

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



weekly **worker**



**Despite Jeremy Corbyn,
Peter Taaffe insists on being
wrong about Labour Party**

- Letters and debate
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LETTERS



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

Four positions

The Left Unity national conference has given over the first day to debating whether to be or not to be. Left Unity is in essence a struggle between old Labourism and new republicanism. Labourism, reflecting the economism of the left in England, has been and remains by far the dominant tendency. It is the disguise which Trotskyists wear when trying to be populist. Now that Corbyn has pulled the rug from under LU, the forthcoming conference may look like a case of Labourites falling out. Not quite.

This week Nick Wrack says in *The Project*: "There is little point its continuation as a small party with policies indistinguishable from those of Corbyn." True enough. But then he adds: "Unless LU were to turn itself into a party based on the principles and programme of Marxism, there is no reason to exist" - which is more or less the same conclusion as the CPGB.

If the Titanic doesn't change course, it will hit an iceberg sooner or later. However, this is not the full set of sailing routes. Republican socialism has a different plan. Conference resolution 69 argues that Left Unity should continue to build as an independent working class party by realigning itself with Rise in Scotland. The resolution says that "LU has no future as a smaller, sectarian version of the Corbyn Labour Party and conference recognises we cannot continue on this basis for more than a temporary period."

The resolution is about realignment. It is about changing direction before we hit the iceberg. It says: "Noting the rise of the democratic movement in Scotland during and after the referendum and the launch of Rise, Left Unity will work to reject Labour's economism and seek to build an alliance with Rise around the politics of *republicanism, internationalism, socialism and the environment*".

If LU survives this conference, the resolution says that, in order "to make the transition to an alternative on the basis of a radical democratic and social programme", LU should "hold a special conference or national meeting in early 2016 ..., where members can discuss and debate the transition to the new politics needed in response to the Corbyn victory".

This realignment resolution is one of four basic positions identified in the resolutions. These are (1) liquidate, (2) affiliate, (3) carry on as before and (4) realign. These four boil down to three trends - right, centre and left - in the struggle between Labourism, which supports the social monarchy, and republicanism, which demands a social republic and an independent working class party to win that programme.

Corbyn's victory is pulling many former Trotskyists to the right and this is defining the right wing of Left Unity. The harder right is throwing in the towel straightaway and the soft right wants to follow the slower route by trying (and failing) to become an affiliate of the Labour Party. The distinction between 'liquidate' and 'affiliate' is not about principle. Affiliation, when push comes to shove, is slower liquidation.

The call for LU to liquidate as a party is found on resolution 15 from comrades Green, Shaheen, Walker, Godfrey-Wood and Willig. The idea of affiliating to the Labour Party is found in resolutions 20 (Norwich), 23 (Haringey), 27 (Becker and Conrad), 70 (Lambeth) and 74 (Waltham Forest).

The Left Unity centre is identified with the idea of continuing to sail in the same direction. Resolution 48, from comrades Hudson and Burgin, urges LU to continue as an independent party. This stands against the liquidation of LU and should be

supported critically. The fight for a new working class party independent of the Labour Party has to continue. But 'full steam ahead' is not a solution.

Left Unity has to turn to the left and realign itself with progressive democratic forces in Scotland. A left turn requires and demands that LU shifts its politics from social monarchy to social republic and makes a clear break with left unionism.

Just as the Labour Party has moved to the left, so LU must likewise turn to the left if the party is not to be run over by the Labour juggernaut. This is the message from the Scottish referendum to the left in England. So far the left in England has shown no sign of listening. Ears plugged up and eyes tight shut. Keep sailing towards that big white thing on the horizon - let's hope it might be America!

Steve Freeman

Left Unity and Rise

Energetic

The sheriff of Nottingham has spoken. Without any evidence, Ted Hankin, a member or ex-member of the Stalin Society, has accused me of giving uncritical support to Stalin (Letters, November 5).

