is "on course to come top" in the leadership contest (*New Statesman* July 15). One survey put him ahead by 15%.

Things have turned, one way or another, in his favour. The backing of Unite, Britain's largest union, is highly significant; but so is the deployment of what we might call the 'Scottish strategy' by various Tories and second-string Blairites: those who raised the spectre of a Labour-Scottish National Party government to put a scare into English-chauvinist voters in May's election are now to be found deliberately talking up Corbyn's chances in order to weaken Labour overall.

The publicity around Corbyn is thus both huge and, for disillusioned soft lefts who may have been leaning Green, encouraging. One reads often these days that Corbyn will fulfil the promise of his CLP nominations, and scrape into second place, no doubt forcing a lot of discomfort upon his rivals along the way. In May, many of Labour's grandees were all in favour of a quick surgical replacement of Ed Miliband, not a protracted airing of dirty laundry. How they must now wish

they were listened to.

The Blairites are fighting back, of course - as are the other candidates. The Labour First pressure group is frantically urging tactical voting in CLPs to deny Corbyn nominations, which is going just *swimmingly* so far. Media reports have been legion and effervescent - although it is clear that behind the smoke and mirrors Labour First is basically the mouthpiece of Blairite blogger Luke Akehurst. However, this is probably representative of what is to come - in larger doses. We hear reports on the ground of other candidates avoiding hustings in constituencies and regions where Corbyn's supporters may be preponderant.

Right manoeuvring

For the assorted factions of the Labour right, this is a disaster not exactly of their own making, but one which they happily cheered along. Responding to an absurd manufactured 'scandal' in Falkirk concerning Unite's attempts to get a favourable candidate selected, those Labour MPs and central office wonks for whom the unions' continuing influence is an embarrassment seized their chance to reform the union link. The result was the tortuous compromise outlined in the Collins report, and with it the new procedures for electing Labour leaders. Inspired by the limp products of US presidential primaries, the Labour establishment did away with the tripartite electoral college system (a third each for lay members, trade unions and affiliates, and MPs) and introduced a 'one member, one vote' system - for these purposes, including a new category of 'registered supporter' as a member.

Diluting the will of the membership is a pseudo-democratic and in fact anti-democratic move in itself, but one that can backfire - as it is doing now. Around 30,000 of these supporters have signed up since the election (plus the same again in full members). Does anybody

really believe that, in the large, they are enthused by Andy Burnham? This eventuality was *supposed* to be prevented by the threshold for MPs' nominations, which increased considerably as part of the package. A lot of Labour rightists evidently calculated that Corbyn was not only unelectable in the country, but also within the party, and thus considered it 'safe' to put him on the ballot. We shall see.

Of course, the Blairites are probably right within the narrow horizon of their ambitions - Corbyn is not 'prime ministerial material' by the rigged standards of our political system. A left-led Labour Party, at the nadir of a long period of retreat, would lead in the short term to relentless sabotage from the right, and very probably a split, either taking the majority of Labour's MPs with it or - worse - leaving behind sympathisers to keep up the wrecking work. Either way, we anticipate little in the way of poll success in 2020 under such circumstances, even before we consider the new government's gerrymandering of constituency boundaries.

Many on the Labour left have illusions on this score - they imagine naively that, since such and such a poll found that the British people support rail renationalisation or an increase in top-rate income tax, a programme of left Labourism will be unstoppable popular at the polls, when it does not exactly work like that. The greater danger, however, arises from their most fiercely held conviction: that any Labour government is better than any Tory government, thus leaving them hostage to the endless taunts of the right over 'electability'.

The truth is almost the opposite: the constraints on constitutionally loyal governments, and for that matter governments trapped within the confines of a single state, are such that disappointment and apathy are the regular-as-clockwork results - and subsequently, most often, *ever more rightwing* Tory

governments. The gruesome Cameron-Osborne double act, hot on the heels of the most rightwing Labour government in the party's sordid history, exemplifies this dynamic perfectly.

The working class does not need a government, *but an opposition*: a headquarters for political struggle against the bourgeoisie, an effort to rebuild the basic organisations of class solidarity - trade unions, co-ops, mutuals, cultural initiatives - that have been either bruised or lost entirely this recent period. Labour is an organisation that *could* play that role, but it can only do so if it is transformed radically, which in turn can only be achieved by those who do not fear being in opposition, possibly for a very long time.

There is, after all, another way to smear Corbyn than those that have already been tried - tying him to Hamas, accusing him of wanting a 'Soviet-style planned economy', and so on. It is a picture of Jeremy, standing next to Alexis Tsipras, in front of a Syriza banner - a piece of publicity that probably seemed like a much better idea at the time. Greek developments are treated elsewhere in this paper; suffice it to say that Syriza's particular road was paved with good intentions, but has led ultimately into a brick wall. We do not deny the differences between Greece and Britain, of course; but the latter would not be more difficult to isolate and punish if it came to it.

We support Corbyn, then, not because his victory would catapult socialism to the verge of victory overnight, but because of the galvanising effect a strong showing will have on the wider left, and the opportunities it will bring to start building something that can, eventually, succeed. Contrary to the sectarian jeremiads of the likes of the Socialist Party in England and Wales, there is *still* a left wing in the Labour Party - and it will benefit all of us if that left wing humiliates Liz Kendall ●

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Tepid support for Corbyn

Mark Fischer reports on the SWP's Marxism school

First off, some general observations about this year's Marxism, the annual school of the Socialist Workers Party that took place in central London over July 9-13.

Staffers of the various left organisations' stalls outside Marxism tend to develop a sort of unspoken and limited group solidarity - we definitely represent 'the other' in the eyes of the loyal SWPers. Each group is busy with its own work, of course, but in the quiet moments in 'Sectarian Alley' (as SWPers contemptuously dub the stretch outside the Institute of Education where we all pitch our wares) people do wander, chat and engage in political exchanges.

Naturally, a recurrent topic (the equivalent of talking about the weather in wider society, I suppose) is the size of the event. Guestimates are pretty hit and miss, sometimes wildly inaccurate - much like weather forecasting itself - and it is safe to say that no-one but the gullible ever trust the SWP's own figures,¹ and the SWP leaders are the only ones actually in the know. However, there are three related points to make about this aspect of the 2015 event.

First, while this year's gig may have been marginally bigger than 2014, the difference between the numbers attending pre-Delta to post-Delta² remain significant. Even in the busy periods for our comrades - between sessions and at lunchtime - the walkways are no longer clogged with a solid stream of people, as in previous years. The gouge out of the SWP's membership caused by the leadership's inept and cynical handling of the Delta scandal has not yet been made good.

Second, and despite the numerical and reputational damage that Delta-gate continues to mete out, the leadership seems to have been fairly successful in its "turn outwards" drive - ie, to convince its loyalist cadre to ignore the political and organisational implications of the crisis that so recently engulfed them, act like nothing has happened and get back to recruiting/campaigning as usual.³ For example, it was noticeable that - particularly from the make-up of the 'Marxism team' stewards and general demographics of larger meetings - the group is still able to recruit young people new to politics and also (unfortunately) to instil in them from the get-go the general philistine hostility to others on the left that has been a hallmark of the Cliffite sect for some time.

Third, this antagonism was not just youthful excess. Concomitant with the organisation's rise in confidence and the feeling that better times are just around the corner, it seemed to be official policy. For example, while the number of other groups attending was down this year anyway (eg, the CPGB did not prioritise the event or organise a fringe meeting), the SWP apparatus had clearly wanted to marginalise the 'Sectarian Alley' impact on their people.

Which is understandable. Most SWP members are generally intensely uncomfortable about being challenged on their politics from the left. This is a reflection of the machine-politics culture that the group inculcates in its comrades, which expresses itself as a frivolous attitude to the history and traditions of their own organisation, a passing acquaintance with Marxism, a contemptuous attitude that implicitly counterposes programme and principle to the demands of the next mobilisation, the next campaign, the next push to recruit ...

One of the slightly pitiful ways Marxism organisers have tried in past years to at least partially insulate conference participants from the



Do what you are told ... or else

dangers of alternative ideas was by block-booking stretches of 'Sectarian Alley' - setting up lines of pasting tables reserved for this or that SWP campaign front - and thus, they hope, pushing the sectarians out of what is a main thoroughfare during the event. I may be mistaken, but this seemed to me to be quite a bit more extensive this year.

These 'reserve' stalls remained unstaffed for the bulk of the time I attended. A few had a scattering of Marxism timetables spread across them, but clearly their primary purpose was simply to obstruct other organisations from using the space. This was confirmed by a near farcical moment when an old SWP comrade of mine from South Wales arrive a *split second* after a comrade I was with had rested her bundle of *Weekly Workers* on the edge of one of the almost bare pasting tables to pick up a programme. "This is a reserved table for the SWP," he breathlessly told us: "You can't have this." He was reassured that we were just passing by.

Of course, what the SWP is trying to do with this sort of neo-Stalinist clowning is to reserve a *political monopoly* for itself at an event it sometimes has the *chutzpah* to dub a "festival of ideas". Unfortunately, Marxism all too often actually resembles a corporate-sponsored recruitment fair - with all the cynicism and superficiality that implies.

Labour pains

Much of the timetable of this year's events consisted of pretty familiar thematic fare, largely reflecting the current political and campaigning priorities of the organisation and its entrenched political method.

Thus, in the Dave Hayes-led

session titled 'Why we celebrate the Russian Revolution', the comrade unsurprisingly offered a version of history that exonerates contemporary SWP practice. 1917 seemed to come from nowhere: "No-one expected it". (That is, no mention of 1905 and the experience of the Bolsheviks and others as *mass* parties, with deep, organic roots in the class; the heavy implication being that the Bolsheviks had been a small group just like SWP, until they were suddenly catapulted to the heady heights of state power - so chins up, comrades!)

The Bolsheviks made the revolution on the basis of "simple slogans - land, peace and bread!" (Meaning - no need for programme or exhaustive discussions and clarifications on theoretical matters; keep things as undemanding as possible for the consumption of the masses to ensure their raw, revolutionary spontaneity is not dissipated by sectarian, factional discussions; that comrades should cultivate an 'Etch-a-sketch' consciousness that allows them to flit from one slogan and intervention to another, retaining nothing of the method or the arguments that informed the last. Or whatever 'works' to pull numbers is Marxism, more prosaically put.)

It would make for a repetitious article to give potted reports of a series of sessions, only to make the same point. However, given recent political developments, the session titled 'Why did Labour lose and how can we win?' promised to be one of the more instructive sessions and is worthwhile reporting in a little detail.

National secretary Charlie Kimber presented an interesting opening, a fair percentage of which it was easy to agree with. For instance, he mocked the notion

that Labour lost the election because of its wild leftism: its near wipe-out in Scotland by the left-posing Scottish National Party made nonsense of that. No, Labour was punished by Scottish voters for its 'Better together' pro-UK state popular front with the hated Tories and this had been the decisive factor, he correctly observed.

Quite rightly too, comrade Kimber pinpointed the reason for Labour leaders' bemused inability to answer the ludicrous charge that *they* were directly culpable for the recession in Britain (and, by implication, the world economic crisis). They were not about to lay it at the door of capitalism as a system, he observed.

