

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



# weekly **worker**



**Air strikes: Turkey aims to establish a PKK-free zone in northern Syria**

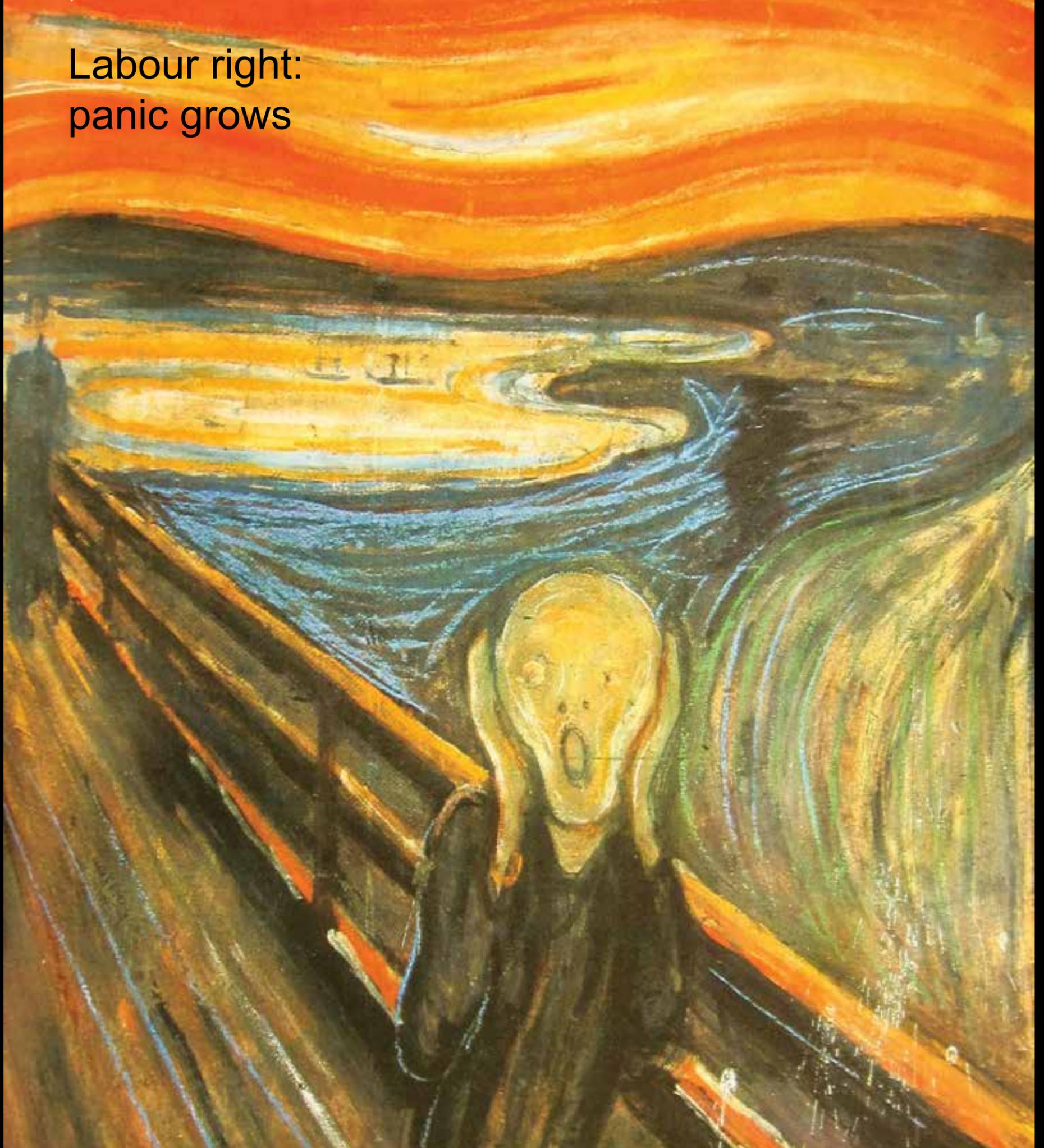
- Letters and debate
- Greek lessons
- Hillel Ticktin
- Ken Loach

No 1069 Thursday July 30 2015

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

£1/€1.10

Labour right:  
panic grows



# LETTERS



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

## Told you so

Many on the left are beginning to sound like Trotskyists now in their advice on entryism, consequent on the rise of Jeremy Corbyn. The concern now is how to relate to the working class and develop its consciousness from reformist to revolutionary. And despite their apparent leftism, the Greek, Spanish and French working class are also reformist in different ways to the British.

I hope that Left Unity members do join Labour and constitute a left there, but some seem to have burned their boats with class politics entirely; these include the intersectionality people of Socialist Resistance and their reactionary politics on Libya, Syria and Ukraine, and apologia for imperialism in general.

Workers Power and the CPGB will have fewer problems, having prepared their transition in articles over the last several months - WP will be able to junk the orientation to a new workers' party relatively easily. The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition will have great difficulty in making any orientation to Labour, because their leading group, the Socialist Party, are stuck with their now untenable insistence that Labour is no longer a bourgeois workers' party, but a straight bourgeois party like the US Democrats. This will be almost impossible to reverse.

Socialist Appeal have just penned articles adopting the CWI position on Labour, and internationally the International Marxist Tendency have begun to reject entryism with some arguments about taking each country's circumstances before deciding. Maybe they have not gone too far. Maybe they can blame it all on Rob Sewell, but it would be almost as difficult as the SP. Talk of getting your timing wrong, but then who foresaw the rise of Corbyn?

I would be amazed if the SWP entered Labour, but stranger things have happened. Certainly their instincts are to follow the latest leftist movement and their members are all three-pounders now, I hear.

But Socialist Fight can point to its consistent stance on this, with 19 journals over five years defending just this position from those who wrote off the working class and said Labour was no longer a field of struggle. A very small group, it is true, but we were demonstrably right on this question.

**Gerry Downing**  
Socialist Fight

## Frontrunner

Wonders will never cease! On July 29, thanks to pressure from below, Unison's Labour Link national committee, which controls the union's affiliated political fund and is not renowned for its leftwing bias, voted to back Jeremy Corbyn for Labour Party leader. Particular thanks are due to the Labour Representation Committee's Andrew Berry, who ran an online campaign to back Corbyn during the committee's rushed consultation period.

The union immediately emailed all of its Labour Link members - about one third of its total membership - with a one-click (no fee) sign-up to register to vote in the forthcoming election of Labour's leader and deputy leader (and, for those in London, to select Labour's mayoral candidate).

Although Corbyn is now the frontrunner, there is no room for complacency. All sorts of dirty tricks and media character assassination can be expected to prevent Labour being led by a tried and tested anti-war, anti-

austerity, pro-trade union, socialist.

Those in the Socialist Workers Party and the Socialist Party in England and Wales who say transforming the Labour Party is impossible should wake up and smell the coffee. A leftwing Labour leader pushed up from below will be an unprecedented development, opening the way towards making the party into an umbrella organisation for all trade unions and all working class and socialist organisations to affiliate.

Comrades on the left should also sign up for the Corbyn campaign at [JeremyForLabour.com](http://JeremyForLabour.com) and help canvass existing party members, recruit new members and sign up new Labour supporters to maximise Jeremy's vote. Those in London can get down to the Unite HQ (128 Theobalds Road, WC1X 8TN - Holborn tube) to do some phonebanking, on Monday to Thursday from 5.30pm to 8pm, and Saturdays from 11.30am to 2pm (email [kat@jeremyforlabour.com](mailto:kat@jeremyforlabour.com)).

**Stan Keable**  
Labour Party Marxists

## Unity

Unfortunately, Sheffield Central CLP decided at its latest monthly meeting on July 23 not to nominate a candidate for the leadership elections. Supporters of 'the other three' staged what looked like an organised attempt to stop Jeremy Corbyn receiving yet another branch nomination by appealing over and over again for "party unity".

While the numerous officials and councillors were astute enough to refrain from criticising Corbyn, they generally struggled to make a good case for their preferred candidates and instead appealed to the 120 members and supporters in the room not to make any recommendation at all. Local MP Paul Blomfield set the tone when he claimed that "we should have had a debate on the future of the Labour Party first and then vote for a new leader". He failed to mention that he had nominated Andy Burnham, so clearly he managed to make up his mind without such a 'debate'.

So, while about 65 people voted not to nominate any candidate, there was a sizeable minority of about 45 who wanted to vote - and it was pretty clear whom they would have voted for. The mood in the room was excited (there were dozens of new and young members), but also pretty angry. A couple of days before, the parliamentary Labour Party had thoroughly messed up its vote on the so-called Welfare Reform Bill. Paul Blomfield was one of the spineless MPs abstaining in the vote. And he got his arse kicked for it.

He unsuccessfully tried to send the audience to sleep by rambling on for over 30 minutes about the wonderful committees he had joined in parliament and the 'big conversations' he had launched. "And we also organised a very successful visit to Westminster," he gushed - though the single participant present in the room failed to mumble more than "yep" when pressed. He barely mentioned the welfare vote, once again referring to the need "for party unity". In fact, "I was surprised when Harriett suggested that we should abstain", because "personally, of course, I am opposed to the welfare cap". Unfortunately, this opposition did not translate to him growing a spine.

The members in the room did not let him get away with it though. "Paul, you have to do better than that," one woman said - "47 MPs managed to vote against the bill, so there was no unity anyway. Why weren't you one of them?" Squirming in his seat, Blomfield tried to explain - and failed miserably. "We abstained

because not all the things in the bill are bad. We support the increase in apprenticeships and the increased government reporting, for example."

"But an abstention does nothing to show you support some things in the bill, does it?" he was asked. Five times he had to come back to the subject and, let's just say, I don't think he convinced anybody.

Later on he actually became a bit more honest. "We're probably out of sync with normal people in our opposition to the welfare cap. It's not the people in the rich areas who complain to me about welfare abuse. It's those on the estates and the poorer areas. That shows me that we need to develop a modern vision of what the welfare state is."

He deservedly was criticised for his position as "poll chasing" and being scared of the media backlash against Corbyn's anti-austerity politics. Speaker after speaker from the floor warned against a continuation of "Tory-lite politics". Though I must say that the supporters of Corbyn were not exactly inspiring either. One speaker centred his speech on the theme that "Jeremy is not an ultra-left loony", claiming he is a staunch defender of "mainstream" Keynesian economic politics. A woman intervened to "dismiss the motion that Jeremy is unelectable".

Every single person who spoke raised the issue of the 2020 elections and who could win it for Labour. Unfortunately, the bourgeois media has succeeded in making "opposition" sound like a bad word to most Labour Party members.

**Christine Keene**  
Sheffield

## Fenland Labour

Last Saturday I attended an open meeting for Labour Party "members, supporters and friends" in North-East Cambridgeshire at March Town Hall to discuss the leadership elections. There were about 45 people in attendance. There were several new faces I hadn't seen before, including about a dozen people aged 30 and under.

After watching videos of the four candidates for leader and the five candidates for deputy, we had an hour and a half of discussion and debate. About a third of the meeting indicated their support for Jeremy Corbyn, another third supported Yvette Cooper, and the final third were undecided.

Many said that they didn't care very much for Tony Blair's intervention in the election campaign. There was no support for Andy Burnham or Liz Kendall. The general view of the meeting was that Labour needs to show clear blue water between Labour and the Tories, including concrete policies activists could use on the doorstep. Policies include the renationalisation of the railways; a large-scale council house building programme; rent controls; a £10 an hour minimum wage; and help for the thousands of self-employed who live in Fenland.

Overall, it was a very good meeting. Hopefully, the Labour Party in Fenland will hold further open meetings every three to six months with leading Labour MPs as speakers.

**John Smithee**  
Cambridgeshire

## Teesside LU

Following up a launch event a couple of weeks ago, members of Left Unity formally established the Teesside branch at a meeting on July 28. This was attended by six paid-up members, plus nine other comrades interested in finding out more about the party. Only members took part in the decision-making.

We elected a branch secretary and a treasurer, and have written to LU's membership and communication officer Simon Hardy to seek official recognition. We agreed to meet again on Tuesday September 8, with consideration of motions for national conference the main item of business. It was agreed that motions should be submitted five days before our meeting.

For updates on Teesside LU, please visit our blog at <http://TeessideLU.tumblr.com>; or follow us on Twitter (@TeessideLU) and Facebook ([www.facebook.com/TeessideLeftUnity](http://www.facebook.com/TeessideLeftUnity)).

**Steve Devey**  
Stockton-on-Tees

## Personalised

We condemn the article published in the *Weekly Worker* attacking Left Unity activists in Leeds ('Sectarian anti-sectarianism', July 23). Such articles aim to publicly chastise and bully individuals who do not agree with the minority views of the CPGB. Personalised attacks on named individuals are misguided, disrespectful, and they are incompatible with the aims of Left Unity - these attacks must cease.

We unreservedly support Matthew Caygill's right to put forward motions from his branch and wish to thank him for his hard work. No individual is accountable for a motion passed unanimously by all present at a well-attended branch meeting of Left Unity members. We congratulate those outward-looking, dedicated active members of Left Unity in Leeds such as Matthew, who seek to develop geographical branches local to their membership, through their commitment to furthering the aims of Left Unity.

The authors' analysis of the Leeds members' aggregate meeting, diminished in its legitimacy by the use of hearsay, would have us believe that without dual membership "there would be nobody left". Members are to be condemned as "random" if we do not hold dual membership. Horror of horrors, there are many of us "random" members of Left Unity. All tendencies should, of course, expect to be heard. However, those so convinced that their priorities are greatest could ask themselves: exactly how much have I done to promote and widen the membership of Left Unity?

**Kath Owen, Marc Renwick, Fran Belbin**  
Left Unity national council, Yorkshire and Humber

**Katy Day, Angela Dwyer, Rhea Ewen, Garth Frankland, Vin Hitchiner, Nick Jones, Liz Owens, Richard Owens, Laila Packer, Colin Smith, John Ward**  
Left Unity Leeds North and East

## Principled move

A 'Unite against Isis and Islamophobia' protest was held in Newcastle on Sunday July 26. The organisers were local Muslims who wanted to demonstrate their opposition to Isis as a terror group who do not represent Muslims or the Islam faith.