Others have made similar unsupported claims, which end up in my wastepaper basket. They will remain there until these individuals can provide unfalsified evidence to prove their claims. For some reason these people confuse supporting Stalin in the struggle against Trotsky's ultra-leftism with uncritical support for Stalin. My position has always been that no-one is above criticism. Thus, it is impossible for me to give uncritical support to anyone, which would be a totally unscientific attitude.

While falsely accusing me of uncritical support for Stalin, Ted gives uncritical support to Marx. Ted's debating ploy is to claim that anyone who disagrees with Marx does not understand the doctrine. He also uses this tactic when he claims that I don't understand the theory of peak oil - a theory which Ted and 99% of the Marxist left had never heard of until I brought it up in 2007. The theory is simple: global, conventional oil production reaches a maximum, or peak, which is sustained for a few years, followed by irreversible decline. Falling supply leads to rising prices and rising prices will destroy the economy, if no suitable replacement is found. Think of the German inflation in the 1920s.

I pointed out in my previous letter (October 29) that modern capitalism, M-C-M, was made possible by fossil fuels. Ted agrees, saying, "this is correct, but totally one-sided". Perhaps he can explain how something can be correct, but totally one-sided. Not everything in life is either/or, but this one is. Either fossil fuels made modern capitalism possible or they did not - the same as 'Either Monday follows Sunday or it does not'. Ted says that without international trade and the development of the productive forces fossil fuels would have remained underground. What I am saying is that the development of the productive forces and international trade - ie, modern capitalism - was made possible by fossil fuels. Ted makes reference to the discovery of oil, which didn't have many uses at first. However, the industrial revolution was not originally based on oil, but coal.

Marxism erroneously teaches communists that it was the development of the productive forces which triggered the transition from feudalism to capitalism. The opposite was the case, in that what began the transition was not the development of the productive forces, as Marxism claims, but the decline of the productive forces under feudalism. For instance, the ground for the industrial revolution was laid in England when the main energy source, wood, became scarce due to

the depletion of Britain's forest, which led to the increasing use of coal and mining. When the mines became filled with water as they dug deeper, a means had to be devised to pump the water out, which eventually led to the steam pump, essentially a steam engine, which had other applications.

The development of the productive forces consolidated the transition from feudalism, but did not begin it. Political economy was a reaction to this process, but the classical economists and Marx ignored the fundamental role of the new form of energy, which was beginning to revolutionise production, only referring to it in passing.

Ted betrays his attitude to Marxism, which he claims I don't understand, when he compares it to the natural laws discovered by Newton. But who would confuse Marxism with the natural laws of science other than one who had reduced Marxism to a religion?

Marx shared the 19th century money-centred view of the classical economists he critiqued. Marxism is the apotheosis of this view, which excludes the role of energy. This is why in the 2008 recession no Marxists were able to explain the crisis in terms of rising energy prices. Likewise, no Marxists related the demise of the Soviet Union to the collapse of Soviet oil prices - deliberately engineered by Reagan and Thatcher with the Saudis, who flooded the market with oil, lowering its price. With its roots in 19th century economics, Marxism is an obstacle to a scientific, energy-based understanding of society.

At the political level, it seems that Ted is opposed to the democratic rule of the people on the basis of socialism, as he takes objection to my use of the term 'totalitarianism', which he claims the CIA invented. The origins of this term, or whether it is accurate, is a matter of debate, but it is foolish to imply we shouldn't use it because the other side came up with it first. Those who argue this should denounce Marx for subscribing to the labour theory of value which bourgeois economists used before him.

Finally, Ted calls on me to substantiate what he calls my hostility to Marxism, pompously declaring that he would welcome an intelligent and coherent attack on Marxism, but my continual sniping serves to make me appear a political dilettante. This is rich, considering it comes from someone who confuses the social sciences with Newtonian natural laws, and who feels no obligation to substantiate his uncritical agreement with so much Marxist doctrine. I have made my position clear: one of the reasons why Marxism is obsolete is because it teaches communists to believe that modern society resulted from money rather than the energy revolution.

We have all heard that money makes the world go round (M-C-M). This is not true: it is energy.