He was on far shakier ground, however, when he discussed the significance of the Corbyn challenge for the Labour leadership and had to resort to some rather flatulent leftist posturing (hypocritical too, given the SWP's *actual* practice in the movement) to excuse his organisation's effective boycott of this important campaign. So, while comrade Kimber began his comments by telling us that the leftwing MP's candidature was "welcome", as it "partially" reflected anger and the willingness to fight from the rank and file, in his concluding remarks he told us - in direct response to a challenge from Stan Keable of Labour Party Marxists - that he would neither be signing up as a Labour supporter himself in order to vote for Corbyn nor encouraging anyone else to. The "strategic question" was actually to build "something different" - which in practical terms, apparently, meant everyone should "join the SWP", heaven help us.

For, although Jeremy Corbyn

would agree with much of comrade Kimber's analysis of the reasons for Labour's electoral failure, the need for mass action and so on, he would *not* agree that "Labour had failed the working class" throughout its existence, he said. Indeed, one of the dangers of Corbyn is that he will persuade people that Labour can be transformed, can be won for socialism. In the contemporary world, although the SWP participated in a "credible left" alternative (!) in the form of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, the "real power to deal with the Tories" was to be found in the "workplace". Our situation, in that sense, was "the same" as in Greece: we need a movement of "strikes and protests", with a revolutionary organisation at its "centre".

Of course, we have dissected this unMarxist, economic method many times in these pages, and this was one of the points I planned to make, had I been called to speak (not a conscious exclusion, I am sure: the large venue was packed out, so there were many disappointed would-be contributors). Others were rather more specific and, by way of a conclusion, here is a précis of what I would have said.

The SWP's leftist abstentionism on Corbyn is justified by the undeniable fact that, in comrade Kimber's words, in every major test "Labour had failed the working class" since its inception. OK, but that is not the result of the wicked mores of individual Labour leaders, but of the nature of *Labourism*. So then we come to Tusc, don't we? - the apparently "credible" electoral alternative to Labour that the SWP participates in. This is a project that is implicitly about creating a Labour Party mark two, complete with the right of trade union bureaucrats to *veto* any policy decision.

This is hardly a secret. At Tusc's founding rally in 2010, Dave Nellist of the Socialist Party in England and Wales told the audience that it stood for a "new, clean form of politics in the old tradition". In case there was some naive soul present who had taken this "old tradition" as anything other than Labourism (eg, the 'tradition' of Bolshevism that both the SWP and SPEW claim adherence to), Hannah Sell of SPEW drew the parallel between Tusc and the "modest beginning" of the Labour Representation Committee, which resulted in the "mass force" of Labour.⁴

So the SWP refuses to engage with an important left-right struggle in the actually existing Labour Party (other than mouthing 'wish you well' commonplaces), because something radically different is needed than a party that has sold out socialism repeatedly. To that end, its electoral work consists of it being the junior party in a coalition that wants to create a Labour Party mark two on the basis of warmed-over Labourism.

I approached comrade Kimber after the session with a technical question relating to the recording of the meeting and I could not resist giving him a version of the above. How did they square it, I asked? The man smiled and told me that "Tusc is a site for struggle".

Not that I have noticed, I have to say ●

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Notes

1. "Over 2,700" is the figure given by *Socialist Worker* (July 14 2015), compared to 2,600 last year and 3,000-plus in 2013.
2. 'Delta' was the not very effective code name given to Martin Smith, a leading SWP full-timer against whom rape allegations were levelled.
3. See 'Apparatus uses fair means and foul' *Weekly Worker* March 14 2013.
4. See *Weekly Worker* April 1 2010.

Bureaucratic centralism and its apostates

Jack Conrad argues that SWP claims about the pre-1917 Bolshevik organisation are bogus

The terrible internal regimes that characterise the confessional sects make an easy target for every domesticated leftwinger, every backslider, every renegade. Eg, Richard Seymour, Laurie Penny, Alan Johnstone, David Aaronovitch and Nick Cohen to name just a few who are given generous space by the capitalist media. Democratic centralism has, as a result, become something of a dirty word.

And, unintentionally providing further ammunition, Socialist Workers Party loyalists stupidly excuse everything - from the unelected district full-timers to the banning of factions, from the rigging of conferences to the physical attacks on leftwing critics, from the botched handling of the Delta rape case¹ to the lurid threats to unleash "lynch mobs" - by invoking their adherence to the organisational theory and practice of Bolshevism. A big lie put together by Tony Cliff, most notably in his four-volume *Lenin* biography (1975-79), and, of course, subsequently repeated by Alex Callinicos, the founder-leader's disciple, amanuensis and effective successor.² With a sad predictability, therefore, the SWP's July 9-13 Marxism event saw John Molyneux, Charlie Kimber, Dave Hayes, Sue Caldwell and a string of apparatchiks, and aspiring apparatchiks, regurgitating what is now an article of faith.

The purpose of this article is twofold. Firstly, to show that SWP accounts of the organisational theory and practice of Bolshevism are entirely bogus. That, moreover, far from guaranteeing unity and success, the SWP's internal regime guarantees the exact opposite. Secondly, having taken on the faithful, I want to challenge the apostates.

SWP loyalists admit that 1968 was the date when the International Socialists, as the Cliffites were then known, decided to "adopt a Leninist model of organisation". Not that the SWP's "Leninist model" emerged as some immaculate conception. No, rather it came about through a series of damaging splits, bruising faction fights and unplanned adaptations. Having suffered too many internal disputes, having expelled the Right Faction and then Sean Matgamna and Workers Fight, having lost his former *Socialist Worker* editor and national secretary with the IS Faction, Tony Cliff decided enough was enough. He clamped down on internal debate, restricted minority rights and put in place an apparatus of dependants.

Naturally, given his 1968 swapping of 'Luxemburgism' for 'Leninism', this package of measures was justified by maintaining that his model, his inspiration, had its origins in "the way the Bolsheviks organised under Lenin's leadership in the years leading up to the October revolution".³

The three 'Leninist' pillars fashioned by Cliff underpin the SWP to this day: 1. A three-month pre-conference discussion period, during which officially sanctioned factions are tolerated - "Permanent or secret factions are not allowed".⁴ Any differences which exist are meant to be hidden away from outsiders. The *Pre-conference Bulletin* is pointedly labelled for "members only".

2. A self-perpetuating central committee. It is elected by a slate drawn up by the previous CC. It also "appoints all full-time organisers".⁵

3. After a majority vote at conference, no matter how narrow, all matters are considered resolved. In public members are expected to parrot the CC line, whether they agree with it or not.

Hence the SWP's approach, priorities and tactics are supposed to be



Military discipline: necessary in Russia in the 1920s, not in 21st century Britain

fixed - unless decided otherwise by the CC. The SWP's democratic centralism therefore amounts to three months of highly restricted "democracy" and nine months of apparatus-imposed "centralism".⁶ In other words, the democratic centralism of the SWP is bureaucratic centralism.

The CC in effect constitutes itself a permanent faction and keeps differences which arise within its ranks to its ranks. Political thought, which back in the 1960s was fairly creative, therefore had to shrivel into a dead orthodoxy. Naturally, top CC members came to regard the organisation as akin to their private property. And, as with any board of directors, they needed junior managers and a hierarchical chain of command. Inevitably, therefore, SWP district organisers function as minions of the chief executive officer. Not being elected and recallable by the membership - as they had been in the International Socialists - it is no surprise that district organisers are widely despised in the branches. The end result must be cynicism at all levels. Hence, although the SWP describes itself as a "disciplined, activist, combat organisation", it is no wonder that the vast majority of the membership is totally passive.⁷

As any serious historian of the Russian Revolution will tell you, the Bolsheviks had a very different regime. Admittedly, Lenin is famous for his 1902-03 advocacy of centralism in the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party. Under conditions of tsarist autocracy there was no other effective way of organising. What was true for the RSDLP was equally true for the Constitutional Democrats. Okhrana spies were everywhere. Siberian exile was the fate of far too many fine revolutionaries. Therefore the RSDLP could not operate with full democracy and the regular election of all office-holders.

Instead, Lenin proposed the publication of *Iskra* from the safety of abroad and the appointment of trusted agents who would distribute the paper inside Russia. Thereby the foundations of the party were to be laid. But, as Lars T Lih shows in his magnificent study of Lenin's *What is to be done?*,

the aim was not to establish a tight-knit party consisting of professional revolutionaries.⁸ No, far from it. Lenin wanted a Russian version of the German Social Democratic Party. That is, a mass workers' party based on a Marxist minimum-maximum programme, with an elected and fully accountable leadership. Lih describes Lenin as a "passionate Erfurtian" (after the 1891 Erfurt congress of the SPD, which adopted the new programme, explained and elaborated in Karl Kautsky's *The class struggle*).⁹

The idea that Lenin wanted an elitist party run by intellectuals is a cold-war myth invented by rightwing academics - but it is repeated, albeit with various ifs and buts, by SWPers such as John Molyneux and, of course, Tony Cliff. As might be expected, where the cold-war right paints Lenin as the devil, Cliff and Molyneux paint him as an angel. But the undemocratic Lenin suits both sides. The cold-war right wants to show that the undemocratic Lenin inevitably led to Stalin, while the SWP wants to show that the undemocratic Lenin led to the bureaucratic-centralist regime Tony Cliff put in place over the years 1968-75.

Needless to say, Lenin strongly argued for the "need to promote workers into the leadership".¹⁰ As to being undemocratic, nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, it was the Mensheviks, the minority, who refused to abide by the decisions of the RSDLP's 2nd Congress. The three-strong central committee elected by the congress delegates were all Bolsheviks - an outrage for the Mensheviks. As was the election of Lenin, Plekhanov and Martov as the editors of *Iskra* - now the RSDLP's central organ. Plekhanov and Lenin had been on the same side during the congress. The Mensheviks did, however, manage to get hold of *Iskra* through the defection of Plekhanov - which they then proceeded to treat as their factional mouthpiece.

Using the pages of *Iskra*, they protested about central committee dictatorship and Lenin seeking to impose a "theocracy" (Pavel Axelrod). For his part, Lenin rounded on the Mensheviks, using phrases such as "intelligentsia indiscipline"

and "intelligentsia anarchism".¹¹ He contrasted their thoroughly undisciplined behaviour with the natural discipline of the workers. This led Rosa Luxemburg to express the view that Lenin was intelligentsia-phobic and worker-philic. Indeed, in her reply to *One step forward, two steps back*, she writes of Lenin fearing that the "independent revolutionary movement of the working class" was in danger of being transformed "into an instrument of ambitious bourgeois intellectuals".¹² A picture totally at odds with the one normally drawn by the cold-war academics and SWPers alike.

Democracy

Following hot on the heels of the Mensheviks, the Bolsheviks adopted the term 'democratic centralism' at their Tammerfors conference in November 1905. The centralism necessary to survive against tsarist oppression had to be complemented with the fullest democracy.

Because of the revolutionary situation - which began when tsarist troops fired on the father Gapon-led procession to the Winter Palace - there was a massive explosion of political activity. There were countless strikes, demonstrations, street meetings and the flowering of hundreds of local organisations - crucially the workers' councils (soviets). Put on the back foot, tsarism had to concede a degree of political freedom. Lenin seized the moment. The working class wanted to do away with tsarism and Lenin wanted to do everything he could to organise the working class towards that end.

Old, secretive methods of work had to make way immediately for the politics of mass agitation, mass education and mass participation. In other words, a Russian version of the German SDP. Lenin, it hardly needs adding, did not have to junk his *What is to be done?* outlook. Despite that, John Molyneux writes of Lenin freeing himself from the "elitist foundations" of *What is to be done?*¹³ He takes for granted the myth of the worker-phobic Lenin. No, *What is to be done?* had been vindicated, fulfilled and now was the time to move on to better, bigger and far more daring things.