This caused much confusion on the left, who were afraid that it could fit in with pressure for Muslims to 'justify' themselves, and could also feed far-right (BNP, EDL, etc) 'counter-jihadist' propaganda. As it turned out, neither of these fears was justified - perhaps because of those leftists who discussed with and negotiated with the organisers rather than simply opposing the event.

For instance, the Revolutionary Community Group initially turned down an invitation to speak, but then sensibly approached the organisers to discuss their demands. They made a principled agreement as the basis

to support the protest. This is a real example of the much-maligned 'united front'-style tactic.

I disagree with the RCG politically - they seem to combine 'ultra-left communism' with abysmally opportunist support for left-over Stalinist and 'progressive'/'anti-imperialist' regimes. As for their 'economics', don't even go there! However, on this occasion they were absolutely correct. And the *only* group to make a principled move, as opposed to a so-called 'principled stand'.

**Alan Theasby**  
Middlesbrough

## Bastards

Surely, as events over the past few weeks demonstrate beyond any doubt, if it weren't for our own workers alongside their global migrant ilk, who both scurrilously and heinously are looking for work themselves, well, put quite simply, capitalism would run like clockwork.

Of course, I'm referring to those striking maritime union bastards in Calais (clearly and self-evidently being nothing but greedy and poisonous scum) and in turn to those many thousands upon thousands of Syrian, Palestinian, Somali, Ethiopian, Iraqi and other assorted migrants, those who are shackled up in their derelict and insanitary ghetto, over there on the other side of our razor-wire-defended border with mainland Europe.

Oh, and I ought to add to this list of the swine and scoundrels primarily responsible for the ills of capitalism the sordidly decadent global bankers and myriad of other 'mad money' institutions. You know, those who were responsible for the 2008 financial crash and therefore the subsequently imposed - no, the anti-socially/anti-democratically inflicted - 'austerity' many of us now are obliged to suffer. Indeed, in my estimation, some of us are to suffer it ever more horrendously over the upcoming years or even months.

So, yes, without that now quite surprisingly long list of bastards, capitalism would run like clockwork; like that proverbial Swiss watch.

**Bruno Kretzschmar**  
email

## Engels wrong

In a recent article, Jack Conrad attempted to defend Engels' theory that there is a dialectic in nature, as well as reply to those who have thought to drive a wedge between Marx and Engels on this and other issues in Marxist philosophy ('Humans, nature and dialectics', May 7 2015).

In 2007, the *Weekly Worker* published an article of mine highly critical of dialectical materialism ('Has history refuted dialectics?', September 123 2007), to which Jack Conrad replied ('Marxist thinking and Newtonian parallels', March 6 2008). I do not want to reprise that debate - except where this latest article impacts on some of the issues that were raised back then.

As part of his attempt to show that Marx and Engels were of one mind on most things comrade Conrad had this to say: "Politically they almost formed a single personality. Some of what is presented under the name of Engels in the collected works comes, in fact, from the pen of Marx and vice versa. Eg, the chapter on economics in *Anti-Dühring* is written from material supplied by Marx (who helped plan the book as a whole, gathered other source material and read and approved the final manuscript)."

I have been unable to find anywhere where Marx says he "read and approved" *Anti-Dühring*; in

fact, we know (because Engels told us) that Marx had this book read to him by his friend: "I read the whole manuscript to him before it was printed ..." (preface, *Anti-Dühring*). But, if Engels did in fact read this book to Marx (a claim he made only *after* Marx's death, it is worth pointing out), it would have taken *at least two-and-a-half days* to complete (I timed myself reading one page of *Anti-Dühring* and made the calculation on that basis).

Can you imagine it? One wonders how often the ageing Marx must have nodded off, not fully realising the nature of what it was that some would later claim he endorsed! Anyway, why read this manuscript to Marx? Were his eyes and brain failing him? Moreover, since Marx had contributed a chapter, why didn't Engels simply ask him to read the proofs? And, it is rather odd that Engels never claimed that he had read any of his other published work to Marx.

More importantly, *Anti-Dühring* contains several sections on mathematics, which few other than die-hard dialecticians will want to defend. Unlike Marx, Engels was neither competent nor knowledgeable in mathematics (as is relatively easy to show). If we insist that Marx agreed with *every line* read to him, then we are also forced to conclude that Marx, too, was an incompetent mathematician. Are supporters of 'the dialectic', who *are* competent in this area, prepared to admit this? If not, then the claim that Marx had this book read to him, and that he agreed with every word, cannot be sustained.

In which case, a major plank in the claim that Marx and Engels saw eye to eye about dialectical materialism will have to be rejected too. If Marx *didn't* agree with these 'mathematical' passages, but said nothing about them in his letters, then Marx's almost total silence about other 'philosophical' ideas that Engels was cooking up in *Anti-Dühring* (and in several letters and *notebooks*) assumes an entirely new light.

Of course, if it should turn out that Marx and Engels *did* see eye to eye on dialectical materialism, that would in no way affect its validity; *it would, however, seriously compromise Marx's scientific and intellectual stature.*

Unfortunately, comrade Conrad doesn't consider the arguments and evidence presented by critics of the view that Marx and Engels were of one mind, confining himself largely to generalities. There isn't much that can be said in response other than to reply with yet more generalities, so I will devote the rest of this letter to examining issues raised by this attempt to defend Engels' views on the dialectic in nature. Because of limitations of space, I will restrict my comments to the 'first Law', the "transformation of quantity into quality".

Engels and Lenin had the following to say about this law:

"... the transformation of quantity into quality and vice versa. For our purpose, we could express this by saying that in nature, in a manner exactly fixed for each individual case, qualitative changes can only occur by the quantitative addition or subtraction of matter or motion (so-called energy) ... Hence it is impossible to alter the quality of a body without addition or subtraction of matter or motion; ie, without quantitative alteration of the body concerned" (Engels in *Dialectics of nature*).

"The 'nodal line of measure' ... - transitions of quantity into quality ... Gradualness and leaps ... gradualness explains nothing without leaps" (Lenin in *Philosophical notebooks*).

However, we are never told how long these "nodes"/"leaps" are supposed to last, which means that what is supposed to be an 'objective

law' is regularly applied by dialecticians in an entirely subjective manner. Even so, there are many things in nature that change smoothly with no "leap"/"node" anywhere in sight; think of melting metal, plastic, butter ... Here, the change in 'quality' from solid to liquid is gradual and not at all sudden. When heated, metals, for instance, slowly soften and become liquid; there is no sudden "leap" from solid to liquid. So, the "nodal" aspect of this law is defective.

Some might want to appeal to exact melting points as clear examples of "nodal" change; however, this is what we read about the so-called amorphous solids (eg, glasses, gels and plastics): "Amorphous solids tend to soften slowly over a wide temperature range rather than having a well-defined melting point like a crystalline solid". Furthermore, "Almost any substance can solidify in amorphous form if the liquid phase is cooled rapidly enough ..." (<http://tinyurl.com/plcu88p>). This must mean that "almost any substance" lacks a melting point if cooled in the above way. If so, there are countless non-"leap"-like changes in nature.

Note that I am not arguing that there are no sudden changes: only that not everything behaves this way. This means that this 'law' can't be used to argue that the transformation from capitalism to socialism must be "nodal" - which is one of the main reasons dialecticians give for adopting it - for we have no idea whether or not this will be one of its many exceptions. Plainly, we could only appeal to this 'law' if it had no exceptions at all. This in turn means that the whole point of adopting this 'law' has now vanished (it is important to add that I certainly do *not* believe that the revolution will be gradual).

Moving on, Engels also forgot to tell us what he meant by "quality"; this means that subsequent dialecticians (again) regularly apply this law *subjectively*, appealing to it when and where it suits them, ignoring the many instances where it just does not work.

Of course, some theorists do make some attempt to define this term; here is what the Glossary at the Marxist Internet Encyclopedia, for instance, has to say about it: "Quality is an aspect of something by which it is what it is and not something else, and reflects that which is stable amidst variation. Quantity is an aspect of something which may change (become more or less) without the thing thereby becoming something else. Thus, if something changes to an extent that it is no longer the same kind of thing, this is a 'qualitative change' ..." (emphases added, [www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/help/glossary.htm#quality](http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/help/glossary.htm#quality)).

Unfortunately, given this definition, many of the examples to which dialecticians themselves appeal (to illustrate this 'law') actually fail to do so. For instance, the most hackneyed example is that of water turning to ice or steam, when cooled or heated. But, given the above definition, this wouldn't in fact be an example of qualitative change, since water as a solid, a liquid or a gas is still H<sub>2</sub>O - no "new kind of thing" has emerged. Quantitative addition or subtraction of energy doesn't result in a qualitative change of the required sort; nothing *substantially new* has emerged. Indeed, when heated beyond its melting point, iron remains iron, even as a liquid; the same goes for all the other elements. Liquid nitrogen is no less nitrogen than its gaseous or solid forms are.

Furthermore, countless substances exist in a solid, liquid or gaseous state, so this can't be what makes each of them "what it is and not something else". What makes lead, for instance, lead is its *atomic structure*, and that remains the same whether or not it exists in a solid or liquid form. As such, it remains "the same kind of thing."

Another widely quoted example is *Mendeleev's table*. However, Lenin had this to say: "What distinguishes the dialectical transition from the undialectical transition? The leap. The contradiction. *The interruption of gradualness ...*" (emphasis added, *Philosophical notebooks*). But that doesn't happen in this case. Between each element in the table there is no gradual increase in sub-atomic particles, leading to a sudden change; *there are only sudden changes as they are added!*

For example, as one proton and one electron are added to hydrogen, it suddenly changes into helium. Hydrogen doesn't slowly alter and then suddenly "leap" and become helium. The same is true of every other element in the periodic table. In that case, one of the best examples used to illustrate this 'law' in fact refutes it! Between the elements there is no "interruption [in] gradualness". This isn't a minor point either; as Lenin noted, this is precisely what distinguishes "the dialectical transition from the undialectical transition".

Hence, Engels's first 'law' is either defective from beginning to end or is hopelessly vague and confused. In which case, it is of no use in helping advance revolutionary theory, and so has no role to play in changing society.

High time we abandoned it.

**Rosa Lichtenstein**  
email

## Communist University 2015

Saturday August 15 - Saturday August 22 (inclusive)  
Goldsmiths University, Surrey House, 80 Lewisham Way, New Cross,  
London SE14 6PB

A week of provocative and stimulating debate hosted by the CPGB

Confirmed speakers include: Mike Macnair, Hillel Ticktin, Ian Birchall, Yassamine Mather, Kevin Bean, Marc Mulholland, James Heartfield, Jack Conrad, Chris Knight, Michael Roberts, Paul Demarty, Salman Shaheen, Guglielmo Carchedi, Pat Smith, Moshé Machover.

Full week, including accommodation - £250  
(£150 no income, £300 solidarity)

First/final weekend, including one night's accommodation - £60 (£30)

Full week, no accommodation - £60 (£30)  
Day - £10 (£5) Single session - £5 (£3)

**Accommodation limited - book now to avoid disappointment**

To receive email updates for this year's CU, sign up to the CPGB's  
*Notes for Action* at [www.cpgb.org.uk](http://www.cpgb.org.uk).

## ACTION

### CPGB podcasts

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

### London Communist Forum

**Sunday August 2, 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' (continued). Organised by CPGB: [www.cpgb.org.uk](http://www.cpgb.org.uk).

### London for Corbyn

**Monday August 3, 6.30pm:** Rally, Camden Centre, Judd Street, London WC1. Organised by Grassroots for Jeremy: [www.facebook.com/events/730387213754207](http://www.facebook.com/events/730387213754207).

### The Podemos phenomenon

**Monday August 3, 7.30pm:** Meeting, committee room 1, Everyone Active Centre, Acton High Street, London W3. Organised by West London Left Unity: [westlondon@leftunity.org](mailto:westlondon@leftunity.org).

### The war game

**Thursday August 6, 6pm:** Film screening, the Light at Euston, 173-177 Euston Road, London NW1. Hiroshima day showing of the shocking 1960s BBC classic depicting the effects and aftermath of a nuclear exchange. No charge, but please register to secure entry. Organised by Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament: [www.cnduk.org](http://www.cnduk.org).

### Left Unity Wales

**Saturday August 8, 11am to 4pm:** National meeting for all Left Unity members in Wales. Venue tbc. Organised by Left Unity Wales: <http://chwithunedigycymru.blogspot.co.uk>.

### Birmingham Left Unity

**Saturday August 8, 11am:** Regular open branch meeting, Ladywood Community Centre, St Vincent Street West, Birmingham B16. Organised by Birmingham LU: [birmingham@leftunity.org](mailto:birmingham@leftunity.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](http://www.facebook.com/movementforjustice).

### Remember Kinsley

**Sunday August 9, 2pm:** Commemorative guided walk. Assemble at Winding Wheel, outside Fitzwilliam railway station, Wakefield WF9. Local socialist historian John Gill reminds us of the resistance to the Kinsley evictions. Free, all welcome. Organised by Wakefield Socialist History Group: [www.theredshed.org.uk/SocialHist.html](http://www.theredshed.org.uk/SocialHist.html).

### Radical Housing Network

**Monday August 10, 7pm:** Regular meeting of London-based housing activists, 33-37 Moreland Street, London EC1. Organised by Radical Housing Network: <http://radicalhousingnetwork.org>.

### Wigan Diggers

**Saturday September 12, 11.30am to 9.30pm:** Festival, Gerrard Winstanley Gardens, the Wiend, Wigan. Organised by Wigan Diggers Festival: <http://wigandiggersfestival.org>.

### Imperialism and IS

**Wednesday August 12, 7pm:** Public meeting and AGM of local STWC group, Methodist church, Chapelfield Road, Norwich NR2. Organised by Norwich Stop the War Coalition: [www.norwichstopwar.org.uk](http://www.norwichstopwar.org.uk).

### Councils and cuts

**Thursday August 20, 6pm:** Meeting, Bungalow Club, Hardcastle Road, Stockport SK3. 'Can councils refuse to implement cuts?' Organised by Stockport Left Unity: [stockport@leftunity.org](mailto:stockport@leftunity.org).