Tony Clark

Labour supporter

Sublime

I have just read the article on Rome by Toby Abse ('Scandals in the capital', November 5). A fascinatingly clear insight into the political manoeuvring there, which led to the ousting of the mayor. I was on the edge of my seat.

If this was an article in *Socialism Today* we would get much of it taken up with some small leftwing group that had met with much approval and whose paper sale had raised €20 and sold six copies of *Rome Socialist* - proving that if only the trade union leaders would call for a general strike the capital would fall tomorrow to the Rome Socialist Party.

And then a reminder that 30 years ago the Milan Militant Socialists as part of the Italian Socialist Party had won power and built 4,000 houses and if it wasn't for the treachery of the leadership of the Italian Socialist Party they would have built 4,000 more.

And we get this on every page of *The Socialist* and almost every article. They are not giving their readers any focus. They are doing our heads in. They forget what socialist news should be all about. A comprehensive news light so that we can see the absolute reality. That's the attraction of socialism.

The article by Toby Abse could easily be extended by him into a book on the current political scene in Rome. He paints a marvellous picture, with characters coming in with full life around them, as they actually are in reality. I was fascinated by this glimpse into Rome politics. He brings in the national leadership as well in a restrained manner in order for us to better understand the capital, which is the seat of government, so of national and international importance. With his type of mind, we can bring in the whole of Italy. It's what I want socialist newspapers to be doing.

Too much narrow and small and ignorant-minded opinion is getting in the way in socialist newspapers, which stops us from seeing the world, which stops us from seeing our own country. We need a socialist reformation. With the *Weekly Worker* we have a chance of getting there. The Karl Kautsky archive article was sublime.

Elijah Traven

Hull

Interaction

I said I was glad that the opponent of dialectical logic, Rosa Lichtenstein, had gone as far as praising historical materialism, because, of course, dialectical thinking is the starting point for it. However, she accuses me of not defining 'quality', which I did (Letters, November 5). She may not have taken this on board because, much to her distaste, I was quoting Hegel (but again only as a starting point).

Did Rosa know that Marx agreed with her that Hegel was mystical? Marx, however, put it like this: "The correct laws of the dialectic are already included in Hegel, albeit in mystical form. It is necessary to strip it of this form" (Letter to Dietzen, 1876). Which Marx did, by adding new material through a critique of economics and politics, modifying concepts like objectification and further researching phenomena like the mode of production and the struggle of classes.

The system limits of the whole are, of course, those of the universe (or multiverse), but we can't discuss that as a whole (too unwieldy): we can only isolate parts to study and then relate them to other parts. Still, the universe is a totality (what else is the Big Bang?) but made up of differences - things that connect, interact and modify. How else can we speak of it?

On qualitative change: something really new occurs only occasionally and due to an accumulation of additions or losses. Those able to perceive it - that is, animal life - can tell there's been a change by the effects of the new thing on other things and the different uses to which it can be put. Why else do we need the concept of 'new'?

The characterisation of such major change as a 'leap' is a metaphor and, like most metaphors, an imperfect analogy. A leap is an acceleration of change. In one field, like geology, a leap won't have the same 'duration' as in others. How long did it take for a social and political crisis in tsarist Russia to become a revolutionary state and what was the 'tipping point'? This is not to say that there exist foregone conclusions. As Sidney Hook put it, in distinguishing Marxism from Hegel's closed system, "The extent, the strength and the rate of interaction between the polar elements within any situation depend upon the specific factors involved. They cannot be deduced from the general formula of dialectical movement" (*From Hegel to Marx*).

The new syntheses - these major changes - are such that they contain aspects of different parts which, when

preserved, may remind us of the previous situation. Inside the Earth there is hot magma, molten rock, which was once on its surface, but is now found at the core, while its surface possesses a habitable atmosphere. The overall relationships have altered and one of the effects of this is that the planet can support life. The Soviet Union had a communist party and lacked the law of value, but due to an undemocratic centralism the working class was not in control.