I am not exactly sure where or how 'democratic centralism' originated. But there are good reasons to believe that the source was German. After the struggle against Eduard Bernstein's revisionism the authority of the SDP's executive committee had been considerably strengthened (with the full approval of the party's radical left). As a result, "discipline was strict, and the elected representatives in the mass organisations were subject to tight control in the party fractions which the full-time members of the leadership controlled".¹⁴ Maybe it was Wilhelm Liebknecht, maybe it was August Bebel, maybe it was some other SDP leader who invented the term 'democratic centralism'. One of our German-speaking comrades has promised to investigate the matter. In any case, there can be no doubt that the "model" for Lenin was the SDP. Except that, whereas the SDP was determined to centralise, the RSDLP was determined to democratise. Nonetheless, the Bolshevik's democratic centralism was a deliberate attempt to translate German norms into the language of the new conditions 1905 had created in Russia.

Here is the relevant resolution agreed at the Tammerfors conference:

Recognising as indisputable the principle of democratic centralism, the conference considers the broad implementation of the elective principle necessary; and, while granting elected centres full powers in matters of ideological and practical leadership, they are at the same time subject to recall, their actions are to be given broad publicity [*glasnost*], and they are to be strictly accountable for these activities ...

The conference orders all party organisations quickly and energetically to reorganise their local organisations on the basis of the elective principle; while it is not necessary for the moment to seek complete uniformity of all systems for electing institutions, departures (two-stage elections, etc) from fully democratic procedures are permitted only in the event

of insurmountable practical obstacles.¹⁵

There is another series of facts that need emphasising. From the birth of the Bolsheviks in 1903 there was a never-ending stream of polemics - and not only against opponents such as the Cadets, Popular Socialists and Socialist Revolutionaries. The Bolshevik press was full of criticism of other groups in or around the RSDLP: the Bundists, Mensheviks, Trotskyites, Gorkyites, liquidators, etc. etc.

More than that. The Bolshevik press featured intra-Bolshevik debate. Lenin argued with Bukharin and Bukharin argued with Lenin. Eg, over national self-determination in 1916 and revolutionary war versus the grossly unequal Brest-Litovsk peace treaty with imperial Germany in 1918. The same went for Lenin and Bogdanov, Kamenev, Lunacharsky, etc. Sometimes oppositional factions were formed. Sometimes they had their own publications. The 'left' communists produced a daily paper, *Kommunist*, under the name of the St Petersburg Committee and the St Petersburg Area Committee of the RSDLP in March 1918. Eleven issues appeared. There was certainly no three-month limit on the right to form factions or the concealing of differences.

Regular conferences and congresses there were too. They heard reports from leading comrades, registered the changing factional balances and agreed particular lines of action. But they did not close debate. Indeed, though the Bolsheviks elected their CC using various methods, it is worth noting that delegates themselves were in general elected according to a proportional principle. Not the 'winner takes all' system used by the SWP for its conferences. Lenin's tried and tested approach of cementing unity through actually winning the argument also applied to central committee elections. So, when in March 1918 Bukharin refused to accept his seat on the central committee because of Brest-Litovsk, he was accused of evading his party responsibilities and jeopardising unity. There was no thought or suggestion that the CC should be politically monolithic. Nor was there a provision in the rules to the effect that being a member of the central committee was to commit oneself to a vow of 'collective responsibility'. CC members were quite open about the political disputes and factional alignments on the CC.

Factions were "temporarily" banned in March 1921 at the 10th Congress under conditions of working class disintegration, imperialist encirclement, renewed war threats, Kronstadt and peasant uprisings. Despite that, public criticism of shortcomings were still deemed "absolutely necessary", etc. There were also ringing declarations that inner-party democracy would soon be restored and that, once the emergency situation had passed, there could once again be election by platform. Of course, it never happened. Stalinism saw to that.

True, the 3rd Congress of the Communist International in July 1921 agreed the 'Organisational structure of communist parties, the method and content of their work'. It demanded that each affiliated party "as a whole must become a *military organisation* fighting for revolution".¹⁶ This went hand in hand with stipulations basically demanding military levels of discipline. Members were expected to obey orders and keep criticisms of higher bodies private: "to weaken or *break the unity of the common front* is the worst *breach of discipline* and the worst mistake that can be made in the revolutionary struggle".¹⁷ Naturally, for form's sake, there was a declaration that there is "no absolute form of organisation which is correct for all communist parties at all times".¹⁸ Nevertheless, the eclipse of democracy by centralism is unmistakable. Obviously - and this is

the point - Comintern was convinced that the decisive struggle for power was imminent and that communists had to be prepared for international revolutionary war.

Here, perhaps, we find the real model, the real point of reference for the SWP's version of democratic centralism. Recognising that possibility, but wanting to hide his own rightist trajectory, Richard Seymour branded the Callinicos-Kimber regime as Zinovievite. Eg, his reply to Alex Callinicos's 'Is Leninism finished?' had the barbed title, 'Is Zinovievism finished?'¹⁹

Gregory Zinoviev is remembered by many on the left not as Lenin's closest lieutenant during his years of exile and his joint leadership of the United Opposition, jointly with Trotsky and Kamenev, in the mid-1920s. No, he is remembered as the president of Comintern who oversaw the 'Bolshevisation' of the communist parties; an example of this being the 'Organisational structure of communist parties, the method and content of their work', I quoted above. It has to be admitted, however, that Lenin and Trotsky undoubtedly approved of the 1921 theses. Nevertheless, there is a truth in the charge that the organisational model adopted by the SWP owes more to the democratic centralism of the early 1920s than the *democratic* centralism of 1905-08 and 1917-18.

A further point. The SWP is a paltry organisation compared with even the smallest Communist Party of the 1920s. And it is not just about crude numbers, but roots in the working class. Moreover, the SWP does not operate and has never operated in conditions of illegality or even semi-legality. Nor do we stand, or even appear to stand, on the threshold of global revolution and international revolutionary war. What was necessary before 1905 in Russia, what was understandable in the early 1920s Comintern is completely inappropriate for a small propaganda group operating in today's Britain.

But, of course, the explanation of the SWP's bureaucratic centralism lies not in objective conditions. It lies in the narrow needs of its CC apparatus.

Projecting

Alex Callinicos shores up what is a thoroughly weak argument by projecting the SWP back into history. The Bolsheviks thereby come to resemble the SWP. We are therefore told in all seriousness that the Bolsheviks "represented for most of their existence before October 1917 a small minority of the Russian working class".²⁰

In absolute numbers it is undoubtedly true that before the 1905 revolution the Bolsheviks were the majority faction of a party that really existed in name only. The word 'party' coming from the Latin for 'part' - therefore, for us, a party equals part of the working class. Marcel Liebman gives a figure of just 8,400 members for the Bolshevik faction in January 1905.²¹ But tsarist terror and oppression had till then prevented the working class from freely organising. To be a member of the RSDLP was to run a high risk of arrest and Siberian exile. Nevertheless, the RSDLP was viewed with sympathy and hope by millions of workers throughout the Russian empire (there were Polish, Latvian, etc, sections).

Once the tsarist state wobbled and Nicholas II had to stage a forced retreat, the two main factions of the RSDLP grew in leaps and bounds. Soviets were formed in late 1905 and their debates and votes show that both the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks were successful according to their aims. Eg, the Bolsheviks took the lead with the Moscow soviet, while the Mensheviks held back the St Petersburg soviet. Needless to say, delegates to the soviets were elected by a definite constituency. In Moscow 400 workers elected each delegate, in St Petersburg it was 500 workers, while in Odessa it was 100.

A widespread demand, especially after the defeat of the December uprising in Moscow, was for the unity of the two factions. This happened in 1906. By the time of the 5th Congress in May 1907 the RSDLP had a membership of nearly 150,000. Given the increasingly difficult conditions in Russia and the small size of the working class, there can be no doubt that the RSDLP had become a *real* part of the working class. And, though Lenin appears to have thought that the Bolsheviks would gain a clear majority at the 4th (Unity) Congress, he was clearly mistaken. Because the Bolsheviks had initiated the December uprising, it was their comrades who bore the brunt of the arrests, prison sentences and executions. They therefore sent smaller delegations, compared with the Mensheviks. The central committee elected by the 112 congress delegates had three Bolsheviks ... but seven Mensheviks. However, the 5th (London) Congress agreed Bolshevik resolutions and the 336 delegates gave them a central committee majority (the Bolsheviks were supported by the Polish and Latvian sections). Put another way, by then the Bolsheviks were the *majority faction* of a mass party.

And it must be understood that both the main factions of the RSDLP remained mass in character despite the severe repression of the 1908-12 period. The results of elections to the tsarist fourth duma in 1912 showed their continued strength. Out of the nine deputies elected from the workers' curia, six were Bolsheviks. A short while later the Bolsheviks secured trade union majorities in the two capitals of St Petersburg and Moscow. Then there was the legal Bolshevik daily paper, *Pravda*. The Bolsheviks had 5,600 worker groups collecting money for it in 1914 - an impressive figure that showed that the Bolsheviks represented four-fifths of the politically active workers in Russia. Hence, when it came to elections of the All-Russia Insurance Board, the *entire* workers' group consisted of *Pravda* supporters.²² The allegation that the Bolsheviks "represented for most of their existence before October 1917 a small minority of the Russian working class" is therefore verifiably false.

Of course, comrade Callinicos needs the myth that in the months from February to October 1917 the Bolsheviks leapt from virtual insignificance to commanding a clear majority in the workers' and soldiers' soviets. Why? The SWP has always been nothing, today it is nothing ... but, given some kind of sharp upturn in the class struggle (Callinicos cites the period 1968-74 and the 1984-85 miners' Great Strike), he can promise his loyalists that the organisation will mushroom into a "small mass party" capable of leading the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. In effect a Bakuninite perspective.

Movementism

Of course, here the 'International Socialist tradition' is far from alone on the revolutionary left. The Workers Revolutionary Party, Militant Tendency, International Marxist Group, Workers Power, International Spartacist Tendency, etc all proclaimed themselves to be the unique contemporary embodiment of the Bolsheviks and their democratic centralism. And like the SWP they too have suffered one eviscerating split after another. All that remains of the always insubstantial 'Fourth International tradition' is programmatically adrift fragments, fossilised remnants and the scattered sects of one.

There is a bigger canvas too. At its peak the 'international Stalinite tradition' boasted a membership numbering many millions, ruled states which included within their borders a third of humanity, provided inspiration for national liberation movements and

in the form of the Soviet Union claimed to be on the verge of American levels of material wealth. In the authorised account the credit for this supposed "decisive tilt in the world balance of forces"²³ was to be traced back to Lenin (in reality Stalin) and the establishment of a "party of a new type" and "absolute unity of action".²⁴

Now, it hardly needs saying, the 'international Stalinite tradition' is a mere husk of its former self. Vestiges such as the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain linger on. Other, bigger relics have morphed into left and not so left parties of neoliberal capitalism: eg, in Bulgaria, Italy, Poland and South Africa.