### 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](http://www.middleeastmonitor.com).

### Stop the arms fair

**Monday September 7 to Saturday September 12, various times:** A week of events and protests against the upcoming arms fair in London. ExCeL London, Royal Victoria Dock, 1 Western Gateway, London E16. Organised by: Stop the Arms Fair: [www.facebook.com/events/702315233214060](http://www.facebook.com/events/702315233214060).

### Lobby the TUC

**Sunday September 13, 1pm:** Rally, Grand Hotel, 97-99 King's Road, Brighton BN1, followed by lobby of TUC Congress. Speakers include Mark Serwotka (PCS) and Mick Cash (RMT). 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](http://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.

## MIDDLE EAST

# Erdogan's twin strategy

Turkey's 'game-changer' has exposed the illusions of sections of the left, writes Yasmine Mather

On July 24, the Turkish air force started the bombardment of PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) positions in the Qandil mountains in northern Iraq, following claims that Ankara would fight Islamic State and the PKK simultaneously in Iraq and Syria.

A bizarre claim, as the PKK and its Syrian wing, the YPG (People's Protection Units), remain by all accounts the only forces capable of combating IS in this area. According to PKK officials, two of the group's positions, north of Dohuk and north of Irbil, were hit, ending the two-year ceasefire. By July 28 it was clear that the United States and Turkey had agreed plans to create a buffer zone in northern Syria and, as White House spokesman Alistair Baskie had declared, the US supported Turkey's aerial bombardment of PKK positions: "Turkey has the right to defend itself against terrorist attacks by Kurdish rebels ... Turkey is a Nato ally of the US".<sup>1</sup>

The Turkish government is claiming that air raids against both IS and the PKK are game-changers that will open a corridor for other Syrian opposition groups (including, one assumes, Al Nasr, which is currently supported by Turkey and Saudi Arabia).

All those on the left who have called for, or supported the PKK/YPG's quiet acceptance of, US military intervention in the region should be thoroughly ashamed. The US involvement was never about helping innocent Kurds, Yazidis and other victims of IS aggression: otherwise it would not support Turkey's "game-changer" attacks against the PKK/YPG.

At a time when some were under the illusion that the US, having signed a nuclear deal with Iran's Islamic republic, had finally made a decision to seriously combat IS - and at a time when Kurdish forces close to the PKK/YPG in Syria and Iraq were making some progress in weakening or at least slowing down IS's advances in the region - we are back to where we were a few months ago, with the world hegemon clearly determined to maintain the status quo: the failed states in Iraq and Syria are too weak to confront the brutal jihadists, and US current policy is certainly not aimed at defeating IS.

Ironically all this

has coincided with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states finally waking up to the threat posed by their former protégés. Last week Saudi Arabia announced the arrest of 431 IS activists, most of them Saudi citizens. According to Saudi authorities, some of those arrested were preparing suicide attacks in the country's eastern provinces (where the Shia minority live); others were said to be behind a number of militant websites used in recruiting IS jihadists. It is difficult to believe that in a dictatorship like the Saudi kingdom, where people are arrested merely for writing a blog or driving a car (if they are female), the authorities had previously been unaware of the activities of these IS activists.

There is clearly a change, however minor, in Saudi policy towards IS. After years of keeping "snakes in their back garden"<sup>2</sup> to threaten Shias in Iran and Iraq and Alevis in Syria, the Saudi authorities have finally realised that the monster they helped create now poses a danger to the kingdom itself, and its allies in the Persian Gulf.

At the same time a report in the US journal *Foreign Policy Report* quotes Stephen M Walt, professor of international affairs at Harvard, who states that IS is in the process of state-building and challenges the widely held view in US that "its evil ensures its eventual destruction".<sup>3</sup>

Walt reminds us that the group now controls large parts of Iraq, including oilfields and cities such as Mosul, as well as large parts of Syria. Walt and a growing number of US academics and politicians point out that almost a year after American airstrikes started it is clear that "only a large-scale foreign intervention is likely to roll back and ultimately eliminate the Islamic State". However, as both the US and Turkey insist that they will not use land troops in Syria, it could be that the so-called Turkish "game-changer" ends up *facilitating* an IS victory, at least in Syria and northern Iraq. According to John E McLaughlin, a former

deputy director of the CIA, "If you add everything up, these guys could win ... Evil isn't always defeated."<sup>4</sup>

It is true that, in contrast to the corrupt Shia government in Baghdad and the dictatorial regime of Syria's Bashar al-Assad, despite its violence and barbarism, IS presents itself as a force against corruption and disorder - here there are parallels with the Taliban, who gained power in Afghanistan on the basis that despite their brutality they were supported by some Afghans because they were seen as a force that would bring order and stability.

It appears that Washington is considering various options, and one of them could be living with IS - at least until the next change in foreign policy.

## Illusions

Let me remind readers how we got here. In the summer of 2013 the US and the UK coalition government were considering bombing Syria, in order to depose the Alevi dictator, Assad - a move that would no doubt have benefited IS as one of the two main opposition groups attempting to overthrow him. Back then in September 2013 we heard reports of a "high-noon stand-off near the Levantine shore" - five US destroyers were said to be "pointing their Tomahawks towards Damascus".<sup>5</sup>

By June 2014, this policy was reversed and we saw an American-led intervention against IS, culminating in the air raids that began in August 2014. Sections of the international left have defended these interventions, accusing the opponents of US military intervention of dogmatism - apparently by opposing US intervention we had failed Kurdish fighters in their hour of need ...

Throughout the last few years I have argued against those who hold such illusions. As we witness yet another twist in this terrible story, I take no pleasure in reminding readers of my

warnings. So what were the arguments in support of US intervention both in the international left and amongst supporters of the PKK and YPG?

1. US military intervention was a humanitarian intervention and, given the barbaric attacks against Kurds, Yazidis, etc, we should welcome them.

Nothing could be further from the truth. First of all, all imperialist interventions claim to be 'humanitarian' and none of them are. In this particular case, it is clear that US interests have dictated the obvious zig-zags we have witnessed. Whose 'humanitarian' interests prevailed in 2013? It certainly was not in the interests of the secular opposition in Syria. In 2014 the main aim remained the policy of maintaining the corrupt Shia government in Baghdad, while weakening or ending Assad's rule in Syria: that is why US air raids targeted IS in Iraq, while supporting Saudi and Turkish interventions in direct or indirect support of jihadi groups. And now, in 2015, what is paramount for the US? Saudi, Turkish and Israeli interests or the plight of the Kurdish people?

2. We were told it is legitimate for the left to exploit the contradictions between imperialist powers - Lenin did so in agreeing to board that famous sealed train provided by Germany before the Bolshevik revolution.

But Lenin continued to oppose both sides in World War I - the fact that Germany believed it was in its interests to allow him access to Russia does not make it true. But, leaving that aside, the contradictions between two major imperialist powers, such as tsarist Russia and the German empire, cannot be compared with relations between the US and Islamic State. The latter is an armed group of maybe a few tens of thousands of fighters - a by-product of al Qa'eda, itself, in part, created by the US. IS owes its existence to funds and arms that have poured from some of America's main allies in the region, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states. If the US had any intention of defeating IS, it would have frozen the bank accounts operated by the group. It would have penalised contributors to IS funds and those who were involved in any financial or trade deals with it, as it did in the case of Iran.

To sum up, here we are not dealing with inter-imperialist conflict. Saudi Arabia, IS's main sponsor, remains the main ally of the west in the region. Meanwhile, IS is an insignificant force, compared to the might of the

world hegemon. Turkey, a member of Nato, had no major issue with the US, even when it was allowing IS jihadists to cross freely into Syria. Talking of 'contradictions' between US and Turkey or US and Saudi Arabia was always a joke.

3. Another argument put forward is that the YPG is so strong that it will not be compromised by accepting support in the form of US air raids.

Again, not true. Larger, more significant organisations - indeed states - have been compromised once they agreed to act in concert with imperialist interests. The YPG had a large following in Syria, but, by accepting/cooperating with US air raids, it joined a long list of Kurdish organisations that have fallen into the trap of believing that the enemy of their enemy is their friend. A trajectory that has led to countless divisions between Kurds based in different countries.

4. Last, but not least, there is the familiar argument about modernity and backwardness. According to this argument, IS is a backward, reactionary force, compared to modern capitalism (encapsulated by US imperialism) - Marx and Engels have been quoted for pointing to the progressive aspect of capitalism, compared to feudal obscurantism.

Again, this is nonsense. First of all, political Islam is a *modern* phenomenon. For example, it is not just the tactics used by IS that are modern: it and its antecedents have only existed for a couple of decades. It recruits young Muslims in the west, relying on their alienation from society, while in the Muslim world it is based on a complicated combination of envy and hatred of the west. In addition, as I have emphasised, that beacon of progress, the US, is in alliance with some of the most backward, obscurantist states in the region. So telling us that this is a war between modernity and backwardness is an insult to the intelligence.

The future of the Middle East looks bleak. Turkey's "game-changer", supported by the US, is mainly aimed at destroying the PKK/YPG and overthrowing Assad in Syria, while *weakening* Islamic State. Who knows? Maybe academics talking to the *Foreign Policy Journal* know more than we do, and the US administration is even considering the possibility of coexistence with an actual IS state. Meanwhile, there is no doubt that Iran's Islamic republic will continue supporting Assad and Hezbollah, as part of its attempts to ensure its own survival.

All this is a recipe for more regional power rivalry and civil wars, disguised as a Shia-Sunni conflict, and the victims will continue to be the peoples of the region: Arab, Persian, Kurd, Druze, Assyrian, Armenian, Turkmen, Balouchi ... ●

yasmine.mather@weeklyworker.co.uk

## Notes

1. <http://news.sky.com/story/1525357/turkey-extends-airstrikes-to-kurdish-targets>
2. Quote from Hillary Clinton: [www.ndtv.com/world-news/snakes-in-your-backyard-wont-bite-only-neighbours-hillary-to-pak-573412](http://www.ndtv.com/world-news/snakes-in-your-backyard-wont-bite-only-neighbours-hillary-to-pak-573412).
3. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/06/10/what-should-we-do-if-isis-islamic-state-wins-containment>; [www.nytimes.com/2015/07/22/world/middleeast/isis-transforming-into-functioning-state-that-uses-terror-as-tool.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/22/world/middleeast/isis-transforming-into-functioning-state-that-uses-terror-as-tool.html?_r=0).
4. [www.nytimes.com/2015/07/22/world/middleeast/isis-transforming-into-functioning-state-that-uses-terror-as-tool.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/22/world/middleeast/isis-transforming-into-functioning-state-that-uses-terror-as-tool.html?_r=0).
5. [www.globalresearch.ca/the-war-on-syria-the-september-2013-military-stand-off-between-five-us-destroyers-and-the-russian-flotilla-in-the-eastern-mediterranean/5355644](http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-war-on-syria-the-september-2013-military-stand-off-between-five-us-destroyers-and-the-russian-flotilla-in-the-eastern-mediterranean/5355644).



Erdogan: war against Kurds

# Wrecking the peace process

Under the pretext of joining in the fight against IS, writes **Esen Uslu**, the Turkish state has unleashed a ferocious assault on the PKK

The old dictum has proved once more to be true: dictators tend to initiate a civil war before being deposed.

The president of the republic, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, had dreamt of his party winning the June 7 general election by a large margin, so that he could amend the constitution to create an elected Sultanate position for himself. In the course of the campaign he started to realise that his party would not win enough seats to form a government. Facing a major setback, he put all the pretence of presidential neutrality aside and joined the electioneering fray in a desperate attempt to swing the outcome. His efforts were to no avail, and his party was stopped in its tracks by the electorate. Even religious Kurds who used to support Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) turned to the leftwing pro-Kurd People's Democratic Party (HDP).

His prime minister and cabinet have gone, but, although the AKP remains the largest party, they are not in a hurry to form a new government. It is apparent that the three-party opposition is unable to step in. So the AKP has the option of extending negotiations in order to form a coalition with one of the other rightwing parties. It could still declare it is unable to do so, thus sparking a mandatory new election in the autumn.

In the meantime the caretaker AKP government acts as if it still had its majority and is pushing ahead with its new policy line: in order to take advantage of the current world and regional order, it has to rid itself of the shackles imposed by the peace process with the Kurds. A side effect of such a change would be to provide a sop to the bureaucracy and military, thus helping to cohere the state. Also such a change would undermine support for reactionary nationalist and Kurd-hating opposition parties, as well as cutting into the HDP vote from liberals and religious Kurds.

The unilateral ceasefire declared by the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) two years ago has been undermined through the undertaking of a shooting war in Kurdistan under the pretext of joining in the fight against Islamic State.

## US-Iran deal

As the endgame in Syria approaches, the changing parameters of the region have been defined by a possible new era of rapprochement between the US and Iran. Naturally this is desperately opposed by Israel and Saudi Arabia - the principal regional allies of Turkey.

Despite the setback created by the 2010 Mavi Marmara incident, when the Turkish ship taking aid to Gaza to beat the blockade was boarded by the Israeli military and nine Turkish activists were killed, Turkey and Israel have been very keen to improve their relations in the face of the US-Iran nuclear agreement. Israel's illicit oil trade with IS became quite difficult to hide in the face of UN security council resolution 2199, adopted in February 2015. It requires every state in the region to "comply with the measures imposed".

Turkey was in a similar boat. Saudi Arabia and Qatar were the key states supporting IS and other Salafist and radical Islamist groups in the region, and their funds and material supplies were channelled through Turkey into Syria. They have been unnerved by the US nuclear deal with Iran, and now they are keen to provide a new impetus to create a Sunni state on the lands carved out of Iraq and Syria by IS. Recent reports suggest that there are



**Günay Özarslan: three-day stand-off before she was buried**

elements within the US administration and the British establishment who are willing to buy into that idea. And Turkish support for the idea of creating a 'moderate' Sunni state has been apparent. Hence the apparent shift in the policy: from tolerating IS to opposing IS.

Today, the days of IS as we know it seem limited and, if and when the new state appears, it is likely that today's 'extremist' organisations would transform themselves into more 'moderate' outfits, providing an acceptable face for international public opinion. Sacrifices would have to be made, but they would be worth it for the sake of creating a Sunni state starting right on the outskirts of Baghdad and extending deep into Syria to almost Damascus, and from the Turkish to the Saudi borders.