I'd say that it's *evolution* that forms the link (mediation, connection) between nature and the human/social dialectic. A process starts with interactive changes within the Big Bang, up to and including the combines that are planets, and producing in at least one spot the synthesis of hydrogen and oxygen known as water. Through that water there emerges the subsequent evolution of life on Earth, with an accumulation of changes distinguishing vegetable, then animal, form and the development of humans and their societies. Some details of this have yet to be discovered, but I submit that the process as a whole is one of new qualities emerging through interaction; new things displaying - for us interested humans - new sets of relationships, internal and external: dialectic.

Mike Belbin

London

Critical support

I was very interested to read Jim Creegan's article on the supportability or otherwise of Bernie Sanders' Democratic primary campaign ('Democrats divided', October 29).

Whilst I think that an overly dismissive tone poisons his appraisal of the senator's chances (yes, Sanders is unlikely to win, but I for one wouldn't bet against him with absolute confidence), the comrade's contribution to the debate is useful. Certainly he is right to mock the apparent Committee for a Workers' International notion that Sanders would be better placed running as an independent - ludicrous, considering that his run *within* the Democrat framework is precisely what has been giving him a platform to reach the electorate. Comrade Creegan also cast aspersions on Sanders' much touted socialist credentials: also correct, since in reality he is a social democrat.

That said, I cannot agree with the idea that any of this automatically renders Sanders unsupportable. He represents a qualitative and quantifiable movement on the political spectrum, the likes of which has not been seen in America for some time. For that alone actual socialists should be looking to make hay whilst the sun shines - why not give him critical support, while at the same time explaining what *we* mean by socialism? At the same time, there should be no support whatsoever for that arch-statist, Hillary Clinton. And I don't worry, as comrade Creegan does, about Sanders bowing out of the race to cheerlead for her. Just because we critically support the man does not mean we need to follow him over the cliff!

In any case the comrade is so busy arguing that Sanders can't win, he never seriously engages with the possibility that he might. What then? If it is fanciful to suggest that a Sanders victory might stem the rightward tide, then the alternative would surely be the kind of civil war we have seen in Labour as of late. Creegan is right that the Democrats are a real obstacle to left politics in the US. However, the conclusion this should lead us to is that we *should* support Sanders - chaos amongst the Democrats is surely a pretty worthwhile consolation prize? Ultimately, the way forward for the left necessitates that the Democrats be replaced as the recipient of workers' votes by a working class party. Giving critical support to a self-acclaimed socialist might help take us nearer that aim.

Tom Munday

@tommundaycs

SOCIALISM 2015

Contradictions exposed

School shines fresh light on SPEW's disarray over the Labour Party, says Peter Manson

Undoubtedly Socialism 2015 - the weekend school organised by the Socialist Party in England and Wales on November 7 and 8 - was a big success. There were 36 different debates over three time slots, giving you a choice of 12 at any particular moment.

What is more, the atmosphere was very friendly and open, with rather more time allowed for contributions from the floor than is the case at the Socialist Workers Party's Marxism event. At one session I attended - 'Counterrevolution against Corbyn: how do we resist?', introduced by SPEW national committee member Clive Heemskerck - when the chair advised me that my four minutes were almost up, comrade Heemskerck intervened to say, "Take another couple of minutes, Peter". In his opening remarks he had noted that there were comrades present who he knew would disagree with what he had to say, and stated that they were welcome to put forward those disagreements.

According to the SPEW website, 2015 was "the Socialist Party's best Socialism weekend yet", with "up to 1,000" comrades present.¹ That seems about right - certainly the Saturday rally, held in the 900-seat Camden Centre, was packed. But I must say that holding two rallies in such a short weekend (the event does not start until 3pm on the Saturday) is rather over the top. Surely it would have been better to devote the time used up by one of them to another debate session.

As you might expect, the weekend was dominated by the question of the Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn and how we should relate to it. That too was more than welcome, since SPEW has been thrown into some disarray by comrade Corbyn's election. After all, the comrades had insisted for the last two decades that Labour was now just another bourgeois party - which surely ought to have ruled out the overwhelming victory of a self-avowed socialist.