There is, of course, China. It is a weird social amalgam characteristic of a declining capitalism that cannot yet be killed off and a communism that cannot yet be born. China is a Dengist police state whose state-capitalist industries are dedicated to exporting cheap consumer goods to the west. Moreover, at least until the Shanghai stock market crash, a range of top western economists credited China with being the great hope for rescuing the US, EU, Japan, etc from stagnation. Martin Jacques, the former Eurocommunist, wrote the "remarkably prescient book", *When China rules the world* (2009). Daniel Bell, the Canadian political scientist, even recommended what he calls China's Confucian "meritocracy" as a political model.²⁵ Testimony, surely, of the poverty of current bourgeois thought.

The collapse of the Soviet empire, the general crisis of 'official communism', the abandonment of reforms by reformism and a string of working class defeats inevitably produced capitalist triumphalism. The writings of Robert Kagan, Francis Fukuyama, Irving Kristol and the Project for the New American Century being the 'highest' expression. In that same triumphalist spirit Margaret Thatcher coined the dour phrase, 'There is no alternative'.

But, just like nature, politics too abhors a vacuum. Sections of the revolutionary left have attempted to provide an alternative - not so much to capitalism, but to neoliberal capitalism, by promoting 'broad parties'. Without exception these 'broad parties' are programmatically determined by the largely phantom right wing; eg, trade union bureaucrats, old Labourites and even liberal Islamists. Therefore, the programmatic alternative to neoliberal capitalism amounts to little more than a nostalgic looking back to welfare capitalism, Keynesianism and the post-World War II social democratic settlement.

Not surprisingly such 'broad parties' discourage serious political debate and are therefore prone to shatter, once faced with any kind of political test. In Britain we have seen the Socialist Labour Party, Socialist Alliance, Scottish Socialist Party, Respect and the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition ... and now Left Unity. Suffice to say, none have gained social weight. None of these halfway houses can legitimately be called a party - a part of the working class.

Under these conditions it has been the sprouting of ephemeral protest movements that has excited the former members of this and the former members of that. The 'teamsters to turtles' demonstration in Seattle coinciding with the November 1999 World Trade Organisation talks is often cited as the starting point. That was followed by the anti-globalisation movement, the Social Forums, Occupy, Spain's Indignados and the Arab spring. Much idle chatter about texting, emailing and twittering being the new form of making revolution has followed. For a typical example, see Paul Mason's *Why it's kicking off everywhere* (2012). He is, it ought to be pointed out, a former member of Workers Power and before that the International Socialists. However, there is nothing new about the ideology of spontaneity. It is anarchistic,

libertarian ... and ineffective.

Because of the dehumanising bureaucracy of mainstream bourgeois society and its reproduction by 'official communism', the labour movement and the revolutionary sects, there is an understandable prejudice against establishing any kind of hierarchical organisation, enrolling dues-paying members, electing office-holders, building an apparatus, etc. This type of politics is seen as part of the problem. Not the solution. So "there is no desire to take over the state or to create a new party".²⁶ Instead the emphasis is on keeping everyone on board through establishing a snug consensus. So, while protest movements have been good at mobilising large numbers over a limited set of grievances, when they are asked what they positively favour there is vagueness or an embarrassing silence.

And, of course, behind the backs of rank-and-file participants decisions are made. They have to be. Small groups of individuals therefore negotiate with each other, try to provide direction, agree speakers, talk to the media, etc. So there is, in fact, a covert verticalism in operation.

In 1970 the feminist, Jo Freeman, famously wrote *The tyranny of structurelessness*. Though originally reflecting on her experience of the women's liberation movement, she skilfully locates the essential problem with all such organisations. The real structures are hidden and informal leaders are unaccountable. Hence, though there is much "motion", there are few "results".²⁷

As for consensus, it is a form of tyranny. The tyranny of the individual. In theory any crank, blackleg or paid agent can assert their will over an entire group by blocking decision-making. Consensus is therefore a recipe for paralysis, lowest-common-denominator politics and people angrily stomping off to do their own thing. Bad when it comes to a single-issue campaign, a strike or a workplace occupation. Impossible when it comes to organising anything complex.

And make no mistake: overthrowing capitalism is a highly complex task that will require the formation of millions of workers into a political party that is both sufficiently centralised and sufficiently democratic so as to allow coordinated and decisive action ●

Notes

1. See, for example, 'Comrades in the SWP, rebel!' *Weekly Worker* October 1 2013.
2. A Callinicos, 'Is Leninism finished?' *Socialist Review* February 2013; and 'What sort of party do we need?' *Socialist Review* July 2013.
3. *Socialist Review* February 2013.
4. SWP constitution 10(c).
5. SWP constitution 5(c).
6. www.scribd.com/doc/152158848/Pat-Stack-The-evolution-of-democratic-centralism-in-the-SWP.
7. SWP constitution 1(c).
8. LT Lih *Lenin rediscovered* Chicago 2008.
9. *Ibid* p6.
10. *Ibid* p532.
11. *Ibid* p533.
12. M Waters (ed) *Rosa Luxemburg speaks* New York 1997, p125.
13. J Molyneux *Marxism and the party* London 1978, p60.
14. P Broué *The German revolution* Chicago 2006, p21.
15. Quoted by LT Lih in 'Democratic centralism: fortunes of a formula' *Weekly Worker* April 11 2013.
16. A Alder (ed) *Theses, resolution and manifestos of the first four congresses of the Third International* London 1980, p259.
17. *Ibid* p257.
18. *Ibid* p234.
19. <http://internationalismuk.blogspot.co.uk/2013/01/is-zinovievism-finished-reply-to-alex.html>.
20. *Socialist Review* February 2013.
21. M Liebman *Leninism under Lenin* London 1980, p47.
22. See VI Lenin, 'Report of the CC of the RSDLP to the Brussels conference and instructions to the CC delegation' *CW* Vol 20, Moscow 1977, pp495-535.
23. CPGB *The British road to socialism* London 1978, p12.
24. JV Stalin *Foundations of Leninism* New York 1939, p120.
25. DA Bell *The China model* Princeton NJ 2015.
26. www.dissentmagazine.org/article/horizontalism-and-the-occupy-movements.
27. www.bopsecrets.org/CF/structurelessness.htm.

STRATEGY

Nation-state and nationalism

Communists strive for the *equality* of nations, writes Mike Macnair in the second of a series of articles

In the first of these articles I argued the case for the *equality of nationalities within the state* as a democratic demand, and concluded with the point that 'assimilationism' grew out of the search for democracy, and 'the self-determination of nations' - ie, the right of nations to a state - grew out of the logic of assimilationism. But then, I said, to assert a *right* to the self-determination of nations poses the question: what is a nation? The necessary starting point is Stalin's definition - not because it is 'right', but because Stalin's *Marxism and the national question* (1913) offered theoretical underpinning to the Bolsheviks' self-determination policy.

In *Marxism and the national question* Stalin defines a nation as "a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture".

The "psychological make-up" which is fairly clearly drawn from early 20th century pop-psychology, can be got rid of without damaging the definition.

The requirement of a common language is problematic from the case of modern Switzerland, which is bilingual using French and German, and Belgium, which is bilingual using Flemish and Walloon; there is, nonetheless, a Swiss 'national culture', though the Belgian case is more problematic. The requirement also precludes the identification of nations as existing at any date before 19th century mass state education marginalised the minor languages within the major states (Occitan, Breton, Welsh, Cornish, Ladin, Romansch, and so on). It is thus *stipulative*: that is, it defines down the thing to be explained into *modern/19th century* national identification, thus simplifying the problem of explanation - arguably unduly.

"Stable community" is somewhat question-begging. But it can be taken together with the requirements of historical constitution and a common culture, as indicating in a loose way that to call a group of people a nation implies some historical existence and common culture extending over more than a generation or two.

The requirement of a common territory is also stipulative, but in a different way. It is grounded on some evidence: *viz* the propositions that (1) England, Ireland and the US are different nations, though they have a common language, and (2) Denmark and Norway are different nations, though they have a common language. In fact, these results could be reached without the use of the territory criterion by the use of the historical constitution and common culture criteria. The stipulative aspect of it is this. Stalin does not want to call a social group a *nation* unless it could at least potentially be a *nation-state*. Thus the Jews are in some sense a national group, but not a nation. This is also reflected in the requirement of a common economy. Thus Stalin comments of his native Georgia:

The Georgians before the reform inhabited a common territory and spoke one language. Nevertheless, they did not, strictly speaking, constitute one nation, for, being split up into a number of disconnected principalities, they could not share a common economic life; for centuries they waged war against each other and pillaged each other, each inciting the Persians and Turks against the other. The ephemeral and casual



National consciousness amongst the ruling class

union of the principalities which some successful king sometimes managed to bring about embraced at best a superficial administrative sphere, and rapidly disintegrated, owing to the caprices of the princes and the indifference of the peasants.

Nor could it be otherwise in economically disunited Georgia ... Georgia came on the scene as a nation only in the latter half of the 19th century, when the fall of serfdom and the growth of the economic life of the country, the development of means of communication and the rise of capitalism, introduced division of labour between the various districts of Georgia, completely shattered the economic isolation of the principalities and bound them together into a single whole.

The paradox of this description is that very much the same could be said of Wales before the English conquest ... and of the consequences of that conquest, which for the first time created Wales as an entity. But this was a *feudal*, not a bourgeois, conquest and the history of Wales in the two centuries between the early Norman incursions and the final conquest in the 1280s displayed classic symptoms of 'nation-building' activities by the Princes of Gwynedd.

Stalin's definition is not *merely* stipulative. It is solidly theoretically grounded - on the proposition that the creation of nation-states is a task of the bourgeoisie. But if that proposition does not stand *without* Stalin's definition of the nation, the entire argument becomes viciously circular. The stipulative aspects of Stalin's definition serve to preclude there being anything which could be evidence against the doctrine that the bourgeoisie creates the nation-state.

Yet the aspect of Stalin's definition of the nation which requires the possibility of the nation-state corresponds to something real about nations. That is, that the existence of self-identified nation-states comes *before* mass national self-identification both in history and in recent times for the larger part of the

world's population.

Nation-state revisited

In my 2003 review of Patrick J Geary's *The myth of nations* I argued that the nation-state is best seen, for the purposes of general historical-materialist analysis, as emerging in the transition from slavery to feudalism, not the transition from feudalism to capitalism.¹ I do not propose to repeat the argument here, except to point out that medieval historians have found literally masses of evidence of *state* self-identification as national, and considerable evidence of national self-identification among wider layers.² Now, of course, as Benedict Anderson and others have argued, academic historians have gone looking for evidence of nationalism because they are nationalists. But the point (made by Geary among others) is that, if historians look for such evidence *before* the end of the Roman empire, they do not find it, and their 'nationalist' constructions become violently artificial. In relation to the feudal Middle Ages there is no such artificiality.

The critical points are two. The first is that - as should already have been clear from my discussion of the difficulties of Stalin's definition - the nation is not a pre-political entity. The origin of the *concept* of the nation is in the ancient Greeks' and Romans' 'ethnography' of the 'barbarian' peoples, who have ethnicities, as opposed to the civilised people, who are defined by the possession of (city or imperial) states. But the 'ethnicities' of stateless peoples are loose, floating and indeterminate, and the need to define one's social relations - one's 'community' - by something broader than family and clan is already a response to existing states.