In the meantime the first fruits of the new Turkish policy have been air strikes and artillery bombardments - not only against IS but *Kurdish* forces too. Turkey has also agreed to provide the US with airbases in southern Turkey and on the July 28 Nato meeting it asked for its reward. Firstly, Turkey wants further military assistance, secondly, it wants a free hand to attack Kurdish guerrillas in Turkey, Syria and Iraq - or at least a benign blind-eye.

## Kurdish front

The Kurdish guerrillas' headquarters in the Qandil mountains in Iraq near the Iranian border came under heavy shelling for several days. However, even though some senior leaders were killed, such a move had been expected and defences had been prepared.

When the AKP ended the peace process and truce, the guerrillas started retaliatory actions in cities as well as in the countryside. The casualties are mounting and, as the Turkish armed forces seem to have batted down for a long campaign, an escalation of the conflict seems likely.

The Iraqi Kurdish autonomous administration, however, is keen to see an early end to the armed conflict, and Kurdish region president Masoud Barzani gave a conciliatory interview to the Turkish press, in which he praised the AKP government for its 'peace moves' and criticised the PKK for

ending its ceasefire too hastily.

However, despite his hostile attitude to the PKK and open support for the AKP, Barzani still enjoys considerable support amongst the Kurds. If the AKP government changes tack again and seeks a way out of armed conflict, Barzani may come to play an important role in providing mediation.

For its part, the US seems, at least up to now, quite happy. It has overcome the stubborn resistance of the AKP government to allowing the US to use Turkish airbases. In return it is prepared to let Erdoğan unleash his forces against the Kurdish guerrillas. However, the US does not want any further trouble in Iraqi Kurdistan and the PKK has the potential to destabilise the autonomous administration.

Undoubtedly, the PKK is influential in Syrian Kurdistan. Despite that, Turkey had allowed heavily armed Peshmerga fighters to cross through Turkish territory in order to join in the fight at Kobanê. And though suffering heavy losses the People's Protection Units, which are close to the PKK politically, gained the upper hand. However, everybody knows that the victory in Kobanê was gained in no small measure through close cooperation with the US. Attacks by US planes on IS forces were frequent.

The Kurdish guerrillas did not stop after victory in Kobanê: they pushed IS forces down to Hasake province in the south, and to the east they loosened their hold in Tel Abiad, in the end creating an IS-free zone along the Turkish border. On July 28 they declared that Sarrin near the river Euphrates had been liberated from IS forces.

Will the US allow Turkey to come into open conflict with a force that is spearheading the ground war? We will have to wait and see, but it seems highly unlikely to me. Probably the US will allow the AKP some leeway until it is satisfied that it has reaped the political benefits. Then it will rein Ankara in.

The PKK command was quite willing to take steps to avoid further escalation. A recent communiqué from its Qandil headquarters stated that it had not ordered any retaliation, but local forces had used their own initiative to undertake various actions. The same communiqué also stated

quite unequivocally that it was not the PKK which had been responsible for undermining the ceasefire.

However, the ever increasing spiral of tit-for-tat actions is in motion. On July 27 a gendarmerie major commanding Turkish forces in the Malazgirt county of Muş province was killed - the highest-ranking casualty to date.

## Repression

As the AKP was initiating its cross-border bombing campaign, simultaneously there was a large-scale police operation in working class districts, where alleged 'IS terrorists' as well as PKK and Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front (DHKP-C) supporters were detained. The reported number of those held exceeds 1,500. During one raid a renowned female fighter, Günay Özarslan, was executed on the spot - it was claimed she had shot at the police.

Her body was transferred to the Alevi Assembly House, but the police did not allow a funeral procession to be formed. There was a stand-off which lasted three days, and there were constant clashes between the Alevi youth of the Gazi district and the police. The Alevi Assembly House and its environs were filled with CS gas. Many people were taken to hospitals, and at least one journalist was severely injured. A policeman was also killed. In the end, the stalemate was resolved through the intervention of HDP and CHP (Republican People's Party) MPs, who negotiated a compromise with the governor of Istanbul. Finally on July 27 Günay Özarslan's funeral was held.

Such repression in working class districts and police moves against any protest action, in conjunction with a despicable media campaign, are aimed at criminalising and discrediting both the HDP and the Kurdish freedom movement in the eyes of the population. An HDP peace march called for July 26 was promptly banned, and all protests are likely to be attacked by the police. The HDP-initiated demand to recall parliament from its summer recess after the July 20 Suruç massacre - 32 pro-Kurd internationalists were killed by an IS suicide bomber - has fallen to deaf ears. However, with

the intervention into Syria CHP and AKP jointly organised a parliamentary session on July 29 with a speech on behalf of the CHP and a statement from the AKP government.

The HDP, and the left organised around it, is standing firm in defence of the peace process and has demanded an immediate end to all hostilities. But its political statements are not given any space in the mainstream press, so left publications and social media are the only channels available. Meanwhile, atrocities committed by IS have been used to promote nationalist-fascist undercurrents in Turkish society.

As the AKP drapes itself in the nationalist flag, posing as a staunch supporter of a strong-arm policy against both the Kurds and the left, the power base of both the social democratic CHP and rightwing MHP (Nationalist Movement Party) is being undermined. However, this also opens up the prospects of an AKP-MHP coalition despite the ongoing negotiations between AKP and CHP. Such a coalition could allow AKP to get a more opportune election date, while at the same time continuing to undermine the MHP. Will the MHP fall into that trap? In view of the noises it made in support of the bombing campaign in Syria, that cannot be ruled out.

The initial effect of the bombing campaign may have boosted the AKP showing by a few percentage points in the opinion polls, but an extended conflict could also be damaging to it. If, for its part, the HDP successfully defends the peace process, continues to demand an end to hostilities through a renewed ceasefire and is able to keep on board the forces coalescing around its policy, it could not only maintain its popular support, but extend it. However, there are factors within the movement that may prevent it doing so. So in the short term many things depend on the maturity and foresight of the HDP core, as well as its stamina in standing firm against the nationalist onslaught.

In the long run, however, the Turkish army has already accepted the inevitable - its high command is openly stating that the war against Kurdish guerrillas is unwinnable ●

## GREECE

# Syriza and the left

We need a real working class *strategy*, says Daniel Harvey

Six months ago, Syriza 'won' the Greek election brought on by the collapse of the New Democracy and Samaras-led coalition government. We have to put 'won' in scare quotes, because it only managed to get 36% of the vote and 149 of the 300 MPs (aided by the undemocratic 50-seat top-up awarded to the largest party). Choosing to form a coalition with the rightwing Independent Greeks (Anel), Syriza managed to form a government which was committed to some form of confrontation with the troika.

The Syriza leadership had done almost everything it could by that point to try and demonstrate that it was a 'responsible' party of government that was sincerely looking for an agreement with its creditors. The programme that it put to Greek voters in 2015 was massively watered down from what was on offer in 2010 and then 2012. There would be no immediate default, no tearing up of the memorandum, and no unilateral nationalisation of the banks. What was put forward was a limited programme of basic reforms to give relief to the Greek population suffering from 25% unemployment and hugely reduced incomes. This meant some pension relief and an increase in the minimum wage.

Alexis Tsipras had worked quite hard in the years up to the 2015 election to rein in the Left Platform in Syriza, ensuring a number of anti-democratic measures designed to restrict its influence were passed. There was in particular a limit on voting for party lists, designed to make opposition platforms invisible. Later there were calls in the Greek media for Tsipras to start "cutting off some heads" to make Syriza credible. One of those heads was Manolis Glezos, the hero of the anti-Nazi struggle who had raised the Greek flag over parliament after the end of German occupation. But now he spoke of Syriza becoming a "party of applauders".

The change in Syriza's status from a coalition to a party was also largely about preparing it for office - and qualifying for that 50-seat top-up.

## Power

When this right-moving, left-populist formation took office, Syriza's sister party, Left Unity, sent a delegation over to Greece, which duly sent back some breathless reports about what a step forward it was. Simon Hardy was to the fore, saying: "We're going to Greece because if a Syriza government is elected then it could be the beginning of a wave of resistance across Europe." He continued:

This is the return of hope! This is a new dawn for the radical left in Europe. The future path is uncertain and all manner of challenges lie ahead - but for now we can finally say that we won. We won a victory and we can start to turn the tide.<sup>1</sup>

Andrew Burgin concurred: this was "the spark that sets the field of socialism alight. This is our time." He even called the Tsipras administration a "workers' government", no less - this in spite of Syriza's opportunistic alliance with Anel, roughly analogous to the UK Independence Party in this country, and in spite of Left Unity's commitment not to "compromise our principles by participating in coalitions with capitalist parties".

The criticism was perfunctory at best. All that mattered was gaining office and putting Greece on a collision



Pablo Iglesias: sprinkling popularity

course with the European powers as quickly as possible. Both comrades implied there were risks involved in this strategy, but the outcome was not predetermined. Simon Hardy said there was a possibility that Syriza might be driven to "radically alter the nature of the Greek economy".<sup>2</sup> The implication was that Syriza would be forced out of the euro and might implement some form of 'socialism in one country'.

Ultimately this was based on a premise of deception. Syriza, having been elected on a platform which ruled out an exit from the euro zone, was going to play a clever game, which prepared the ground for leaving. There was quite lot of naive talk along these lines. None other than Slavoj Žižek has put an absurd spin on the eventual capitulation, saying: "Tsipras and Syriza outmanoeuvred Angela Merkel and the Eurocrats." In fact they are "playing a long game" and "waging a patient guerrilla war against financial occupation".<sup>3</sup> "Playing a long game" by forcing austerity through the Greek parliament with the help of New Democracy and the other pro-capitalist parties, presumably.

Greece has now become a debt colony. The fact that it has no economic sovereignty has been confirmed, with the institutions managing to convince Tsipras in a final 17-hour negotiation session in Brussels, likened to "waterboarding" by one participant, to accept that there will be €50 billion-worth of privatisations, with Greece not even being in direct control of the resulting funds. The requirement for a primary surplus has been hardened. The emergency measures on pensions, the minimum wage and trade union rights have been scrapped. All that has survived is the measure allowing children of migrants born in Greece to be eligible for Greek citizenship. Not an unworthy measure, but not exactly matching up to the hype.

Apologists for Tsipras, like Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin, have been saying, with some merit, that a disorderly exit from the euro was not an option. The social turmoil that would have resulted would have been horrific for ordinary Greeks and there was no mandate for it. The referendum that was put to the Greeks in the final moments of the "negotiations" was explicit about not being a vote on whether to leave the euro, despite what Merkel said.

"Negotiations" is actually a prettified term for what was going on. It is obvious that Syriza was naked from the start. It was as former finance minister Yanis

Varoufakis said: "You put forward an argument that you've really worked on, to make sure it's logically coherent, and you're just faced with blank stares. It is as if you haven't spoken."

In reality, Syriza was always looking to implement some form of austerity, even before it took power. The opening position was surrender in that sense. Its inevitable defeat has naturally had ramifications for the rest of the left in Europe. Far from being an inspiring example for others to follow, Syriza has ended up as an example of where defiance will lead. Following the Brussels deal, support for Podemos in Spain has nearly halved, compared to its high point last year. Pablo Iglesias in his typically shifty way has tried to distance himself from the outcome by saying, "Spain is not Greece". This is true in the sense that a small degree of recovery is visible in Spain, and that, together with the example of Greece, has produced increased support for the centre-left and rightwing parties.

## Plan B

The people who have been most belligerent in their condemnation of Alexis Tsipras have been promoting a plan concocted by Varoufakis, along with the Left Platform, which came to light this week. Apparently in a clandestine way Varoufakis had been using the data of Greek taxpayers under the control of the troika representatives in order to prepare the ground for an alternative currency to replace the euro at short notice. He says that he had been told to do this before the election in January by Tsipras in case it was ever needed. Not only that: to make this strategy work, representatives of the Left Platform had been making trips to see Vladimir Putin in Moscow to try and get his support in the event that Greece broke with the EU.

The fact that this could be seen as a viable plan by much of the left shows the extent to which it has lost touch with reality. In the first place, Putin could not be less interested in bailing out Greece, given that Russia has plenty of its own problems to deal with, economically and politically. You only have to look at what happened in Cyprus, where a significant amount of Russian capital was at risk when the country went bankrupt, to understand this. Russia advanced a tiny bridging loan and then left Cyprus to crash. Nothing was going to persuade Russia to get more heavily involved. In any case, there is no way that Russia could

ever fill the void left by the EU.

In the end, this plan B amounted simply to a last-resort move to save Greek capitalism from collapse. It was not in any sense of the word a 'strategy' for working class power - despite reports about the "heady revolutionary atmosphere" in the supposedly secret meetings where these plans were hatched. The comrades might have thought they could be compared to the Bolsheviks planning the October revolution, but I am afraid such a comparison just does not work. The Bolsheviks aimed to lead the working class to power; Syriza aimed to prop up a decrepit banking system. When it actually came to the surrender deal going through the Greek parliament, only two Left Platform representatives actually voted against. All the rest either abstained or decided to absent themselves. This was not in any sense a disciplined platform putting forward a serious alternative approach.

But in Britain we have had a whole axis of leftwingers, from Richard Seymour, through Workers Power, to the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, who have advocated some variation of this approach. For all of them, the point where Syriza failed was where it failed to make use of the *Oxi* vote to break from Europe, to default and to initiate a new currency. Comrade Seymour wrote:

If we didn't know that a Syriza-led government would be "in perpetual crisis", a "spotlit enclave, under constant assault from capital and the media", we shouldn't be in this game. If we didn't guess that Berlin would want to "make an example of Greece one way or another", and that any concessions offered would probably "be deliberately insulting", we really weren't paying attention.<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, he said: "Next week, there will be a rally in Syntagma Square, with the slogan, 'We're not afraid of Grexit'." Those who warned from the beginning what Syriza was about and that the left should not see the Syriza administration as in any way an advance for the working class were dismissed as "the broken-clock left".

For Sacha Ismail of the AWL it was enough to quote Trotsky from 1935: "What is our task? To help the workers to turn the wheels, into which the opportunist leaders have been forced to thrust their hands".<sup>5</sup> But

what does "turning the wheels" mean in this case, where the Marxist left is an insignificant player? However, the most delusional rhetoric of all comes from Workers Power, for whom KD Tait thundered after the *Oxi* referendum vote:

The time has come for the Greek working class to seize the initiative, to take its destiny into its own hands, to prepare for a fight to the finish. Every conscious worker and youth in Europe will come to their aid.