The SPEW comrades are, unfortunately, forced to adopt all sorts of contortions in order to avoid admitting that their characterisation of Labour had been wrong, and I will concentrate in this article on this central question, reporting on the two sessions on Labour I attended, plus the two rallies - which were also dominated by the Corbyn phenomenon.

Fixed 'settlement'

First, the session introduced by comrade Heemskerck. This, he said, would feature five themes:

1. Corbyn's victory represents the best opportunity so far to overturn the "Thatcher/Blair settlement".
2. That settlement had been part of an international trend to "prevent the working class regaining the Labour Party as a vehicle for working class representation".
3. There is a civil war in the Labour Party, but "the terrain is not favourable".
4. Which is why the struggle cannot be limited to the Labour Party itself and the outcome "may well be a new workers' party".
5. When it comes to our historical task, "reclaiming" the Labour Party is not our final goal. Which is why preserving the Socialist Party is "an essential part" of defeating the anti-Corbyn counterrevolution.

Comrade Heemskerck said he did not want to dwell on SPEW's analysis of the Labour Party, which he knew was controversial. But he could see there were those in the audience who think "nothing has changed" and



Will not, cannot see what is in front of them

looked forward to hearing their point of view.

Returning to the "ferocious class war" against Corbyn, he said that SPEW's plan was to open up a dialogue with Labour councillors through the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, and try to build joint action against council cuts. SPEW is arguing in the unions that we should stand against pro-cuts Labour candidates. A letter from Tusc to local Labour councillors was widely circulated at Socialism, inviting them to meet "a delegation of trade unionists and anti-austerity activists", with a view to reaching agreement on supporting the idea of "legally compliant no-cuts budgets".

There was no principled reason why socialists should not join Labour and work within it, continued comrade Heemskerck, but today Labour is completely different from, say, the 1980s. Internal democracy "does not exist" and the unions' role has been drastically reduced.

That is why we should not see the Labour rule book as "the bible". Which means we should encourage candidates to stand against Labour where necessary, although "not indiscriminately", and this should be combined with a serious campaign to win over local Labour Parties to the right side on what SPEW sees as the central question - austerity. If current councillors and prospective candidates - who, in 2016 at least, are likely to be dominated by the right, since they were largely selected before Corbyn's victory - cannot be persuaded to oppose all cuts, Tusc will aim to stand against them.

Comrade Heemskerck said it was wrong to "overstate" the movement that took Corbyn to the leadership - it cannot be compared to the anti-war movement of 2003, for instance.

But it still represented a "political earthquake" (a phrase we were to hear several times over the weekend) and if it was to succeed it must engage in serious discussions with "the Socialist Party and others".

In the debate that followed a SPEW comrade said he had been inspired by Corbyn's victory, but "won't join Labour", while another said the new leader was, after all, a "prisoner of the Parliamentary Labour Party". This theme - the odds are stacked against us, so it's not worth joining the fight inside Labour - was a recurring one. A SPEW student noted that on the recent student demonstration there was, as far as he knew, no-one present from Momentum, the campaign set up to support Corbyn within the party - it seemed more like "inertia" to him. But what can you expect when the "Blairites control everything"? At this point, a comrade from the International Bolshevik Tendency asked, "How much do we care about this?" After all, what really mattered was the mobilisation of a "movement on the streets".

In my contribution I took up comrade Heemskerck's invitation to criticise SPEW's analysis of the Labour Party. I agreed that it would have been absurd to have said "nothing has changed" under Blair - the bourgeois pole of this bourgeois workers' party was in the ascendancy as never before, with the working class pole more marginalised than ever. But the continued existence of these two poles only served to demonstrate that Labour had not become just another "bourgeois party" - a fact reinforced by Corbyn's victory: could such a phenomenon have arisen in actual bourgeois parties, such as the Tories or Liberal Democrats?

I reminded comrades that Corbyn

ACTION

CPGB podcasts

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

London Communist Forum

Sunday November 15, 5pm: Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, followed by open discussion and reading group. Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. This meeting: introduction to Ralph Miliband's *Parliamentary socialism*. Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk.