The state, as I have already said, is a *territorial entity*. This leads into the second point. We should identify the nation-state as coming into existence not when there is *mass* national self-identification, but when *states* identify themselves as attached to a particular nation: the Kingdom of the English, and so on. 'Nation' here means people

with a common language and culture, *identified as such by the state*. And this moment is the moment of the beginning of feudalism: the European early Middle Ages, the emergence of the Kamakura Bakufu in Japan.

It is intimately linked to two recognitions. The first is recognition of *foreigners* who have a different language (and state), but in other respects share a common culture (in early medieval Europe, other Christians; in Japan, the big neighbour, China, and the smaller neighbour, Korea). The second is recognition of *the primary producers* as members of the society: the transition from slave to serf. State formation under feudalism then *produces* national self-identification in broader layers.

The difficulty in perceiving the feudal shift to the idea of the nation-state stems from three phenomena. The first is that medieval European culture is still *also* overlaid with the idea of the Roman empire as a nostalgic image of the ideal past. In Italy and Germany the strength of this 'imperialism' combined with the struggle between church and state to prevent full state-formation.

The second is that there were *also* in feudal society political orders of, and self-identification as members of, sub-national communities, like cities, regions and indeed villages.³ But the common idea that this is *counterposed* to national self-identification is a false generalisation from cases of weak central states (Germany, Italy) connected to the imperialist ideology (above). Such local political orders and local self-identifications are found just as much in modern capitalist societies: the United States provides striking examples.

The third is that medieval kings are not only the heads of nation-states, but also feudal family dynasts, who seek to add territory to their family holdings. The result is the creation of unstable agglomerations of nation-states and sub-national holdings, like the late 12th century 'Angevin empire' of Henry II and his sons and - the biggest of the lot - the 16th century Habsburg 'empire' of Charles V, comprising the titular Holy Roman Empire of Germany-Austria and the Netherlands; the three kingdoms of Spain; and Naples-Sicily.

But these agglomerations are, precisely, unstable. They continue to be governed through the *national* or sub-national institutions of their components, and they tend to break up. They are, in the late medieval period, agglomerations of *nation-states*. In some of them, as in the accretions of Brittany to France and of Scotland and Wales to England, the state in the modern period promotes a larger national identification. But this does not mean that the smaller components were not self-identified and identified by the broader culture as nations before; and this identification has tended to re-emerge in the 20th century.

Was the formation of nation-states 'historically progressive'? The answer on this analysis must be clearly 'yes' both (a) as against prior state forms (city-states, tributary empires) and (b) as against forms of statelessness which involve routine cattle- and slave-raiding against neighbouring tribes, etc (pre-Roman Gaul; early medieval Wales and Ireland; the Pakhtun parts of Afghanistan; etc). They are 'historically progressive' in the teleological sense that feudalism tends to improve the forces of production relative to pre-feudal forms, and that capitalism emerges out of feudalism, and in turn creates the possibility of socialism. But they are also 'historically progressive' in the *immediate* sense that it is blindingly obviously better to be a serf than to be a chattel slave, and better to live under a national-feudal judicial system than to live in constant fear of slave-raiding and head-hunting by the guys who live on the next hill.

Nation-states, capitalism and modern nationalism

Capitalism is from the outset an international economic, social and political phenomenon. But, in order to overthrow the feudal state and take political power, capital needs the support of the petty proprietors and the embryo working class. In addition, the feudal states are weakened in their response to the capitalist movement by their national and dynastic divisions. Capitalism therefore breaks through to political power at the nation-state level.

The first wave of what can best be called a proto-capitalist struggle for power is the international commune movement of the 12th and 13th centuries. In most countries this achieved *partial* autonomy for cities and towns within the existing feudal state. In northern Italy, however, the exceptional weakness of the feudal state allowed fully independent city-states to emerge. Most of these were recaptured by the feudalism of the surrounding countryside, becoming *signorie*; Venice and Genoa survived until the French revolution, and Venice at least showed its class character by exporting capitalist production relations into the agriculture of its immediate *terrafirma* hinterland. By 1200 the commune movement was beginning to ebb, but it left behind aftershocks. In the mid-13th century the two most nationally centralised feudal states of the period, England and Naples-Sicily, saw members of the landlord class combining with the towns to create 'national communes', which, however, rapidly fell apart. At the end of the century commune ideas combined with a peasant movement to create the beginnings of Switzerland as a confederation of communes.

Even the strongest of these developments were not strong enough

to give effective state expression to capital as an international phenomenon. The breakthrough came in the late 16th century with the emergence of the Dutch Republic. Here the struggle for Protestantism and the Kingdom of God coalesced with a national struggle against Spanish Habsburg domination of the Low Countries. The movement enabled the creation of a capitalist state which was more than a city-state, though it did not succeed in capturing more than a part of the Dutch-speaking 'national' territory, or that of historical Flanders, let alone the whole territory occupied by speakers of variants of German; but it also provided an international centre of capital.

More clearly, when in the 17th century the English capitalist class took political power, they created first a 'Great Britain' dominated by England, and then, rapidly, a British world-empire. By taking the English nation-state they broke beyond its confines to create a British state, and make it into a highly effective instrument of international capital. The international character is reflected in the Huguenot-French, Dutch, German, Italian, etc names of many of the commercial operators in the 18th century London markets.

The late-feudal English state was a nation-state; the 'three kingdoms' of the Stuart monarchy (England-Wales, Scotland, Ireland) were a late-feudal agglomeration. The British state, created in practice from 1688, was a multinational political state and, immediately, the centre of a world empire, rapidly understood as such. Allegiance to it was grounded on the common politics of 'English' - later 'British' - 'liberties': it was an allegiance primarily to the constitution and only secondarily to the nation as such. It nonetheless retained the English nation-state at its core.

The British state operated on a world scale. As a result, it came into repeated conflicts between 1688 and 1789 with the leading surviving feudal-absolutist power, France. In these conflicts the French were repeatedly defeated. In 1776-83, they were finally successful in inflicting a partial defeat on the British by allying with the colonist rebels who formed the USA and with the Dutch. But the effort bankrupted, and, after a few years' delay, brought down the French state.

When the French revolutionaries were debating what was to replace the fallen monarchy, they started to a considerable extent from the need to adopt/adapt what were perceived as being Anglo-American forms of government. Hence a national assembly; hence a (temporary) adoption of trial by jury; hence the effort to create what was perceived as being a feature of the English state: a centralised single legal system.⁴ On this basis they embarked on a campaign of 'national' centralism against the *patries* (fatherlands, meaning provinces) of the French *ancien régime*, and for a French-wide *patrie* to back their modernising reconstruction of the French state.

Then in the 1790s the British state orchestrated intervention against the revolution. The campaign for a French-wide *patrie* now became an instrument of mobilisation against the international counterrevolution. Under this banner the French under Napoleon went on to conquer much of Europe. Before he turned to empire, French arms carried with them the abolition of old particular jurisdictions and the creation of new centralised 'nation-states' in the Low Countries, Switzerland, Italy, Spain ... What became, after the reaction of 1815, 19th century European liberalism, the movement against the *ancien régime*, was thus committed to the French *image* of the nation-state.

After Napoleon's turn to empire, it was the turn of the British to play on nationalism, and counter-enlightenment conservative

nationalism emerged as a mobilising force in Germany and Spain in the years around 1810.

The two nationalisms - liberal-imitative and counter-enlightenment reactionary - went on to shape 19th century European politics. From there they spread into the wider world colonised by the European empires. But they are both results not of deep-rooted national unities, but of specific and contingent responses to the global and 'globalising' power of the British capitalist state. The British came first, and they were never 'nationalists' in the continental sense (and still are not). But British capitalists *did* use their state, which had originated in the English nation-state, as an instrument to defend their interests against potential competition. The creation of 'nation-states' in the 19th century sense was a way of responding to British domination.

The French showed in the 1790s and 1800s that any imitative response would inevitably, because of the military-economic needs created by British world power, have to go well beyond the simple creation of a nation-state, have to struggle for power on a world scale; the Spanish and the Germans at the same period showed that one could be, for example, 'German nationalist' in the interests of ... British capital. Nation-states and nationalisms in the modern world are thus inherently located in an antagonistic way within, for and against, a global hierarchy. Until the 1940s this global hierarchy had the British international capitalist state at its head; since then, it has had the USA.

'Historically progressive'?

Was the modern formation of nation-states 'historically progressive'? Here we are no longer engaged with a largely abstract historical question, as we were when considering the original emergence of nation-states. In the modern world nationalism and the creation of nation-states is an ideological form - and not by any means always an ideological form of the rise of capitalism.

French and liberal nationalism and nation-state construction certainly was an ideological form of the overthrow of pre-capitalist state forms and, to the limited extent that they survived, pre-capitalist social relations.

In contrast, the Spanish nationalism of the *guerrilleros* of the 1800s and the German nationalism fostered by the Prussian state in its fight against the French was based on pre-capitalist state and social forms and reactionary in its concrete political and social content. It was also actually dependent on and upheld the existing system of world hierarchy, the British world hegemony. Another very transparent example of this is the effort of the US slaveholders to construct a 'southern nation'-state, the Confederacy: if this effort, grounded on reactionary politics, had succeeded, it would merely have enabled the British world-empire to impose its will on both USA and the Confederacy. Katanga, Biafra ... there are plenty of examples in the modern world of the use by the imperialist powers of attempts to set up nation-states as an instrument to maintain their global rule over nationally subordinated peoples.

From this point of view 'liberal' nationalism, to the extent that it represents the overthrow of pre-capitalist states and social forms, is 'historically progressive'. This is not the same thing as necessarily being democratic or immediately good for the working class. It means simply that resistance to the creation of a new nation-state is likely to be utopian-reactionary in its political character and more hostile to the working class than the 'liberal' nationalists. 'Counter-enlightenment' nationalism

tends to be utopian-reactionary in its political content: it appeals to the imagined past. But it is *not* doomed to defeat; rather, it can usually only succeed where it has the backing of the current world hegemon.

At a more concrete level the question for the working class is: is it better to live under a new nation-state or under the alternative? In the case of 'liberal' nationalism, 'the alternative' is likely to be either (a) a pre-capitalist regime or (b) direct domination by a power higher up the global hierarchy. In addition, liberalism as an ideology carries with it some pro-democratic liberties. The *prima facie* answer is therefore likely to be that the immediate interest of the working class is in the creation of a new state. In contrast, in the case of 'counter-enlightenment' nationalism 'the alternative' is likely to be a 'liberal' nationalist state, which is acting in ways Britain (before the 1940s) or the US (after the 1940s) does not like.

Both of these questions, of course, are related to the lesser evil. But what is the positive interest of the working class? The answer has to start from its underlying interests in (1) its own unity as a class, (2) political democracy and (3) overcoming the rule of capital. From all three points of view, the interest of the working class is in creating a global democratic political order; and, to the extent that this is not possible, creating the largest possible multi-national democratic political order. This point is not original. It forms the basis of the half of Lenin's policy which only the CPGB, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty and a few others have preserved. This is that communists (insofar as they are members of nations which do not have their own states) should in general oppose the secession of national groups from larger states, even if these states are nationally oppressive, but instead fight for forms which make possible the equality of nations within a common state.

The 'right' to 'national self-determination'

The self-determination of nations means that nations get to decide collectively whether or not to secede from larger states and form their own - and its corollary: whether or not to join larger states. To say that there is a right of self-determination is to claim that there is such a 'right' in the law of a particular state which includes minority nations, in 'public international law', or in natural law.