We say the struggle of the Greek working class is our struggle, too. Their victory will be a victory for the European working class.

We must carry the fervour and fighting spirit of Syntagma into the Plaza del Sol, the Place de la République, into the squares and streets of every capital in Europe.

*The choice is not between reform or revolution, but between revolution or counterrevolution.* The failure to seize the hour will see the initiative pass into the hands of our enemies.<sup>6</sup>

What observers need to understand is that when the Bolsheviks developed their tactics after 1917, they were part of a strategy based on a Europe where (a) there had been a *communist revolution* in Russia and (b) every major country in Europe had a sizeable *Marxist* party, while the working class movement was by an order of magnitude much more politicised and organised than today. They were part of a strategy for arousing Europe when it was pregnant with the possibility for workers' revolutions against capitalism.

Today we have Podemos, Die Linke and Left Unity to spread the spark ignited by Syriza. In fact we are a million miles from that situation today, so talk about Greece committing *seppuku* in order to spark the European revolution is crazy. If you were an ordinary soldier in the trenches, and you had officers like these offering this kind of suicidal leadership, telling you to charge over the top to certain death, you would be well advised to turn your guns on them. It is this kind of advice that more aptly describes today's "broken-clock left".

We live in a period that demands revolutionary patience. That means warning against taking office prematurely and exposing the opportunism of those who claim that left populism represents any kind of progress for our movement. The experience of Syriza has materially damaged the prospects for the left in that country. It may not be popular to say so, and it may leave people feeling impotent in the face of the austerity being imposed on them, but that just reflects the hole that we have collectively dug ourselves into.

Surely making people realise that there are no easy fixes is the first step to getting out of that hole ●

## Notes

1. <http://leftunity.org/why-we-must-support-a-syriza-government-in-greece>.
2. <http://internationalsocialistnetwork.org/index.php/ideas-and-arguments/organisation/left-unity/528-towards-a-strategy-for-left-unity-lessons-from-the-european-left-pamphlet>.
3. <http://inthesetimes.com/article/18229/slavoj-zizek-syriza-tsipras-merkel>.
4. [www.leninology.co.uk/2015/02/syrizas-mauling-at-eu-negotiations.html](http://www.leninology.co.uk/2015/02/syrizas-mauling-at-eu-negotiations.html).
5. [www.workersliberty.org/greece-trotsky](http://www.workersliberty.org/greece-trotsky).
6. [www.workerspower.co.uk/2015/07/greece-referendum-oxi-no-syriza](http://www.workerspower.co.uk/2015/07/greece-referendum-oxi-no-syriza) (my emphasis).

INTERVIEW

# You can't just sit and wait

Critique editor Hillel Ticktin takes issue with the line of the *Weekly Worker*. He spoke to Mark Fischer

The first impression I had of Greece after the deal with the institutions was that the population was in shock. They really did not expect what happened to them. And they are unlikely to accept it very easily. In contrast to what the mainstream press was saying - that is, that the general population were supportive of Tsipras and the line that he had taken - I think that is very unlikely. The big question is how they react now.

Of course, Greece has its history of struggle - its civil war, the period of the colonels, etc - so it is quite likely that there will be a reaction. Although it is taking time to manifest itself.

The division in Syriza - which is often referred to in the press - leads many to presume that there will be some sort of split, with two groups in particular breaking away. That's possible, but not inevitable. It is clear that there are different factions in the organisation and that there are tensions between them. It is not clear that this will mean a split - the nature of Syriza is that it is a whole collection of different groupings, but you would not actually expect it to break up. The fact that it hasn't broken up says something and quite what its future is - that's not very clear.

My general impression is that the Stalinist party - the KKE - has not gained much out of this crisis. Their abstention in the referendum did them no good - the level of abstention was roughly at the level that the organisation achieves in national elections. Having said that, it is also clear that they have a base amongst the manual working class.

Turning to Europe, I think that the euro zone is now finished. This won't be immediate, but I really can't see how it can last very long. The line in Germany is very firm and is shared by the both the Social and the Christian Democrats - it is a very rightwing consensus. And without political change in Germany, you can't really have a euro zone that lasts. Without that change, you essentially have a euro zone in which Germany gets richer and everyone else gets poorer.

The different attitudes came out very sharply in some of the discussions and summits we have seen. Clearly there is an entrenched - and "violent", according to press reports - difference between France, Italy, the Mediterranean countries, on the one hand, and the likes of Germany, Holland, etc, on the other. That existed previously, but it is far sharper, far more toxic now. It also reflects a material reality, of course - in the relative growth and strength of Germany and the relative stagnation of France. Previously France had been the dominant power in continental Europe, so you have an obvious antagonism there between these two - the key players in the project of Europe.

This is also reflected in growth of national chauvinist sentiment. This is an expression of the fact that there has not been the sort of merging of industries and economies that was one of the stated aims of the European Union. The political background simply isn't there for that type of process to take place, which is why it seems to me very unlikely that the euro zone can continue.

This is not a startlingly original point to make, of course. Informed



Hillel Ticktin: highlighting the possibilities

bourgeois commentators - in the *Financial Times* and elsewhere - have been making the point that the euro zone cannot last. A key political question for us therefore is that of the German working class - when is it going to stand up to the bourgeoisie? There are many factors that make that problematic, of course. The merger of East and West Germany effectively created a new workforce and with it new forms of struggle and new political problems.

What about the working class in Europe as a whole? Syriza has been a sort of wake-up call for the left across Europe, but particularly in southern Europe. Although the organisation has betrayed its original programme, that remains true, I think. Yes, right now it is a source of demoralisation - but I wouldn't put too much stress on that. That is temporary, in my view. The fact that this organisation came into existence at all and that it had its level of popularity and fighting stance is very important.

It was and is a reformist organisation. But, despite this reformist form, it was forced to take on revolutionary content. They were reformists who found that they couldn't reform. They had to take a much harder line. Despite their formal politics, objective circumstances drove them to a much harder stance. That they backed down eventually should not be a surprise - as I say, Syriza never was a revolutionary organisation. But the fact that over a time it was forced to take a revolutionary position was very important.

The lesson is that there are no national roads to socialism, no socialism in one country. The Bolsheviks were clear that this was impossible. Syriza obviously are not the Bolsheviks, but they too have shown the impossibility of some reformist middle way in one country. But the question is - how will this happen? It is idealist to think you can delay an upsurge in one country for any extended period, when there is no immediate prospect

of other countries having a radical left regime or government for some time. Historically, the left has acted when it *could* act. If you simply say that you have to wait until a whole swathe of countries are ready for radical change, then you may have to wait for several hundred years.

I think these sorts of things will develop in a much more uneven type of way. Just like in 1917, in that sense. Look at the Bolsheviks. They took power with the expectation that their revolution would inspire and galvanise others - which did in fact happen, to a certain extent. But you can't make your revolution contingent on the certainty of others - and if you can't be certain, simply stand down? That doesn't make sense.

Despite the problems of Syriza, they have had an effect across Europe - there is no doubt about that. It failed internally, but it has been a success in highlighting the possibilities of struggle, and the struggle is beginning again in that sense. It has clearly inspired people

throughout Europe. In that sense Syriza has been a success. I don't know if you can expect much more frankly. It isn't a revolutionary undertaking - it wasn't that from the start.

There is a danger in what the *Weekly Worker* is saying - although, you are quite correct about socialism in one country being impossible and so on. With a passive attitude, you would never do *anything*. To have a perspective of having strong socialist parties in every country - ready to respond with solidarity and revolutions of their own if a more important, more central country than Greece goes socialist - is simply not realistic at the moment. With that method, you just sit and wait - perhaps for 50 or 100 years.

I understand your point, but we have to accept the haphazard way things happen, given the nature of the transitional period we are living in, given the nature of capitalism itself and also given the relatively backward nature of the socialist and left forces that currently exist ●

## REVIEW

# The red and the green

Ken Loach (director) *Jimmy's hall* 2014.

The real-life Jimmy Gralton was not the handsome young blade portrayed by Barry Ward in *Jimmy's hall*, the 18th feature film of the venerable leftwing director, Ken Loach. He was actually a bespectacled, balding man in his mid-40s. But, apart from this understandable bit of cinematic licence, Loach appears to have rendered accurately the major events of a little known episode of class struggle in the history of the Irish free state that emerged from the war of independence and subsequent civil war.

*Jimmy's hall* - just released over here in the United States - is something of an historical sequel to Loach's more ambitious *The wind that shakes the barley* (2006), which views the aforementioned conflicts through the eyes of a fictional west Cork Irish Republican Army band. The character upon which Loach's latest movie is based - this time a real one - was a communist organiser and agitator, who holds the distinction of being the only citizen ever to be deported from southern Ireland in the 20th century.

Loach's film begins when Gralton returns to his native County Leitrim in 1932, after having spent 10 years as an industrial worker in the US. There, he participated in a campaign to free the legendary Irish labour leader, James Larkin, imprisoned at the time in Sing Sing penitentiary, and founded the James Connolly club of the US Communist Party in New York City.

But Gralton was a well-known radical before he first sailed westward across the Atlantic, which is why his return - to manage the family farm in place of a deceased brother - does not pass unnoticed. In the early 20s, he had been a prominent member of the local anti-treaty IRA, and a leader of the land agitation that then gripped several western counties. He had converted a tin warehouse on his land into a local meeting place and recreation centre named Pearse-Connolly Hall, after the two most prominent leaders of the Easter Rising. The hall had been the venue of a notorious Sinn Féin court (or Gralton court, as it was known thereabouts), one of many such republican tribunals that filled the gap left by the breakdown of civil authority during the troubles. The Gralton court had often used threatened or actual force to restore to their homes tenants evicted by big landlords for non-payment of rent. Reinstated tenants and excitement-starved rural youth had not forgotten their debt of gratitude to a man who was a local legend by the time he came back; neither had Leitrim's landlords and priests forgiven his affronts to authority. When Gralton is persuaded by neighbours to organise the restoration of the now decayed and weed-grown former gathering place, all the latent antagonisms flare up a second time.

Although the hall's activities - dances, boxing lessons, literature and Irish-language classes - are more cultural than political, they quickly provoke the enmity of the local gentry, and especially of the clergy, in the person of a parish priest named Father Sheridan (Jim Norton). The 'masters and pastors' feel threatened by the very existence of any locus of organised social life and education outside the control of the main pillar of Ireland's social order, Holy Mother Church. Run by a notorious radical, boasting the county's only gramophone, and regularly featuring a jazz band playing the latest Yankee hit tunes, Jimmy's re-opened hall quickly comes under attack as a breeding ground of political

and moral subversion.

## A different Ireland

Gralton returns to an Ireland that is different in important respects from the one he left a decade earlier. The country's more conservative elements had prevailed in the civil war, and were now devoting themselves to the work of consolidating the clerical-reactionary state that was to rule the 26 counties for decades to come.

The general election of 1932 brought to power for the first time the Fianna Fáil party of Eamon de Valera, an Easter Week veteran who was to dominate the country's political life until the 1960s. Although he had nominally headed the anti-treaty forces in the civil war, de Valera had renounced armed struggle and pledged to work within the parliamentary system five years earlier. Yet, despite its bid for respectability, Fianna Fáil could not easily escape the taint of radicalism from its continuing association with the defeated and still armed remnants of the anti-treaty side, and the left republicans and revolutionary socialists who had rallied to the 'irregulars' during the civil war. Thus, the pro-treaty politicians and Free State Army officers who dominated the government before the elections sought to keep de Valera out of office by launching a hysterical anti-communist crusade, with the church as its most zealous knight-in-arms.

Although, as Father Sheridan remarks in the film, there could not have been more than two or three hundred genuine communists in the entire island, their small number did not prevent them from becoming a convenient bogey for partisan-political scaremongering. The government of Liam Cosgrave, de Valera's arch-reactionary predecessor, promulgated amendment 17 to the constitution in 1931, banning over a hundred political organisations and authorising special tribunals for subversives. Jimmy Gralton belonged to the Revolutionary Workers Groups, one of the proscribed organisations.

Gralton joined Fianna Fáil on the morrow of its electoral triumph, in hopes that it would pursue a more progressive course than the outgoing government, but soon became disillusioned and resigned, as de Valera continued in his rightward trajectory. The newly elected leader - a famously ascetic and pious former mathematics teacher - missed no opportunity to shed past radical associations and prove his loyalty to the reigning powers, secular and ecclesiastical.

One such opportunity arose with the Eucharistic Congress, a worldwide gathering of Catholic clerics and devout laity, produced with much pomp and circumstance in Dublin in 1932. De Valera made himself conspicuously present. The victories of fascism on the continent put wind in the sails of this reactionary carnival, reinforcing the authority of the Irish church.

Moreover, the Wyndham Act of 1903 had promoted the sale of big landed estates to tenants, and greatly expanded the number of small proprietors. This legislation had conservatised the peasantry, and dampened, if not eliminated, the agrarian discontent that had acquired near civil-war proportions in the era of Parnell and the Land League in the 1880s. These are the unpropitious political circumstances, touched upon but not fully developed in Loach's film, that attend the local story it proceeds to tell.

The story contains little that one would not expect: an escalating campaign of harassment and terror against Pearse-Connolly Hall. There are



Ken Loach: high drama

the initial warning visits from Sheridan, followed by the rougher forms of persuasion employed by the strong farmers and their hirelings, abetted by the police. Gralton's partisans, many of them civil war veterans, organise in armed self-defence. The hall is raided, fired upon and ultimately burnt to the ground. Because Catholicism had over the centuries become a bedrock of Irish identity, the pulpit was a mightier weapon than the gun in the arsenal of the existing order.

Waxing righteous from the altar, Sheridan seeks to mobilise national feeling by invoking the people's ancient ways - going back to St Patrick and the Protestant marauder, Oliver Cromwell - to paint Gralton as a bearer of alien influences and a latter-day anti-Christ. He also reads out and heaps obloquy upon the names of those seen attending events at the hall, from a list compiled by the glowering neighbours he has recruited as informers to stand watch at its door during social events.