Radical Anthropology Group

An introduction to human origins
Tuesday November 17, 6.45pm: 'A tomb with a view? Megaliths, skyscape and folklore in western Iberia'. Speaker: Fabio Silva. Daryll Forde seminar room, Anthropology Building, 14 Taviton Street (off Gordon Square), London WC1 (nearest tube: Euston). Talks are free, all welcome.

Organised by Radical Anthropology Group: radicalanthropologygroup.org.

Health through peace

Friday November 13, Saturday November 14, 10am to 4pm:

Conference, Friends House, 173 Euston Road, London, NW1.

Discussing the impact of war on healthcare.

Organised by Medact: www.medact.org.

Unite the Resistance

Saturday November 14, 11am to 5pm: Annual conference, Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church, 235 Shaftesbury Avenue, London WC2. Speakers include shadow chancellor John McDonnell.

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

Caring, survival and justice

Saturday November 14, Sunday November 15, 9am to 5pm:

International women's conference, Hampstead Old Town Hall, 213 Haverstock Hill, London NW3. No to the tyranny of the market.

Organised by Women of Colour and Global Women's Strike:

womenofcolour@globalwomensstrike.net.

Defend the Right to Protest

Sunday November 15, 11am: Annual conference, SOAS students union, Thornhaugh Street, London WC1.

Organised by Defend the Right to Protest:

www.defendtherighttoprotest.org.

10 Years of BDS

Thursday November 19, 7pm: Public meeting on anniversary of Israel boycott campaign. Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester M1.

Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign:

www.palestinecampaign.org.

No to austerity

Saturday November 21, 1.30pm: Rally, Central Hall, Westminster Storey's Gate, London SW1. Speakers include John McDonnell and Yanis Varoufakis.

Organised by Trade Union Coordinating Group: www.tucg.org.uk.

Left Unity

Saturday November 21, 11am to 5.30pm, Sunday November 22, 11am to 5pm: Conference, the Venue, first floor, Student Central, Malet Street, London WC1.

Organised by Left Unity:

<http://leftunity.org/national-conference-2015-pre-conference-timetable>.

Protest the autumn statement

Nottingham: Saturday November 21, 2pm, Old Market Square, Nottingham NG1.

www.facebook.com/events/101187886910160.

Eastbourne: Saturday November 21, 11am, Bankers Corner, Eastbourne BN21.

www.facebook.com/events/416174951911966.

Cambridge: Saturday November 21, 12 noon, Guildhall, Market Square, Cambridge CB2.

Bristol: Tuesday November 24, 5.15pm, Cascade Steps, Habourside, Bristol BS1.

www.facebook.com/events/981806018524290.

Doncaster: Tuesday November 24, 12 noon, Mansion House, 45 High Street, Doncaster DN1.

www.facebook.com/events/531397327008779.

Newcastle: Tuesday November 24, 5pm, City Library, Civic Centre, Barras Bridge, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1.

Swindon: Tuesday November 24, 5pm, Crumpled Waterfall, Canal Walk, Swindon SN1.

www.facebook.com/events/454566661418849.

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

Out of credit

Tuesday November 24, 6pm: Protest against chancellor's autumn statement. Assemble Trafalgar Square, London WC2, for march to Downing Street, London SW1.

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

Combating climate change

Sunday November 29, 12 noon: National demonstration. Assemble Park Lane, London W1, for march to Millbank, London SW1.

Organised by Time to Act: www.timetoact2015.org.

People's Assembly

Saturday December 5, 10am to 5pm: Annual conference, Friends Meeting House, 173-177 Euston Road, London NW1.

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

CPGB wills

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

SOCIALISM 2015

had won the first preference of half of the individual party members, whose number had since been swollen by many thousands more. The situation now is that the pole that represented working class interests (in however distorted a form) dominates amongst the rank and file - and it has captured the very top of the party. It is absurd to claim that because the pro-capitalist wing control the PLP and the Labour machine it is destined to remain in the ascendancy forever. We should not stand on the sidelines, but try to influence the outcome of the civil war. We should urge individuals to join and all unions to affiliate/reaffiliate - I predicted that both the Fire Brigades Union and the Rail, Maritime and Transport union would do so, despite SPEW urging them to stay out.