I argued in the first article that to say that there is a 'right' to some thing or power (self-determination is a power of decision) is to claim it as quasi-private property. It is also to say that the use of force to defend it is justified - whether the force in question is state force (bailiffs and police, etc), private vengeance or forcible self-help, war or insurgency. For a nation to have the right to self-determination is to have the collective right to decide whether that nation is to have a state it controls; and to be entitled, if it decides to have its own separate state, to use force to achieve it. "Between equal rights," said Marx, "force decides."⁵ This is not generally true, but in the context of the claim to national self-determination the conclusion is unavoidable.

But a state is a coercive-bureaucratic organisation which controls a definite territory. The right of national self-determination is thus a claim on the part of a national group to own and control territory. Remember that a national group consists of users of a common language and culture, with a certain historical unity, and (adding Stalin's stipulative element, which is necessary to make sense of 'self-determination') historical geographical concentration.

The claim to a right to self-determination thus inherently entails either ethnic cleansing or the creation of

a subordinated national minority within the territory. It is thus not obviously reconcilable with the general principle of democracy, that those who inhabit a territory should be entitled to participate in the government of that territory.

Rights-talk in this context is also counterposed to the practical compromises which are, in fact, necessary to democratic political life or even to peace. Thus in the AWL's arguments the right of Israel to exist as an Israeli-Jewish state is counterposed to the right of the Palestinian refugees to return. Within the framework of rights-talk the AWL is correct. Rights are not to be compromised without unanimous consent: if they were, they would not be rights.

The right of self-determination of nations is thus, other things being equal, *not* a democratic - ie, a pro-democratic - right. Rather, being a claim to control territory, the right of self-determination is in effect a distributivist land policy. Nations, as collective groups, are to acquire an international law, or a natural law, title to bodies of land; just as under distributivist land policy the village acquires a collective right to its land against outsiders.

The character of self-determination as a distributivist land policy is reflected at the hard edges of 'national questions': in Balkan ethnic cleansing, in the struggle over Jewish settlements and water rights in the occupied Palestinian territories, and in the struggles over control of particular streets and roads which have marked loyalist mobilisations in the Six Counties under the 'peace process'.

Nationalism

The capitalist world order involves the existence of a hierarchy of nation-states. Capitalism in itself tends to generate inequality: this is the natural and inherent result of its market-competitive structure.⁶ This general tendency towards inequality takes the form of inequality between nations, however, not because this is inherent to the capitalist market order considered in abstract, but because capitalism in historical fact initially achieved a sufficient political basis for its world order on the basis of the pre-existing (English) nation-state, for the reasons given above.

The fact that capitalism involves the existence of a hierarchy of nation-states inevitably has the consequence of producing both liberal-imitative and counter-enlightenment-reactionary nationalism. In their deep roots, both forms of nationalism appeal to the resistance to the concrete inequality of nations (British world dominance; French conquest; and so on) and, in that negative sense, express an aspiration to the equality of nations which communists share.

However, in so far as nationalists genuinely seek the independence of the nation - a self-contained nation-state without dependence on external contacts - their ideas are reactionary-utopian. The existence of the inequality of nations in capitalism reflects the dynamics of the world market. The existence and dynamics of the world market also imply that retreat into national autarky is disastrous: this is one of the fundamental lessons of Stalinism.

To the extent that they claim the right to have 'a state for our nation', without seeking to retreat into autarky, nationalists are not seeking to overcome the inequality of nations in the global hierarchy. They are seeking merely to improve the standing of their nation within this hierarchy. Hence the immediate transition from French Revolution to a French career of European conquest, from German unification to German military aggression and the struggle for a 'place in the sun'/Lebensraum, and various other examples.

Here again nationalism parallels the demand for the redistribution of

the land. When peasants demand the redistribution of the land, they are not demanding universal equality. On the contrary, they expect outsiders to keep out of their 'village community', and within it they expect to exploit their wives and children. Their ideas may be reactionary-utopian. This is the dream of a society without non-peasants, which will nonetheless somehow magically produce billets of iron for the manufacture of tools (and other products which cannot in fact be produced without a division of labour extending well beyond the village) without feeding miners and artisans, and which will similarly magically produce protection from bands of robbers, cattle-nomad raiders, etc, without feeding soldiers. Or else they are seeking to improve their own relative position on the assumption that social inequality and hierarchy is to continue.

Line of least resistance

As a response to the capitalist hierarchy of nation-states and national inequalities, the nationalism of subordinated national groups is, as István Mészáros argued in *Beyond Capital*, a "line of least resistance".

On the one hand, the idea of the equality of nations within the state carries with it ideas of general human equality, which are counterposed to the interest of the petty proprietors in the exploitation of their wives and children (and on a slightly smaller scale of day-labourers) and very fundamentally opposed to the interests of both class and clerical elites. The equality of nations is therefore a hard position to fight for.

On the other, nationalism is legitimated within the capitalist hierarchy both by the feudal past of the nation-state and by the 'national' character of the world hegemon state (Britain, US) and other successful states. It is thus easier to set up national claims than to demand political democracy and equality.

We can see this role of nationalism as a "line of least resistance" in the immediate experience of the British workers' movement. The partial nationalist turns of Scottish and Welsh Labour allow the leaderships of these groups to differ from the Blairite leadership without directly confronting it. Even more clearly, the nationalist turn of Scottish Militant Labour-Scottish Socialist Alliance-Scottish Socialist Party allowed the leadership of this trend to make a partial (and temporary) break from the sectarianism of the British far left without directly confronting the leadership of the sects; and to find a way to be openly opposed to the British state without directly confronting its class character.

Because nationalism is a line of least resistance, it is natural that, where states are beginning to lose their legitimacy, there will be a rise of forms of minority nationalism seeking to escape from subordinate status within the state by taking this line. Communists know that this line of least resistance is a dead end.

The problem this poses is what tactics to adopt towards the nationalism of subordinated national groups ●

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Notes

1. 'Nation-state and feudal revolution' *Weekly Worker* February 13 2003.
2. Eg, S Reynolds *Kingdoms and communities in western Europe 900-1300* Oxford 1997; MT Clanchy *England and its rulers 1066-1272* London 1972, chapter 10; GG Coulton, 'Nationalism in the Middle Ages' *Cambridge Historical Journal* 1935 Vol 5, No1, pp15-40.
3. Reynolds (see note 2) has a good deal of detail.
4. Perceived because in 1789, and long after, local and particular jurisdictions and laws were almost as extensive in England as in pre-revolutionary France, and in the US they remain as extensive or more so.
5. K Marx *Capital* Vol 1, chapter 10, section 1.
6. Well explained by Alan Freeman, 'Crisis and the poverty of nations' *Historical Materialism* 2000, Vol 5, No1, pp29-75.

IRAN

Dependent on global hegemon

Yassamine Mather discusses the possibilities following the nuclear deal

After 18 days of negotiations, and 20 months after the initial talks regarding Iran's nuclear programme started in New York, Iran and the P5+1 powers finally signed a deal on July 14.

Not everyone was happy. Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu had already declared that "some of the negotiating countries" (a clear reference to the Americans) were "willing to make a deal at any price",¹ and afterwards he described it as "a mistake of historic dimensions". His allies in the US Republican Party echoed these sentiments.

As details of the 159-page document became known, it was clear it was neither the "win-win" claimed by Iranian president Hassan Rowhani and his foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, nor the disaster that conservative Islamist opponents inside Iran said would result from any deal with the 'Great Satan'. While Iran's nuclear programme was not "heroic resistance", as supporters of the regime claimed, giving up major aspects, it was not "heroic softening" either, as supreme leader Ali Khamenei had claimed earlier this year. The *Financial Times* summary is accurate: "Iran has accepted unprecedented international control and surveillance over its nuclear programme, as well as cuts in its uranium stocks and in the number of centrifuges."²

At the end of the day Iran's neoliberal, dependent capitalist economy was brought to its knees by punitive sanctions imposed by successive US administrations. They had little to do with the country's nuclear programme: they were about regime change from above. But for the time being that threat, along with the possibility of a military attack, is lifted - at least until the US presidential elections of 2017.

Rowhani, speaking immediately after the deal was signed, claimed Iran had actually won the right to pursue its nuclear programme and, strictly speaking, this is true: low-enriched uranium can now be used to produce fuel for nuclear-power plants.

In exchange, Iran's Islamic republic has to remove or destroy two-thirds of its existing centrifuges, used for enriching uranium, as well as getting rid of 98% of its stockpile of enriched uranium, leaving just 300kg for the next 15 years. The heavy-water reactor in Arak will be converted, so that it cannot produce weapons-grade plutonium and Iran will not start building any new reactors for the next 15 years. It will be limited to installing no more than 5,060 of the oldest and least efficient centrifuges for 10 years. In fact the restrictions accepted by Iran are far more severe than any regulation stipulated by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

We are back to where we were 13 years ago, when the nuclear conflict started. However, in the meantime, Iran has spent billions buying dodgy nuclear equipment, often on the black market, while, as I have said, sanctions have destroyed its economy.

A compromise was reached over Khamenei's 'red line': the inspection of the country's military sites. Iran has agreed to allow United Nations inspectors to access any site they consider to be suspicious. However, Iran will be able to challenge such requests and a meeting with the P5+1 will make the final decision on its legitimacy. One could argue over to what extent this is a face-saving solution. After all, Khamenei had categorically stated: "I will not allow inspection of Iran's military installations."

However, sanctions (another of



Celebrating the lifting of sanctions

his 'red lines') will be removed at once, when the International Atomic Energy Agency confirms that its 'Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action' has been followed through, which the IAEA declared should be completed by the end of the year. Iran has accepted that if it violates the deal sanctions could be restored within 65 days.

While a UN arms embargo will remain in place for five years, this could end earlier if the IAEA is satisfied that Iran is pursuing an entirely peaceful nuclear programme. A UN ban on the import of ballistic missile technology could remain in place for up to eight years. Although by all accounts the Russians, keen to sell such missiles, were opposed to this, the Iranian delegation gave in.

'Arrogant'

On July 11, as Iranians awaited the conclusion of the negotiations, ayatollah Khamenei addressed the issue of Iran's relations with the US after the deal. Khamenei called the US the "ultimate embodiment of arrogance" and warned that Iran's opposition to America would continue: "Get ready to continue combating the arrogant power."

In fact Tehran's pursuance of a neoliberal economic agenda has long since demonstrated that it has to succumb to the wishes of this "arrogant power" and the system over which it is the global hegemon. Iran is now one of the most unequal societies in the region, where "a new class of untouchable one-percenters hoards money, profiting from sanctions and influential relations, leaving Iran's middle classes to face the full force of the country's deepening economic woes".³

This week news came of billions of dollars of personal wealth accumulated by ministers of the former president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, as a result of both privatisation and sanction busting. Ahmadinejad - Khamenei's favourite president, the man who claimed to be the defender of the poor and the disinherited, who claimed he would stamp out corruption - was by all accounts heading one of the most corrupt governments of recent times. In June his vice-president, Hamid Baghaei, was charged with embezzlement, while in January, another of Ahmadinejad's vice-presidents, Mohammad Reza Rahimi, was jailed for five years and ordered

to pay 38.5 billion rials (\$1.3 million) in connection with a money-laundering scheme worth billions of dollars.

But Khamenei's reaction to the seemingly endless revelations of corruption, alongside the continued abject poverty for the majority, has been to call for such matters to be played down. According to him, there is no need to exaggerate things - think of the demoralisation that will cause!