Rural Ireland is an intimate place, where even the fiercest of antagonists have often known each other all their lives, and the class struggle commonly assumes a personal face. Hence the one-on-one dual between Jimmy Gralton and Sheridan, whose characters are depicted as having more than one dimension. Gralton, the revolutionary, shows himself open to compromise. At the urging of followers fearful of confronting the church head on, Gralton goes to Sheridan with a proposal that the latter become a trustee of Pearse-Connolly. Sheridan will only agree to do so if the church is given full proprietorship - an offer Jimmy cannot but refuse. Yet Sheridan is no mere pawn of the strong farmers and gombeen men. He is also a believing clerical reactionary, capable of seeing in his adversary a selfless man of principle. He reads the *Workers' Advocate*, put out by the Revolutionary Workers' Groups, and understands the appeal of Marxism for men and women of no property.

## A fateful step

The turning point comes when Gralton is prevailed upon by the local IRA to speak at an anti-eviction rally in the neighbouring County Roscommon. Here Loach does not repeat the facile equation he made in *The wind that shakes the barley* between anti-treaty republicans and socialists, criticised by this writer in an earlier review.<sup>1</sup> The IRA men tell Gralton that their ranks are divided over the question of evictions, with about a third on the side of the landlords, a third against them,

and another third who are wavering or indifferent. This approximates more closely to the historical truth. Those around Gralton urge him to decline the invitation, arguing that it will only intensify the persecution he is already facing, but he reluctantly accepts.

Standing at a Roscommon crossroads on a horse-drawn trap, Jimmy explains to the assembled crowd that the growing hardship they are now suffering is a result of a crisis of international capitalism. He pours cold water on the official rhetoric of national unity intoned so sanctimoniously from on high in post-treaty times. The colours of the flag may have changed, he says, echoing Connolly, but now as before, the poor still toil and endure, the owners still own, and the state still stands firmly on the latter's side. Gralton never actually calls himself a communist revolutionary in the film, but his speech can leave little doubt as to his political persuasion.

Gralton's caution-counselling friends turn out to have been right. His speech earns him a deportation order, urged by Leitrim's masters and executed by de Valera's minister of justice. The pretext is that Gralton renounced his Irish citizenship by becoming a naturalised American. Jimmy at first eludes the police and goes on the run. A defence campaign is mounted on his behalf, but the historical currents are not running in his favour. The weight of the church is great enough to intimidate large numbers of people from rallying to his cause, and Gralton is ultimately captured and deported.

The film serves as a reminder that most righteous struggles do not have a triumphal Hollywood ending. Loach allows his audience no more than a fleeting feel-good moment, when a throng of Gralton's bicycle-riding followers briefly surround the police lorry transporting him to the ship that will carry him back to America. They pay him a final, wistful tribute. Gralton was never again to set foot in his native land. He died in 1945 in New York City, still a militant of the Communist Party.

## Past and present

The past can enlighten for its parallels with the present, as well as for its contrasts. In the case of *Jimmy's hall*, audiences are probably more likely to be struck by the contrasts. After years of scandals involving Dickensian orphanages and sexually predatory priests, not to mention the overwhelming approval of gay marriage in this spring's referendum, the centuries-long role of the Irish Catholic church as the custodian of the social order seems finally at an end. Ireland is now no longer the home of the "godforsaken, priest-ridden race" of James Joyce's description.

Metropolitan capitalism (now including Ireland) has evolved more potent mechanisms of social control than the "faith of our fathers". In 1932, the acquisition of culture and the stirrings of individual personality amongst those meant to suffer and obey, posed a definite threat to the prevailing powers. Radicals and socialists could fill a void in their lives not only by spreading revolutionary politics, but by creating alternative social and cultural spaces. Today, however, that void is largely occupied by a consumerism that presents infinite diversions and promotes individual expression, even the expression of rebellious impulses, through the decidedly non-threatening activity of acquiring commodities. Even people of little means tend more to be integrated into society through the cash nexus than by direct reliance on one another. Television and information

technology have greatly privatised leisure time; social media have displaced dances and weekend socials.

Subversive though Jimmy Gralton's Pearse-Connolly Hall was in its day, the kind of phenomenon it represents belongs, at least in developed countries, more to the past than to the future. What new forms of solidarity today's declining western capitalism will throw up is very much an open question.

## Loach's legacy

Ken Loach's work will soon become part of the past as well. Since the director, now 79, has said that *Jimmy's hall* will probably be his last feature film, this may be an appropriate place for a few brief comments on his cinematic legacy. Loach was once associated with Gerry Healy's Socialist Labour League and is now a supporter of Left Unity. He leaves no doubt about where his loyalties lie. His films are clearly made from the standpoint of an enemy of capitalism and a partisan of the working class and the oppressed. *Land and freedom*, his 1995 drama of the Spanish Civil War, is also an unflinching indictment of Stalinism and the Popular Front. Unfortunately, however, political engagement is not always wedded to artistic genius.

Loach never attains the heights of the great auteurs - Vittorio De Sica (*The bicycle thief*), Gillo Pontecorvo (*The battle of Algiers*) - from whom he claims to take inspiration. Largely absent from his movies are the lively crosscutting, the striking tableaux, the use of symbols, the revealing details, the vivid characterisations and the small artistic touches that make for outstanding cinematography. Loach's stories usually unfold in resolutely chronological order, and his presentation is distinctly literal-minded: things and people are simply what they are, no more, no less; they do not stand for or suggest anything else; the different elements are seldom made to cohere in an aesthetic whole.

His characters are sometimes more exemplars of various types than flesh-and-blood individuals, and his attempts to imbue them with personality often fall flat (Jimmy Gralton's near-kindling of a romance with an old flame, Oonagh, for instance, is the least memorable part of Loach's latest film.) The interactions among his characters sometimes focus on illustrating a point at the expense of reflecting life. Anyone looking for the poetry of revolution and the class struggle will be hard put to find it in the films of Ken Loach; his stories are told in a sturdy cinematic prose. And, while by no means descending to crude propaganda, his movies do suffer from some of the character typing and didacticism that much socially and politically themed art is hard pressed to avoid.

Yet Loach's films seldom fail to engage. The director's artistic limitations are usually compensated for by the high drama of the tales he chooses to relate. They are the stories of ordinary people, fictional or historical, resisting the ruling classes, individually or collectively. If not for Loach, such stories would remain untold; he stands out as one of the few continuators of the radical independent cinema of the 60s and 70s in the intervening decades of commercial mediocrity. The left and the working class will always value the body of work he leaves behind ●

Jim Creegan

## Notes

1. See 'Ken Loach's use of Irish history' *Weekly Worker* April 18 2007.

# LABOUR



Four rivals: Yvette Cooper, Jeremy Corbyn, Andy Burnham and Liz Kendall

## Dissolve the party and elect another

As the Labour leadership contest gets ugly, William Kane begins to worry about the sanity of the bourgeois press

As we hit the rough midpoint of the Labour leadership contest, it is safe to say that the right - both within Labour, and meddling from without - is in total, blind panic.

It is not hard to see why. While it initially looked like we would have a yawnsome choice between Andy Burnham, Yvette Cooper and Liz Kendall - a Blairite, a Blairite and a Tory - the three clones have been almost eclipsed by an insurgent left that few even remembered existed, intent on pushing Jeremy Corbyn into the job. Nothing our rightwing friends do works. 'He's unelectable!' the cry goes up. 'He's friends with terrorists!' howl Zionist ideologues. No matter: people keep flooding into the Labour Party to vote for him.

As things get more heated, the fight gets dirtier. We may turn to John Mann, a Blairite MP who seems to have had a little more foresight than his colleagues - as soon as Corbyn got onto the ballot, he lamented that apparently the party did not want to win an election ever again. He has recently come forth with a pile of scurrilous innuendo, suggesting that Corbyn turned a blind eye to abuse in the Islington care system. That's Corbyn for you - friend to Hamas and paedophiles; enemy of 'wealth creators'.

This, naturally, says a great deal more about Mann than Corbyn. There are two possibilities here - that he is telling the truth about Corbyn's complicity, or that he is lying. If he is lying, he is straightforwardly using vile crimes against young people to further his political ends. If he is telling the truth, we can only conclude that - instead of blowing the whistle previously - he kept quiet until such time as this scandal was politically useful against his enemies, such is his concern for Islington's most vulnerable. Either way, his behaviour is utterly repellent.

It has also obviously not worked.

### Delusional

If all else fails, of course, there is always the 'reds under the bed' option - and so the rightwing press last weekend was choc-a-bloc with silly-season stories about "hard left infiltration" of the Labour Party, designed to give justification to those who would stop the process entirely and have a 'do-over' - this time without the guy in the Lenin cap.

In fine barrel-scraping form, we

have that sinking ship of the British press, *The Sunday Telegraph*, which dug out some sordid personal history:

Ralph Miliband, a Marxist academic, founded a small group of political activists who met at Tony Benn's house in London, and included the then newly-elected young MP, Mr Corbyn ... The emergence of the long-standing link between Mr Corbyn and the Miliband family is likely to reinforce the view that, since the departure of Tony Blair, Labour has been taken over by leftwing intellectuals, backed by union money and bent on imposing socialist policies on Britain.<sup>1</sup>

Leftwing MP corresponds with other leftwingers - not exactly the smoking gun, is it? All we learn from this is that the *Torygraph* is still - in spite of everything - pushing the 'Red Ed' line. We wonder what Miliband *files* makes of all this commotion - we somehow suspect that he is not a born-again Corbynite, now he has returned to the back benches. Never mind the sneering tone of the word "intellectuals": as if Blair was not reliant on those baleful modern surrogates for the public intellectual, wonks and pollsters. Is Anthony Giddens really the *Telegraph's* idea of a horny-handed son of toil?

At the most delusional end, we find - unsurprisingly - *The Mail on Sunday*, whose foam-flecked red-baiting focuses on a truly astonishing claim from the MP, John Cryer: "I am reliably informed that members of the Militant Tendency are using Tusc [the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition] to pay £3 to vote for Corbyn."<sup>2</sup>

Where are we to begin? Perhaps by suggesting Cryer looks up the word 'reliable' in a nearby dictionary, and considers whether it can really be applied to any source who claims that:

- The Labour Party is being infiltrated by an organisation that no longer exists, and whose direct descendant, the Socialist Party in England and Wales, refuses to touch Labour - Corbyn's campaign included - with a barge pole.

- This infiltration is being conducted through the same organisation's electoral front, set up as a competitor to Labour.

- This peculiar course of action is being taken in spite of there being no need for it, since anyone can sign up for £3 if they so choose.

If he is truly gullible enough to believe such charlatanism, then I have a bridge to sell him.

### All our fault?

Such stupidities are to be expected from the likes of the *Mail*, whose purpose is not so much to influence the outcome of the Labour leadership as to hold its petty bourgeois readership in a state of perpetual anxiety about the encroachment of modernity upon its prejudices.

But, really, we expect better things from *The Sunday Times*. After all, Rupert Murdoch's papers are not indifferent to the internal goings-on of the Labour Party, but highly interventionist. We might consider them a sort of evil twin: both our organisation and their corporation think about Labour *strategically*, albeit from diametrically opposed political viewpoints.

How amused we were, then, to make the front page! A story about "hard-left infiltrators" voting for Corbyn seized upon our humble organisation as a significant agent in all this stuff. They quoted us - more faithfully than many comrades on the left, we might add - on transforming the Labour Party, on fighting for a left victory in the leadership election, urging people to register and vote for Corbyn.<sup>3</sup>

There was, naturally, some hair-raising revolutionary rhetoric, and a little photomontage of Provisional Central Committee chair Jack Conrad and the last issue of the paper (clearly in view, ironically enough, is the front page promo: "As Jeremy Corbyn surges ahead, right plots anti-democratic coup"). There you have it - it's the *Weekly Worker* wot won it.

Seriously now - we find ourselves, above all, concerned with the precipitate decline in journalistic standards. When a mail-out writer for Labour List declared on July 27 that we "could organise an infiltration of a nine-year-old's birthday party and I doubt anyone would notice", he was being a touch unfair; but we do not claim to be a large organisation, and frankly even if everyone who had read this paper since Corbyn's nomination had signed up (almost certainly not true, given our international reach), it would still not amount to a significant minority of the numbers who have done so.

There is nothing in *The Sunday Times* about us that could not have been gleaned from five minutes'

clicking around on our website or a glance at Wikipedia. Somehow they failed to notice that we are not a large organisation, and target our propaganda more or less exclusively at other "hard leftists", who in turn seldom take our advice. Ladies and gentlemen of the press: if you want to know who on the far left is actively supporting Corbyn, you might start by reading our polemics against the Socialist Workers Party and SPEW - the two biggest Trotskyist groups - for *not* doing so.<sup>4</sup> If only our comrades on the left were taking this matter as seriously as they should.

### Dig your own hole

No, let us be clear - this development is not our work, never mind that of the 'Militant Tendency' or some such nonsense. It is a self-inflicted wound by the Labour *right* - and its cheerleaders in the bourgeois press. Who was it who drove through 'one member, one vote', registered supporters and the rest? Why, Ed Miliband, in response to an utterly artificial 'scandal' concerning the Unite union's attempts to get a favourable candidate selected in Falkirk - in other words, under intense pressure from the *right*.

And in theory, it was a good idea, from the right's point of view - reduce the *collective* power of the unions to shift things, by breaking the block vote. Introduce registered supporters, like the Democrat and Republican parties have in the United States - and thus make the whole procedure more vulnerable to media manipulation. There was a safety mechanism built in - no candidate could get on the ballot without a substantially *higher* level of support from the parliamentary party than before.

Here we meet the petty concerns of individual MPs. Who nominated Corbyn? Not so much the left - after all, many soft-lefts fell in behind Burnham initially, as a 'realistic' candidate. But partly under pressure from the rank and file, and partly as a manoeuvre on Burnham's part so as not to be seen as the 'left' candidate - Red Andy, god help us - people who would never dream of voting for Corbyn got him on the ballot.

At that point, it became possible for people who *despise* Blairism and the rightwing press, who had deserted Labour over the last decade, to vote for somebody they actually liked. And, the more dirty tricks the Blairites pull, the

more scare stories clutter the pages of the yellow press, the more determined they become.