I commented that there was something dishonest about SPEW's current position: Labour had by coincidence become a bourgeois party when the Militant Tendency, SPEW's forerunner, was witch-hunted. And now we are told that if Corbyn does succeed in defeating the right that would once again produce a "new party". I ended by quoting the *Weekly Worker* headline on SPEW's position for the last two decades: "Admit you were wrong!" (November 5).

Roger Bannister, who is currently contesting the election for general secretary of the Unite union, was typical of the SPEW comrades who intervened, saying that Corbyn had won "because of the anti-austerity movement" and now our position should be to build that movement "inside and outside the Labour Party". In reality SPEW's position is to carry on as before, calling for united union action and standing aside from the struggles "inside" the party.

Although several comrades seemed to express some reservations about the leadership's position, there was only one coherent SPEW dissenting voice in the two sessions on Labour I attended: Alec Price from Kent. Comrade Price reiterated that Corbyn's victory "proved" that Labour was not a bourgeois party - it was a "very, very, very bourgeois" workers' party, in his view. While he would not rule out standing candidates "exceptionally" against Labour in next year's elections, and it was right to continue "pushing Tusc", it would be a mistake to stand widely.

One problem, he said, was that people who had previously stood for Tusc (whose ideas he described as similar to those of Jeremy Corbyn) had now joined Labour, as had some SPEW members. In some areas, comrades are being

a bourgeois workers' party was "just semantics" - it "doesn't change what we do". And, directing his comment in my direction, he did not "remember a headline in the *Weekly Worker* saying Corbyn was going to win" (in fact once he got on the ballot we did indeed predict a Corbyn victory).

Others tried to put flesh on SPEW's 'official pessimism' over the outcome of Labour's internal civil war. One asked, if the FBU and RMT reaffiliate and "Corbyn gets kicked out", what then? Another said that Labour was "never going to come back - it will always be Blairite".

In reply to my prediction about reaffiliation, a comrade remarked: "I wish I had Peter's crystal ball." She said that re-affiliation would cost the RMT a quarter of a million pounds and it "would gain almost nothing". Instead of volunteering for the Labour "straitjacket", that money should be used "inside and outside the Labour Party in support of Jeremy Corbyn". That would make a "much bigger impact". What exactly "inside" the Labour Party means is anyone's guess.

Several comrades noted that Labour's civil war was "one-sided", with the right doing the attacking and the left attempting to conciliate. But some seemed uncertain about the correct response: Labour painted a "mixed picture", said one, and "eventually we will work out which way to go".

A comrade who described herself as an ex-Labour councillor, who was expelled and stood this year for Tusc, was nevertheless confident that it would be possible to deselect rightwingers. However, "Unless people from outside strengthen Monument, we won't win." We need to "start being visible" and put forward a left agenda.

In his response, comrade Heemskerk remarked that the discussion had been excellent - "as you'd expect", in view of the current "historical turning point". Replying to comrade Price and myself, he asked, "Can you imagine Bernie Sanders winning in the Democratic Party?" In other words, it was possible for a "socialist" to become the leader, even though the US Democrats were obviously a bourgeois party. Of course, Labour and the Democrats had "different histories", but the unions also have a role in the latter. However, "Do they have control? No, they don't, either in Labour or the Democrats".

Admittedly there remained a "trace element" of the former bourgeois workers' party, but in this situation it would be wrong for the RMT to

"pour in millions of pounds" to "fund the compliance unit". Comrade Heemskerk acknowledged the CPGB's position on democratisation of Labour and said he agreed with the points I made about the pro-capitalist wing being dominant. But it was not just ideological. The Blairites had imposed structural, constitutional and organisational changes that made "winning back the Labour Party almost impossible".

Leaving aside the remark about "winning back" Labour - as though the party had ever really been ours - I find this utterly unconvincing. Why is it not possible to take over the Labour machine from the right and force through democratisation? That went unexplained - you just have to accept it can't be done.