In other words, our 'third worldist' supreme leader, who is presiding over one of the most unequal and corrupt capitalist countries anywhere in the world, where the neoliberal economic agenda imposed by the IMF, World Bank and indeed the US has created conditions of mass unemployment, 'white contracts' and wholesale privatisation, every now and then comes out with slogans about fighting US arrogance (he consciously avoids using the term 'imperialism' because of its Marxist connotations).

Our supreme leader's politics are indeed frozen in the 1970s. He fails to acknowledge that, for all the slogans of the Islamic revolution about economic independence, full employment and a comfortable standard of living for all, by the end of the 20th century, things remained pretty desperate. Iran's population more than doubled between 1980 and 2000 and its median age declined. Although many Iranians are farmers, agricultural production has consistently fallen since the 1960s. By the late 1990s, Iran imported much of its food. At that time, economic hardship in the countryside resulted in many people moving to the cities.

Iran might seem to be a regional power because of its influence in Lebanon, Syria, Bahrain and Yemen, but it is very much economically dependent on international capital. Conditions imposed by the IMF and the World Bank in exchange for loans made a mockery of claims of independence. Khamenei chooses to ignore the fact that, long before sanctions, Iran was totally dependent on the sale of oil.

Reforms

In February 2015, an inspection team from the International Monetary Fund visited Tehran. It was led by Martin Cerisola, assistant director for the Middle East and central Asia. In their discussions with Iranian authorities, the IMF team discussed developments

in the Iranian economy, short-term programmes and the Rowhani government's macroeconomic policies and reform agenda.

Cerisola's statement at the end of this visit was typical of such inspections by IMF:

The discussions focused on the policies needed for preserving disinflation gains and for supporting the economy in its adjustment to lower oil prices. For this, the IMF team recommended that fiscal policy should aim at limiting the budget deficit in the next fiscal year to around 2.5% of GDP ... The discussions also focused on the need for pressing ahead with reforms and the authorities' plans in the banking sector to address nonperforming loans and strengthen the efficiency of financial intermediation.⁴

We all know what IMF "reforms" have done so far - Khamenei does not need to look very hard to see signs of imperialist "arrogance". However, as the negotiations progressed, foreign firms - in particular European-based transnationals - started queuing up to invest in Iran, with its cheap labour, stringent restrictions on workers' rights and a workforce that has been disciplined by years of unemployment.

No wonder France, Germany and the United Kingdom were so keen to find a solution to the remaining points of contention. The German industrial group, BDI, is already trading with Iran to the tune of \$2.4 billion, and it now hopes to increase this to \$10 billion. According to Jean-Christophe Quémard, one of the directors of French car maker PSA Peugeot Citroën, plans are being discussed to resume car assembly in Iran (Peugeot had closed its plant in Tehran in 2012). Of course, this will mean jobs for hundreds of workers, but it will also yield major profits for the French car manufacturer.

And, according to the *Wall Street Journal*,

American firms have already been exploring the market potential. Apple Inc has been in touch with potential Iranian distributors ... Boeing Co started selling aircraft manuals and charts to an Iranian airline last year, its first Iranian sales in more than three decades ...

General Electric Co already has limited exposure. Under the current sanctions' humanitarian exemptions, the company distributes medical equipment like MRI machines and CT scanners in Iran ... a spokeswoman said ... "We look forward to reviewing the details of the agreement reached and will watch the regulatory landscape that may unfold."⁵

Someone should tell the supreme leader that Iran's corrupt Islamic Republic is part and parcel of the capitalist order and its "world arrogance", into which it will be now much more closely integrated.

What next?

For all the hysteria expressed by Israel and to a certain extent Saudi Arabia in opposition to the deal, it is very clear from statements by both president Barack Obama and Khamenei that the political situation in the region will not change dramatically.

The US is determined to support Turkish and Saudi efforts for regime change in Syria. The fact that arms embargoes remain in place for the foreseeable future show that, contrary to what Robert Fisk has written, the

US has not changed track. According to Fisk,

Goodbye, therefore, to the overwhelming influence of the Sunni Muslim nations, which gave their sons to the 9/11 crimes against humanity and provided the world with Osama bin Laden, which supported the Taliban and then the Sunni Islamists of Iraq and Syria and - finally - goodbye to those emirs and princes who support Isis. Washington is sick and tired of the decrepit princes of the Gulf, their puritanical lectures, their tiresome wealth (unless it's paying for US weaponry) and their grotty civil war in Yemen. Shia Iran is now the good guy on the block.⁶

Not true. The twin-track policy of containing Islamic State, while promoting failed states in Iraq and Syria, is now supplemented by a policy of controlling Iran. There will be no sanctions against the main backers of IS - Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the other Gulf states. On the contrary, arms sales to all these countries will continue and by all accounts the Saudi kingdom is seeking to develop its own nuclear programme. Let us hope that this aspect of Saudi military expenditure is not shared with IS.

What about the situation inside Iran following the deal? The Iranian people celebrated it in their thousands and there are reasons to do so. Hopefully the lifting of sanctions will mean better access to medication and essential supplies. The country will be able to import spare parts for production and for transport vehicles and undoubtedly this will save lives. The lifting of banking sanctions means Iranians can enter into personal and commercial international transactions and this has already seen an improvement in the rate of exchange for the rial, Iran's currency.

Iranian students will be able to continue their studies outside the country, and there will be work for some of the millions of workers who have lost their jobs over the last few years, courtesy of the "targeted sanctions". Those sanctions impoverished the majority of the population, while bringing windfalls of billions of dollars to the select few, including within the Islamic government. The regime will no longer be able to cite sanctions as its excuse for economic mismanagement, unemployment and poverty.

But do not expect improvements in democratic rights. On the contrary, having made the decision to reverse the nuclear programme for the sake of remaining in power, the regime (all its factions, 'reformist' and conservative) will remain opposed to basic political freedoms, and those fighting for the rights of workers, women and national/religious minorities will continue to face an uphill struggle. They will now find fewer allies and supporters outside Iran, as funds for regime change dry up.

Having said that, we in Hands off the People of Iran will continue to extend our principled solidarity to those struggling against oppression ●

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AUSTERITY

Berlin turns Greece into debt colony

Syriza's humiliating capitulation has lessons for us all, says Eddie Ford - principally the need for united organisation on a European scale

Greece's future within the euro zone still hangs in the balance. After a gruelling 17-hour session, Alexis Tsipras in the early hours of July 13 agreed to a new bailout programme worth €86 billion. Naturally, Berlin and its close allies (such as the Finnish and Slovakian governments) were the torturers, with the victims being the Greek people.

At the time of writing, Syriza is showing all the signs of fragmentation. Thirty of its MPs are pledged to vote against the deal and half the central committee have signed a joint statement condemning it. The expectation is that Tsipras will win the vote - but with the support of New Democracy, To Potami, Pasok, etc. And, then form a new government, perhaps a government of national salvation?

The bailout plan signed up to by Tsipras represents a humiliating capitulation to the demands of the European leaders. Indeed, the terms are far more draconian than the plan which the Syriza leader was supposedly urging the Greek people to reject in the July 5 referendum - which they did, of course, even if a remarkable 39% actually voted *for* austerity. Then again, as we all now know, on June 30 - the day on which the second bailout programme officially expired - Tsipras had written to the institutions accepting nearly all of the demands that only a few days earlier had been "humiliation" and "extortion".¹ You were going to get austerity whether you voted 'oxi' or not.

According to the Greek prime minister, the new plan is a "bad deal". Yet, he insisted, it was the best available option, given that a "disorderly default" would have not only led to the total collapse of the banking system, but forced Athens to print a "drastically devalued" currency - a pensioner with €800 would find themselves with 800 drachmas instead, which "would only last him three days and not a month". On that, Tsipras is surely right.

In an hour-long TV interview, the Syriza leader declared that he is "fully" accepting responsibility for "signing a text that I do not believe in, but am obliged to implement". The three-year programme includes a fresh wave of vicious austerity policies, including increases in VAT, public-sector wage cuts, less generous pensions, further 'liberalisation' of the economy, 'reforming' labour market practices with new rules on industrial action and collective dismissals, privatising the docks, and so on. Another part of the deal talks about "quasi-automatic spending cuts in case of deviations from ambitious primary surplus targets". Despite strong objections from Tsipras, Berlin was adamant that the new programme would be closely monitored by the International Monetary Fund - another humiliation.

Furthermore, there will be a new fund to manage the sale of the country's state-owned assets - run by the Greek government, but 'supervised' by the "relevant European institutions". This fund at some point in the misty future will supposedly generate €50 billion in cash from asset sales, to be used for various purposes: half for repaying money borrowed from the euro zone to recapitalise Greek banks; a quarter for "investments"; and a quarter for "reducing" the government's debt burden. Originally Berlin wanted the fund to be located in *Luxembourg* and run by the Institute for Growth, which is owned by the German bank KfW - whose current chairman happens to be a certain Wolfgang Schäuble, the German finance minister. But the ensuing uproar scuppered that proposal.

Tsipras has even agreed to "re-



Alexis Tsipras: renegeing on promises

examine with a view to amending" measures his government has already taken this year - ie, introduce measures that will help to 'build trust' with the creditors.² Does this mean that the famous Athens cleaners, who were rehired after protesting their dismissals, will be sacked once more? One thing that does seem certain is that pensioners will be hit especially hard. The Greek state is belatedly implementing pension cuts that were passed by previous governments, but which could not be acted upon due to severe staff shortages. Now that the backlog is beginning to be sorted out, pensions that were 'overpaid' in the interim are being reclaimed in large monthly debits - with the elderly now facing further cuts on top of that, thanks to the bailout deal agreed this week. A double whammy.

Concerns

Naturally, Athens will not get hold of the money until the deal has been ratified not only by the Greek parliament, but also by several national parliaments - an outcome which is far from certain. For example, the rightwing populist Finns Party, or True Fins - the second largest in parliament - has threatened to bring down the government over the issue.³ The Slovakian government and opposition parties are less than happy with the new arrangement. There are rumbles of discontent from the Bundestag too.

However, the International Monetary Fund has expressed concern that the severity of the terms could make things worse. In a 'secret' report leaked to Reuters and sent to leaders late on July 13, IMF analysts argued that the closure of the banks and the introduction of strict capital controls were "extracting a heavy toll" on the economy - leading to a further "significant deterioration" in debt sustainability, compared to the projections in previous IMF studies. The inevitable conclusion is that Greece requires far more generous debt relief than is currently on offer from its creditors, perhaps a 30-year 'grace period' - either that or face the choice of either annual transfers to the Greek budget, or "deep upfront haircuts" (ie, cancellation of part of the debt).⁴

But the real point is that the IMF would be forbidden *by its own rules*, or at least in theory, to put money into

a new bailout that it does not believe is sustainable: can it 'extend and pretend' again? The assumption has been that the IMF would provide €16.4 billion, around 25% of the total, with the rest coming from the European Financial Stability Mechanism. However, the latter is embroiled in a row - with the European Commission proposing that the EFSM give Greece a €7 billion bridging loan to cover its financial obligations for the next month.

However, several governments are objecting - principally the UK. The latter, for instance, would be required to fork out maybe £850 million, which chancellor George Osborne has described as a "non-starter" - arguing that only euro zone countries should participate in the Greek bailout or bridging loan. Schäuble too has said it would "not be appropriate" to use the fund when some non-euro zone member states were against.