Since nominations closed and campaigning began, there has been one story and one story only: the momentous surge in support for Jeremy Corbyn. Andy Burnham, the archetypal career politician, began this campaign by talking about the need to get out of the "Westminster bubble", though in his mouth it was a laughable ambition. Now, for Labour at least, that bubble has been well and truly burst - by Corbyn, and his brand of sentimental, well-meaning, bearded Islington leftism.

The takeaway is a simple one - in the *particular form* it has taken during the last two decades of its total dominance, the Labour right is in fact very fragile. It ensured that dominance by totally ossifying internal structures, relying instead on favourable press coverage and support from elements of the bourgeoisie (we think of Lord Sainsbury) to increase its influence. That support has gone, however, and those who seek to lead Labour are forced to do so by appealing - heaven forefend - to the *party*, a beast they at this point barely understand.

Yet, with the press rallied behind the Tories, the party rank and file is also the only connection available to the doorstep; thus we have the bizarre spectacle of Burnham, Kendall and co claiming to be in touch with the electorate, but only able to talk in central office jargon about marketing Labour to this or that subset of voters; that is, discussing *in full public view* the lies they intend to tell in order to manipulate people. They are then somehow surprised when a straight-talking leftwinger shows them up as the degenerate, technocratic creeps they are. All this noise about 'infiltrators' reflects merely their political exhaustion: they may as well try, after Brecht, to dissolve the party and elect another.

Let the Labour right and the press learn this lesson - there is no injury the CPGB can inflict on their ambitions that can possibly compare to the one they have inflicted upon themselves. For the rest of us, it's popcorn time ●

### Notes

1. *The Sunday Telegraph* July 26.
2. *Mail on Sunday* July 26.
3. *The Sunday Times* July 26.
4. See 'Tepid support for Corbyn' *Weekly Worker* July 16; and 'Stop digging, Peter' *Weekly Worker* July 2.

**LABOUR****Jeremy Corbyn: now the favourite**

# Rightwing panic grows

Ordinary leftwing activists are using the weapons supplied by the right *against the right*, says **Eddie Ford**. Things will never be quite the same again

**W**ith the ballot papers due to be sent out on August 14, Jeremy Corbyn still maintains his lead in the Labour leadership contest. Private polling by the *Daily Mirror* has Corbyn way ahead on 42%, with Blairite clones Yvette Cooper and Andy Burnham trailing behind on 22.6% and 20% respectively.<sup>1</sup> As for Liz Kendall, who could have been selected by Tory Party central casting, she is obviously out of the race on 14%.

The July 22 YouGov poll had very similar results, and although Burnham was still ahead of Cooper (26% to 20%), perhaps the latter is now becoming the 'ABC' candidate: ie, 'anyone but Corbyn'. That would hardly be surprising, given Burnham's farcical antics over the recent Welfare Bill vote: he had said on his Facebook page that the Labour Party "could not simply abstain" on the issue, and then abstained himself - nothing like consistency.

But the result is too close to call, even if Corbyn does appear to have a generous lead. According again to the *Mirror*, once second preferences are taken into account, then the MP for Islington is only two points ahead of Cooper on 51% to 49%. From such polls, it still seems the case that Corbyn has to come very close to an outright win on the first vote in order to prevent the second preferences piling up against him - whether they end up going to Cooper or Burnham.

When it comes to CLP nominations or recommendations, insofar as they are an indication of the mood among ordinary Labour Party members, Corbyn is still out in front with 121 - followed by Burnham on 107, Cooper with 91 and Kendall just 14 (when it comes to the deputy race, Tom Watson is leading Stella Creasy by 85 to 53).<sup>2</sup> The *New Statesman* recently carried some interesting, or amusing, anecdotes about CLP meetings, where the numbers attending are "vanishingly small".<sup>3</sup> At one contest, we read, there were just 25 votes: nine for Jeremy Corbyn, eight for Andy Burnham, four for Yvette Cooper, and one simply reading "Fuck Kendall". Making a more substantial point, the unnamed *NS* journalist observes that the majority of CLPs that are nominating Corbyn in the last leadership contest - the author therefore sees "no reason to suggest" that these local parties "have become less reflective of the party's mood than they were five years ago". Indeed, the writer is "more convinced than ever" that Corbyn is going to win - though he or she does note that Corbyn has a "far smaller pool" of second preferences to draw on than his rivals.

## Divisions

But, looking at the polls, the Labour establishment is sweating - Christ alive, *Corbyn really could win*. As they stare into the abyss, with maybe

the abyss staring back, the language from the right is getting steadily more bitter, angry and recriminatory. Tony Blair nastily said that Corbyn supporters needed to "get a heart transplant", earning him a rebuke from Lord John Prescott, the former deputy prime minister - such "abuse" is "totally unacceptable", apparently. Margaret Beckett regards herself as a "moron" for nominating Corbyn, and the prince of darkness himself - Lord Peter Mandelson - admitted to experiencing a "growing sense of *déjà vu*": believing that Labour's existence as an "effective electoral force is now at stake".

With the divisions opening up, Labour First (essentially a vehicle for the relatively influential Blairite blogger, Luke Akehurst) has written to Progress, the New Labour think-tank amply bankrolled by multi-millionaire Lord Sainsbury. His open letter expresses annoyance that Progress *still* "have not recommended use of second and third preferences" to stop Corbyn, who represents the "most serious threat of a hard-left victory" in the Labour Party for over 30 years.<sup>4</sup> Rather, it continues to back the loser, Kendall - the letter implores Progress to amend its position in order to "demonstrate the unity of moderate and mainstream forces", given the "strategic priority" of preventing a Corbyn victory.

Kendall herself, however, is refusing to drop out of the race - a position endorsed by Cooper, who

told the BBC that the Leicester West MP should not "leave it to the boys, just because of one poll". Maybe playing the feminist card is the key to victory for the anti-Corbynites, as Jonathan Freedland desperately suggests in *The Guardian* (July 23). He asininely hopes that the prospect of Labour's first ever elected female leader will somehow "match the excitement" unleashed by the Corbyn campaign, the "pragmatists" needing to convince their fellow party members that the "purity of impotence" will lead to a lifetime of opposition. Get real, Freedland.

Anyhow, supporters of Kendall have told YouGov that 55% of them will give Cooper their second preference vote, 22% Andy Burnham, and 6% Jeremy Corbyn (with a small number remaining undecided). Of course, as this is not a first-past-the-post election, if a candidate drops out before the vote, that should *in theory* make no difference to the eventual outcome - votes can be transferred to the best-placed rightwinger in any case. But obviously to beat Corbyn the three other candidates need to persuade their supporters to transfer their second and third preferences to the other anti-Corbyn candidates.

All very simple on one level - there should be enough votes to block Corbyn, assuming he does not get an absolute majority in the first vote. But unfortunately for the right wing, the political momentum is *against* them. Everything seems to indicate

that Corbyn is picking up support with almost each day that goes by. Expressing this concern, Richard Angell of Progress wrote an article for *The Times* worrying that both Burnham and Cooper are in danger of being regarded as "Corbyn-lite" (July 26). If they do not "draw a line to their left flanks" and "start a step-change towards the centre", he warned, then their chances of becoming party leader "might be dead" already.

Panic seriously setting in, some Blairites are agitating for a coup - Operation Stop Corbyn. Rumours abound about a vote of no confidence against the likely new leader - current rules stipulate that 20% of the parliamentary party (ie, 47 MPs) can nominate an alternative candidate. Trying to further stir the excrement, John Mann, MP for Bassetlaw, informed *The Sunday Times* that the leadership contest was "totally out of control" - the party being flooded with new members and registered supporters at the £3 bargain price. At the current rate, it is projected that about 140,000 extra voters will have registered by the August 12 deadline - the ballot will close on September 10 and the result will be announced two days later at the special conference.

Therefore time to change the electorate, who are just not doing what they are told. Mann has written to the acting leader, Harriet Harman, asking for the election to be

# What we fight for

suspended until "proper checks" can be conducted on the new members/supporters. The contest has become a "farce", he said, with long-standing members "getting trumped" by people who have "opposed the Labour Party and want to break it up". Other senior Blairites and the rightwing press have muttered darkly about Tory and "hard left" infiltration of the party, even naming small groups like the CPGB and the Socialist Party in England and Wales (sorry - Militant Tendency) as supposed evidence for this sinister plot (see p9).

Unluckily for Mann and his fellow coup-makers, his request has been turned down (at least so far). Harman has insisted that processes are in place to ensure "integrity" in the contest, which involves amongst other things a "special unit" of 48 people working six days a week listening *in their entirety* to two-thirds of recorded phone calls made by union members asking to become party supporters - with half of the remaining third being played back and checked (adding that she has personally listened to some of these calls). Very thorough, Harriet, but have you not got better things to do? Burnham too was less than impressed by Mann's claims, saying on Sky TV that if he has any "evidence" then he needs to send it to Labour HQ, but far more importantly "we're in the middle of a debate that is actually now finally capturing attention" - which is a "good thing" for the party.

But the insults against Corbyn continue. With stunning hypocrisy, Emma Reynolds, the shadow communities secretary, accused Corbyn of being "disloyal", as he had "rebelled against the party literally hundreds of times" - in fact, she tut-tutted, "more than 500 times just in the last 14 years".<sup>5</sup> If Corbyn became leader, Reynolds predicted, he would not be able to "command the loyalty" of his colleagues in parliament when it comes to votes on key issues - he might also "struggle" to appoint a shadow cabinet, she thought, as many Blairites and 'modernisers' would refuse to serve under him. In other words, it is the *right wing* that is being "disloyal" and rebellious - when they are not actively conspiring to overthrow a leader elected by a popular mandate of party members.

Indeed, it is the right wing that is threatening to *split* the party if none of its favoured candidates wins. John Mills, one of Labour's biggest benefactors, who gave £1.6 million during Ed Miliband's leadership, has declared that if Corbyn wins then he "suspects" that there would be "some sort of split", leading to an "SDP-type party" - referring to the last time the right waltzed out of the party with the 'gang of four' (Roy Jenkins, David Owen, Bill Rodgers and Shirley Williams, who formed the Social Democratic Party in 1981). Similarly, John Hutton - the Blairite quisling who worked for the last Tory-led coalition government - has said that a Corbyn victory would "immediately split the party" (and no guessing which way Hutton would jump).

Then again, look at recent remarks by the so-called "Corbyn-lite" Burnham. He may now be trying to distance himself slightly from the excesses of New Labour - hence his comment about how the party has become "frightened by its own shadow" and would not have the "courage or capacity" to create the NHS today.<sup>6</sup> All very true, of course. But in an interview for the *Sunday Mirror*, just like Mills and Hutton, he talks about the "real risk" that Labour could split if the 'modernisers' do not defeat Corbyn - dishonestly saying that the party must use the leadership election to "call time on factionalism and division" (July

26). Come again, brother Burnham? It is *you* and the right wing that is causing "factionalism and division" with your constant talk of splits and the SDP. Pots and kettles.

By contrast, there is the letter to all Labour MPs from leading leftwinger John McDonnell, in which he calls for a halt to the "personalised infighting" that has been accompanied by "talk in the media of splits and breakaways" if Corbyn gets elected.<sup>7</sup> Everybody should "calm down", he continues, and argues for a whole period of consultation after the election that "would ensure the fullest inclusion of everyone within the party in determining the party's strategy for the coming period, its policy programme and its decision-making processes". In this way, he writes, nobody "would feel excluded" and "everybody would have a democratic say". No talk of purging the right from McDonnell or Corbyn (rightly or wrongly).

Meanwhile, getting even nastier, Mann has written a lengthy open letter on his website about Corbyn's "inactions" in the 1980s and 1990s over allegations of widespread child sex abuse in Islington - which "says a lot" about Corbyn's politics, we are invited to believe.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the "so-called 'trendy left' politics of the early 1980s was a contributory factor in covering up child abuse". No attempt here to sow "division", is there? Nothing "personalised" at all.

## Mass sentiment

Far from being a leftwing loony totally out of touch with the 'aspirational' British public, as endlessly insinuated by Corbyn's opponents and an overwhelmingly hostile media (yes, that includes *The Guardian*), he is actually keying into a *mass* leftwing sentiment in society - as proven by numerous surveys and polls on this or that subject or social attitude. Not that we in the CPGB would want to exaggerate the reach of this sentiment or pretend it is held by the majority of the population - which would be self-deception.

But it is certainly the case that perhaps 20% of the country subscribe to views that are *to the left* of where mainstream Labour has been for the last 20 years or so. Here we have Corbyn's natural constituency. A member of the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs, the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Amnesty International, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the Stop the War Coalition - you name it - he has clearly hit a popular chord with his calls for the renationalising of railways and the mail service, the nationalisation of the utilities

and banks (bailed out to the tune of *billions* by the taxpayer), opposition to tuition fees, PFI schemes, cuts in corporation tax, Iraq war, House of Lords, and so on. These are views you can overhear every day on the tube or bus, or encounter all the time at work - nothing 'extremist' about them. Another genuine widespread sentiment is how great it is that Corbyn is on the ballot, livening up the otherwise dull debate - not something they had to read in a far-left paper to realise, even if the rightwing media think we are all stupid.

What happens if Corbyn wins? Here we really are entering politically unknown territory - and rerunning the past is not particularly helpful. Sections of the press are prattling on about Michael Foot, *The Sunday Times* having an allegedly amusing picture of Foot morphing into Corbyn (July 26). What nonsense. Who voted for Foot? Was it through 'one member, one vote' (Omov) and new members flooding into the party, as with Corbyn now? No, the election of Foot was not primarily the result of a leftwing upsurge from below. It was the Parliamentary Labour Party which elected him as a *compromise* candidate. He beat Denis Healy in the second round. The labour bureaucracy wanted a shift to the left in an attempt to *secure Labour's base*, traumatised as it was by the experience of the social contract, which left the party deeply unpopular with the trade union movement. Historically, something similar happened in 1931, when Ramsay MacDonald dismissed the Labour cabinet and formed the National Government. In response, the party expelled him and elected George Lansbury on a pacifist, leftwing ticket - but Lansbury was the candidate of the party *establishment*.

Nothing could be further from the truth with Jeremy Corbyn. He represents a rebellion *against* Labour's establishment, using the weapons *accidentally* supplied by the Labour establishment itself. Omov, 'registered supporter' category, and all the rest - these are classic rightwing innovations that stink of American politics and which the left has always opposed, quite correctly, well aware that the Blairites wanted to use them to swamp the ordinary members with 'sensible' people influenced by *The Sun*, the *Mirror*, the BBC, Channel Four, etc. Communists, on the other hand, positively favour the working class exercising influence and power *collectively* - we want block voting, but done *proportionally* according to delegation, political balance in a particularly union, and so forth. We were always against US-style primaries.

But life itself threw up a weird historical accident: from *above and below*. In the name of opening up the debate to all factions, MPs from all wings of the party found themselves nominating Corbyn (such as the rightwinger, Frank Field), either because of constituency pressure - which existed to a certain degree - or cynical calculation. For instance, the Burnham camp did not want its candidate to be dubbed 'Red Andy' - hence Corbyn could perform the useful function of attracting the arrows of the rightwing press, leaving Burnham free to act the responsible statesman. Or so the plan went. In the end, Corbyn just managed to scrape together the required 35 nominations despite having little support amongst the Parliamentary Labour Party and *initially* a lukewarm reception from the union leaders. Who would have thought that not only Unite, but now Unison, would come out in favour of the left candidate?

Quite wonderfully though, thanks to the Blairite rule changes, ordinary leftwing activists are now wielding the weapons supplied by the right *against the right* - sensibly ignoring the advice of the Socialist Party in England and Wales and the Socialist Workers Party to build an imitation or replica Labour Party mark two. Everything is there to play for.

But it is important to inject a dose of realism. Corbyn's chances of radically changing the LP should not be rated extraordinarily high. There is no Communist Party (except in name), no skilled cadre force in the working class that has a *strategy* and coherent world view. We will inevitably see all sorts of confusion, splits and divisions - good, bad and contradictory. Nevertheless, we are seeing before us a fluidity which would not have existed if we had had a grisly beauty contest between Blairite clones chosen by the *Mirror* - a huge opening up of politics, even if Corbyn comes second.

Things will never be quite the same again ●

eddie.ford@weeklyworker.co.uk

## Notes

1. www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/jeremy-corbyn-opens-up-massive-6154187#ICID=sharebar\_twitter.
2. www.newstatesman.com/politics/2015/07/which-clps-are-nominating-who-labour-leadership-contest.
3. www.newstatesman.com/politics/2015/07/im-more-convicted-ever-jeremy-corbyn-going-win. https://labourfirst.wordpress.com/2015/07/27/an-open-letter-to-progress.
4. www.express.co.uk/news/politics/594282/Jeremy-Corbyn-Emma-Reynolds-disloyalty-claim.
5. 'Andy Burnham: timid Labour would not be up to creating the NHS today', *The Guardian* July 27.
6. www.john-mcdonnell.net/appeal\_to\_labour\_mps\_to\_halt\_infighting\_over\_leadership\_election.
7. www.mann4basselaw.com/an\_open\_letter\_to\_jeremy\_corbyn\_on\_child\_abuse.

# Summer Offensive

## Ten comrades!

The past seven days have produced an unspectacular but solid week for our Summer Offensive - the CPGB's annual fundraising drive, which has a £30,000 collective target this year. We have added a respectable £1,573, which means that our running total is now £15,434. Not bad at all, comrades, but still lagging a little in terms of the pace we need to set ourselves to hit that £30k by August 22, the last day of the campaign. (From past years' experience, we normally should have £20k or thereabouts in the pot by the time of the opening day of our annual school, Communist University, which starts on August 15 this year.)

Let me belatedly thank LW for

donating £50 at the beginning of this month - apologies to the comrade for overlooking this. Then there's the editor of this paper, Peter Manson, and his personal donation of £530, and comrade SC for a useful £200. Also a tip of the hat to comrades TB and MC, who are performing some minor financial miracles in some of our organisation's 'commercial' enterprises. Inspiring stuff, comrades.

I find myself being gently harassed by some comrades to reprise some of the more absurd stories that once circulated on the left about our Summer Offensive and the source of our finances in general. And I can't say I'm not tempted. It's an amusingly perverse and utterly fabricated narrative

that takes in the East German state as was, a well-known national chain of dry-cleaning franchises, MI5 (naturally) and the sale of human organs. So here's the deal. If 10 comrades who have not so far contributed to this year's Summer Offensive stump up over the coming week, I will entertain readers with some of the deliciously stupid things that have been said about our organisation, its approach to politics and to raising the wherewithal needed to finance our political project.

Deal? Then let's see your cash! ●

Mark Fischer

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The *Weekly Worker* is licensed by November Publications under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International Licence: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/legalcode>. ISSN 1351-0150.

# weekly Worker

**Workerism,  
nostalgia and  
vague populism  
will not help**

## Opposition in limbo

The SACP grip over the workers' movement remains strong, writes Peter Manson

What was a growing opposition to the South African Communist Party is now undoubtedly in some disarray.

Earlier this month both the SACP itself and the Congress of South African Trade Unions held a special national congress (SNC), where oppositionists were in a small minority - Cosatu loyalists had in effect rigged the federation's congress by expelling the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa). It had dared to break with the SACP-Cosatu-ANC triple alliance - and, as Numsa was by far the largest Cosatu affiliate, there was now no chance of the opposition winning the day. In both Cosatu and the SACP, a substantial section of the rank and file is looking for a change of course - a break from the 'neoliberalism in the name of socialism' that the African National Congress-led 'national democratic revolution' represents. But in both organisations loyalists did their utmost to ensure, by fair means and foul, that oppositionist voices would be marginalised at the two congresses.<sup>1</sup>

The two oppositionist figureheads are Irvin Jim, Numsa's general secretary, and Zwelinzima Vavi, who had the same job in Cosatu until he was dismissed from his post earlier this year - basically because he had become too outspoken in his criticisms of the ANC's anti-working class agenda. But both had seemed to bank everything on the courts calling a halt to the loyalists' anti-democratic shenanigans - refusing for almost two years to call an SNC despite being constitutionally obliged to do so; suspending and then dismissing Vavi; expelling Numsa without allowing an appeal.

But it goes without saying that the bourgeois courts are not exactly reliable upholders of working class democracy and in the end the opposition in Cosatu was heavily defeated. So what will Vavi and Jim - both former SACP members - do now?

Well, it seems almost certain that they will give up all attempts at winning back Cosatu, despite the fact that nine of its 20 affiliates have to one degree or another expressed opposition to the leadership and sided with the minority on at least some occasions. And even in the loyalist-dominated unions there is a growing rebellion amongst the rank and file, with branches and even regions opposing the leadership line - and usually seeing such opposition repressed by bureaucratic means. But in order to break the grip of the SACP loyalists in a way that actually benefits the working class it is vital to have the correct politics. Workerism, nostalgia and vague populism will not help.

According to the online *Daily Maverick*, the establishment of a rival trade union centre looks more than likely: "The plan is to convene a workers' summit within the next few months to decide, among other things, on whether to form a new federation. Vavi said he is consulting with unions from inside Cosatu and outside on this 'broad' workers' summit."<sup>2</sup>

Ironically this "workers' summit"



Irving Jim and Zwelinzima Vavi: opposition

was conceived precisely as a means of building political opposition to the ANC-SACP-Cosatu alliance - I assume Vavi is talking about the national launch of the United Front, which was set up by Numsa and, in conjunction with a "Movement for Socialism" would aim to establish a new party to contest elections, starting with the 2016 local elections.

But things have not been going according to plan. A commentary in the *Mail and Guardian* states:

The United Front was to be launched nationally in December 2014, but that event was turned into a "preparatory assembly", where delegates found little to agree on except that the ANC was to blame for almost all the woes of workers and the country as a whole. It was then scheduled to launch in April, but in that month Numsa - which came up with the concept and funded the initial push for its creation - announced it would, in fact, launch at the end of June. That launch was postponed because of what was described as a lack of money.<sup>3</sup>

Mazibuko Jara, national secretary of the United Front, responded on the UF website:

On funding, there is no expectation that Numsa will pay for the UF. The preparatory assembly proudly asserted that the front must not depend

on Numsa and that it must finance itself. In the six short months of our existence, we have not had sufficient time to raise enough of the R3.5 million [£178,000] required for the founding conference or the additional millions needed for operations, programmes and campaigns.<sup>4</sup>

Even taking into account the fact that a South African rand is now worth just 5p, surely a political formation can be organised without "millions" in the bank? True, many delegations to a founding conference will have to be subsidised, but I would have thought even amongst the poverty-stricken South African working class some money could be raised locally for that purpose.

Comrade Jara does not deny that the UF launch has twice been postponed, but adds: "we will decide at the end of October when to hold the founding conference".

### UF and Wasp

One of the small groups that has been more than keen for the UF to get off the ground has been the Workers and Socialist Party (Wasp), set up by comrades from Peter Taaffe's Committee for a Workers' International. Wasp was originally established on the initiative of the Democratic Socialist Movement, the CWI affiliate in South Africa, in order to contest the 2014 general election. In true CWI style, the aim was to be a

new "broad" mass party, and the DSM comrades won several local committees of striking platinum workers to sponsor Wasp's launch in 2012.

Wasp appealed to Numsa to throw its weight behind the new formation - in fact the union was virtually invited to come in and take it over. But to no avail. And unfortunately Wasp's election result was stunningly dismal - it won a meagre 8,331 votes (0.05%) across the whole country. Under South Africa's completely proportional electoral system, it needed to pick up one 400th (0.25%) of the total vote to see its top candidate elected, but, despite the mass publicity over the CWI's role in the platinum miners' strike (see below), it got nowhere near that figure.

So much for the new Wasp mass workers' party - a change of plans was called for. Now the UF would have to take over that role and the CWI decided that the DSM and Wasp should "merge" - taking into account the newcomers who had come on board, at least that would mean a slightly larger CWI section. The final DSM posting - announcing that the two groups were to merge and that Wasp was to seek affiliation to the CWI - appeared on its website back in February,<sup>5</sup> and now it appears that the DSM has shut up shop. (Strangely, however, the CWI's own website does not direct inquiries to Wasp, but still shows contact details only for the DSM.<sup>6</sup>)

I mentioned the CWI's role in the 2012 platinum strike - for such a small group it was remarkably able to coordinate some local strike committees - dominated by workers who had left the loyalist-dominated National Union of Mineworkers in disgust as a result of the NUM's increasing collaboration with the mineowners. Because of this role in the strike the CWI was targeted by the ANC, in the shape of secretary-general Gwede Mantashe, who just happens to be a member of the SACP central committee.

Mantashe claimed that in particular a senior DSM figure, Liv Shange, who is a Swedish national married to a South African, was an example of the "foreigners" who were allegedly "at the centre of the anarchy in the platinum belt". There was a concerted attempt to deport the comrade, despite the fact that she had been living in the country since 2004 and had two children by her (now estranged) husband.

Taking advantage of the fact that comrade Shange's spousal visa, giving

her permanent residence in South Africa, had been stolen when she was mugged, the department of home affairs insisted it had "no record" of any such visa (even though she had provided a reference number). Fortunately, a successful campaign, both in South Africa and internationally (there was an official protest from Stockholm), forced the authorities to let comrade Shange and her children back into the country when they returned from a family visit to Sweden in 2013.

But earlier this week, on July 27, comrade Shange, now a member of the Wasp executive committee, was finally forced to leave South Africa following the expiry of her temporary visa. This time there was no protest campaign beforehand - the CWI says such a campaign will be launched "from outside the country",<sup>7</sup> but one cannot help suspecting that, following the break-up of her marriage, comrade Shange is more than content to settle with her children in Sweden, where she originally joined the CWI.

But none of that excuses the disgusting behaviour of the anti-working class ANC and its SACP apologists, not least the despicable Mantashe. Despite its reactionary role, the SACP continues to grow - at this month's SNC it claimed a new high of 230,000 members, confirming its position as the country's second largest party. While this figure is undoubtedly exaggerated - I am reliably informed that only around one in 10 'members' pays any dues - that still amounts to an awful lot of support of one kind or another. Of course, this is connected to the party's role in national and local government - the SACP is the most coherent force within the ANC and its reward has been senior positions in the South African cabinet and in local authorities.

While this position of influence accounts for a large part of the membership growth, it is also the case that many new recruits, particularly among the youth, have been attracted by the party's continued revolutionary - indeed Marxist - rhetoric ●

### Notes

1. See "Two congresses and a rigged victory" *Weekly Worker* July 16 2015.
2. [www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2015-07-17-zwelinzima-vavi-man-on-the-march/#.VbfRnPIViko](http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2015-07-17-zwelinzima-vavi-man-on-the-march/#.VbfRnPIViko).
3. <http://mg.co.za/article/2015-07-16-an-indefinite-pause-on-a-workers-revolution>.
4. <https://unitedfrontsa.wordpress.com/2015/07/25/uf-alive-well-and-united>.
5. [www.socialistsouthafrica.co.za](http://www.socialistsouthafrica.co.za).
6. [www.socialistworld.net/view/33](http://www.socialistworld.net/view/33).
7. <http://workerssocialistparty.co.za/liv-shange-a-farewell-tribute>.

Subscribe			
	6m	1yr	Inst.
UK	£30/€35	£60/€70	£200/€220
Europe	£43/€50	£86/€100	£240/€264
Rest of world	£65/€75	£130/€150	£480/€528

**New UK subscribers offer:  
3 months for £10**

**UK subscribers: Pay by standing order and save £12 a year. Minimum £12 every 3 months... but please pay more if you can.**

Send a cheque or postal order payable to 'Weekly Worker' to:  
Weekly Worker, BCM Box 928,  
London WC1N 3XX

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Tel: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Sub: £/€ \_\_\_\_\_

Donation: £/€ \_\_\_\_\_

**Standing order**

To \_\_\_\_\_ Bank plc \_\_\_\_\_

Branch address \_\_\_\_\_

Post code \_\_\_\_\_ Account name \_\_\_\_\_

Sort code \_\_\_\_\_ Account No \_\_\_\_\_

Please pay to Weekly Worker, Lloyds A/C No 00744310 sort code 30-99-64, the sum of \_\_\_\_\_ every month\*/3 months\* until further notice, commencing on \_\_\_\_\_ This replaces any previous order from this account. (\*delete) Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Name (PRINT) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_