Protectorate

In the end, Athens agreed to terms that a diplomat close to Berlin described as akin to turning Greece into an "economic protectorate" - a debt-colony run from Brussels. Even more cutting, Yanis Varoufakis, the former Greek finance minister, said that the bailout agreed by Tsipras was a "new Versailles treaty" - this is the "politics of humiliation", he stated.⁵ He went on to compare the deal to the 1967 military coup, but, whereas then the "choice of weapon" was tanks, "this time it was the banks" - used by "foreign powers" to "take over the government".

Varoufakis added that he had "jumped more" than he was pushed. He made the decision to resign the moment he entered the prime ministerial office, having been "elated" and "pushed by beautiful winds" of Greek democracy in the referendum - he "sensed immediately" an "air of defeat" which was "completely at odds with what was happening outside". He also observed, with some truth, that "tragically" Golden Dawn could "inherit the mantle of the anti-austerity drive" - the latter already blaming the left and Marxism for the ignominious bailout.

The explanation for the tougher conditions imposed upon Athens is quite straightforward - *payback* for the 'no' referendum. The *Financial*

Times quotes one senior official at the negotiations saying of Tsipras: "He was warned a 'yes' vote would get better terms, that a 'no' vote would be much harder" (July 14). Germany played hardball with Greece to make it an example, a deterrent. If you vote Podemos, Sinn Féin, etc, then this is what will happen to *you*.

For us communists, serious questions are raised about all those on the left who made Syriza a 'sister party' - not just LU, but also the Greens, Sinn Féin, Podemos, Jeremy Corbyn, etc. Almost all the soft/reformist left closely identified with Syriza, foolishly saying that they would carry out the same programme if given a chance - thus attaching themselves to inevitable failure.

But Syriza could never deliver, for all its fine promises about ending austerity and ushering in the social democratic promised land. Never in a million years. What a contrast to the Bolsheviks in 1917. When they took power, they did not promise an easy road. Rather, to borrow a phrase, they offered "blood, toil, tears, and sweat". That is, they took power to prevent economic catastrophe and banked on the German revolution. They were *honest* with people - can you really say the same about Syriza and groups like it?

In today's world, it is the United States which is the overwhelmingly dominant power - not the British empire, as it was in the Bolsheviks' day. Unless you can map out a working class strategy that has a realistic hope of overthrowing US hegemony, then grand phrases about bringing peace, prosperity and a better world are just empty air. That is why strategically we begin with Europe ●

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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.

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weekly worker

Neoliberalism in the colours of socialism

Two congresses and a rigged victory

Peter Manson examines the bureaucratic manoeuvring of the SACP

Last week South Africa saw two 'special national congresses' each run along the same cynical lines.

The first was that of the South African Communist Party in Soweto, where oppositionists appear to have been in a very small minority. I say 'appear' because the media were excluded and there has been very little published of the discussions over July 7-11.

The second, that of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) - held in Midrand from July 13-14 - had a rather different atmosphere. The SACP-dominated leadership of Cosatu had been ordered by the high court to convene an SNC after it had simply ignored its own constitution, whereby a special congress must be called if a third of affiliates want one. But in this case the affiliated unions who signed the demand for an SNC were oppositionists, and by the time the leadership complied with the court ruling it had already rigged the vote by forcing through the expulsion of the country's largest trade union, the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa, thus ensuring that its loyalists would win every vote.

So the SNC - from which the press and observers were also excluded in some sessions - was constantly interrupted by the songs, boos and cheers of rival delegates. Oppositionists had attempted to force onto the agenda the expulsion of Numsa and the dismissal of former general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi. But instead on the first day there was a nine-hour wrangle over credentials - oppositionists objected to the participation of the Liberated Metalworkers Union of South Africa (Limusa), which is a tiny union set up by the loyalists to replace the 365,000-strong Numsa. They also objected to the presence of Zingiswa Losi, Cosatu's second deputy president, because she had originally been nominated for the post by her union, Numsa, but switched sides in the current ongoing dispute.

Incredibly this wrangling over credentials lasted over nine hours and it was 9pm when delegates finally voted not to discuss the cases of Numsa and Vavi. In all, 1,752 were for the leadership line, while only 253 were against - a further 226 delegates abstained in protest over the whole charade. A pretty conclusive decision then, which makes you wonder why the loyalists did not attempt to put the whole thing to a vote much earlier. The answer was that they were more than happy to waste time arguing over credentials, rather than try to justify the expulsion of Numsa.

There had previously been some uncertainty over the outcome because the loyalist-dominated National Union of Mineworkers had just elected an oppositionist general secretary, David Sipunzi, who described the goings-on in the hall as "chaos" and spoke disparagingly to journalists about the blinkered views of the Cosatu majority. But Sipunzi is very much in a minority on the NUM leadership and I assume that he was overruled by the miners' delegation.

There were also obvious divisions in other loyalist-controlled unions, with some members of the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union



Blade Nzimande: opposition seen off

(Satawu) staging a protest outside the venue, claiming they had been improperly barred by their union from taking their place as congress delegates.

Political purge

So why was Numsa expelled? For the 'crime' of voting unanimously in December 2013 to end its support for the ruling African National Congress and stop paying its levy to the SACP. Since Numsa has been supported with varying degrees of consistency by nine other unions, this set the alarm bells ringing for the SACP, for whom the alliance with the ANC in support of the "national democratic revolution" (NDR) cannot be called into question.

Eventually, in November 2014, Cosatu's central executive committee voted to expel Numsa from the federation - it had already dismissed Vavi from his post in April of that year for his increasingly strident criticisms of the ANC's anti-working class policies.

According to Mphumzi Maqungo, Numsa's national treasurer, the metalworkers were "summarily expelled" on "trumped-up charges", in what amounted to a "political purge". Comrade Maqungo, writing in the online *Daily Maverick*, states that in reality Numsa has remained a supporter of both the NDR and the ANC's social democratic Freedom Charter, while, on the other hand, "it is the current Cosatu leaders who have deviated from these policies". Official Cosatu policy, he states, is for the formation of a movement "to assert the leadership of the working class in the ... NDR". But "the Freedom Charter, which is the minimum platform and programme of the alliance, has been completely abandoned in favour of rightwing and neoliberal policies".

Once again, this demonstrates the political weakness of the Cosatu oppositionists. While the leaders of Numsa and a number of other unions

have at long last seen through the SACP's claim that the current ANC-led trajectory is the "shortest route to socialism" in South Africa, they believe that all would be well if only the ANC had stuck to the Freedom Charter.

But comrade Maqungo does make a good job of exposing the loyalists' main excuse for expelling the metalworkers: Numsa had to go because it was riding roughshod over the rights of other unions by ignoring Cosatu's "founding principle" of 'One industry, one union'. He writes:

All Cosatu affiliates find themselves unavoidably recruiting members across each other's sectors. Numsa's sin was simply to have been open to the possibility of a genuine dialogue within Cosatu over the matter of organising along value chains and ensuring that every worker enjoys the right to representation and protection by a union.

That is correct - although I cannot say I agree with him when he goes on to say: "the bosses (whether private or state) have changed how they organise the workplace so much that the 'One industry, one union' principle is simply not possible for most workplaces and trade unions".

The problem is not the way the workplace is now organised so much as the lack of any guidelines on what actually constitutes a particular industry. Should drivers employed by the health service be organised by the National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union (Nehawu) or by Satawu, the transport union? The reality is that less than 30% of employed workers are organised in any union. But, of course, the loyalists are not really interested in such a debate - the 'poaching' allegation directed against Numsa was the main excuse for their "political purge".

Needless to say, when the two-

day SNC proper actually got going a day late, both Numsa and Vavi were mercilessly attacked from the platform. Cosatu president Sidumo Dlamini lambasted them for attempting to raise money from the "imperialists" with the intention of "destroying Cosatu" - Numsa general secretary Irvin Jim has been visiting the United States and Belgium, where he has tried to win support, including financial backing, for the United Front and Movement for Socialism that the union has sponsored.

Wearing T-shirts sporting the slogan, 'Building unity and cohesion to advance the national democratic revolution', loyalist delegates saw to it that the leadership line was overwhelmingly carried: Numsa and Vavi will be able to appeal against their expulsion at the regular triennial congress to be held in November, but for now the task is to just accept the status quo. That is the best way to build "unity and cohesion" obviously.

SACP

The SACP's own SNC, which ended two days before the start of Cosatu's, was a rather less fraught affair by all accounts.

It is unclear to me what the purpose of this particular special national congress - as compared to a regular congress - was. Both the post-congress statement and the speech of general secretary Blade Nzimande seemed pretty routine. Nzimande announced yet another large increase in membership - up by 70,000, compared to two years ago, to 230,000. While this is certainly exaggerated - only a very small proportion of 'members' actually pay dues or attend SACP events - there is no doubt that the SACP claim to be South Africa's second largest party is true.

There had been some talk beforehand about a section of the membership calling for the party to contest elections independent of the ANC, but this was clearly a reaction to the undemocratic shenanigans of corrupt ANC bureaucrats in a couple of provinces, where the two alliance partners have been at daggers drawn, rather than any left-led rebellion, as in Cosatu. The SNC resolved that "the SACP's stance towards electoral politics will be evaluated in an ongoing manner" within "the wider context of the need to unite and reconfigure the alliance".

In Nzimande's two-hour speech - reproduced in full on the SACP website³ - he declared that the country was now in the "second, radical, phase of the NDR", which "must assume a much stronger anti-imperialist and anti-monopoly-capital character". There

must be "a struggle for the increasing decommodification of all basic social needs", because "Only a struggle to build capacity for, momentum towards and, increasingly, elements of socialism will take us forward."

Well, that would be a contrast to what we have seen in the first two decades following apartheid, which, despite "our democratic government's major redistributive measures", have seen wholesale "neoliberal restructuring". I wonder how that happened, with all those SACP government ministers keeping an eye on things?

As you might expect, Nzimande laid into the Cosatu oppositionists, who represent a "regressive and workerist tendency". He dishonestly implied that Irvin Jim *et al* identify "any and all of government as inherently the enemy of the working class". Mind you, one particular criticism was not inaccurate:

The leadership clique in Numsa ... criticises the present democratic state as the "executive committee" of the bourgeoisie, and yet it constantly runs to the least transformed part of the state - the courts - in order to address what are, essentially, internal union organisational matters.

Nzimande finally got round to discussing the 2012 Marikana massacre, when 34 striking miners were shot dead by police and scores more were seriously injured. He thought this was a case of "poor tactical and strategic management of the situation by the police" and so welcomed the recommendation, three years after the event, that it should be established whether "any of the [police] shooters exceeded the bounds of self-defence and whether criminal proceedings should be introduced".

A disgraceful conclusion that whitewashes the government and excludes it from any responsibility for the state slaughter. But what can you expect from a party which, despite its continuing left rhetoric, is a key participant in the running of South African capitalism? And some of those 'communist' leaders having been doing rather nicely, thank you. Media reports noted an array of Range Rovers, Mercedes Benzes and BMWs incongruously parked outside the congress venue ●

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Notes

1. www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2015-07-14-numsa-noisy-in-its-silence-at-cosatus-special-congress/#.VaVtWfViko.
2. Post-congress statement, July 13: www.sacp.org.za/main.php?ID=4816#sthash.nFk93Lu0.dpuf.
3. www.sacp.org.za/main.php?ID=4810.

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