Mixing up his sporting metaphors slightly, comrade Heemskerk said that this is "not a game of cricket; there are no Queensberry rules." In fact it was "class war", which meant we had to "put forward a fighting programme" - to which he added the usual enigmatic formula, "as much inside as outside the party". Such a fight "could result in a revolutionary party with just a handful of MPs - but with the mass movement behind it." In this situation we had to be "careful about sacrificing our ability to act independently". As if individuals joining or unions affiliating meant that was bound to be the case.

Bolshevik analogy

The question of Labour also dominated the Saturday evening rally, where SPEW and Committee for a Workers' International comrades addressed us under a banner which read: "Organise, strike, resist! To smash Tory austerity."

SPEW EC member and chair of the rally, Claire Laker-Mansfield, referred to the "historic times" and the "political earthquake" (that phrase again) caused by Corbyn's victory. "Socialism is back!" she assured us. Chris Baugh, assistant general secretary of the

PCS union, said that the outlawing of Militant had been "part of the move to capture the Labour Party for Blairism", while Suzanne Muna of the Unite executive reported that general secretary Len McCluskey had to be "pushed" to do everything to get Corbyn on the ballot paper (even though she had wanted Unite to disaffiliate).

The CWI and SPEW had been lifted by the news of the re-election last week of Kshama Sawant of the CWI's Socialist Alternative as Seattle city councillor. Comrade Laker-Mansfield not only stated that the US group had "won the confidence of working class people": she also noted that Bernie Sanders was "standing as a socialist" and had made a "call for revolution".

The best speaker was Paul Murphy TD, who represents the Anti-Austerity Alliance in the Irish parliament, but I will concentrate here on the intervention of SPEW general secretary Peter Taaffe. He waxed lyrical about the "re-emergence of the class struggle in tremendous form", referring to general strikes in Greece and Spain and the recent victory of students in South Africa in forcing a retreat over tuition fees.

Then there was "the election of Jeremy Corbyn, allied with the re-election of Kshama Sawant". He stated: "All bourgeois parties are in crisis, including the social democrats - or, to be more precise, the ex-social democrats." According to SPEW 'theory', it was not just Labour that changed its fundamental character following the expulsion of *Militant's* editorial board - all social democratic parties became bourgeois pure and simple. And if Corbyn does defeat the right, what emerges will be "essentially a new party". But SPEW will not lift a finger to aid the internal process - "We won't collaborate or join a party still attacking the working class". Of course, Labour governments during the Militant era never 'attacked the working class', did they?

Interestingly, comrade Taaffe likened today's Labour Party to the situation in Russia in December 1922, when Lenin had commented that the Bolsheviks were still presiding over the tsarist state, to which they had provided "only a soviet veneer".² Similarly Labour is still a Blairite formation, said comrade Taaffe, with only a "veneer of Corbyn". He used the phrase "dual power" apparently in relation to both.

The following day, in the session he addressed entitled 'Momentum, defending Corbyn and the fight against austerity', I asked comrade Taaffe how

far we ought to take this analogy. If he had been around in 1922, would he have urged workers not to intervene directly in the struggle for control of the Russian state?

That session, by the way, had been advertised as featuring Jon Lansman of Momentum, but comrade Lansman had thought better of it after *The Sun* ran a story headed "Corbyn aide to join ex-Militant leaders to plot battle for Labour's soul".³ The story quoted rightwing Labour MP John Mann as condemning the appearance of this "key Jeremy Corbyn aide" and saying: "Jon Lansman should be on the doorstep registering people to vote in the Oldham by-election, meeting real people."

Opening the session, comrade Taaffe said that the withdrawal was "regrettable" - it "doesn't show much confidence". But almost immediately, in relation to Corbyn and Labour, he went on to say: "The rightwing press doesn't have the power it once had!"

In support of his argument that Labour was no longer "a workers' party at bottom", he contrasted the current situation to that of the 1960s, when, he said, Labour was forced to retreat by internal opposition over both Harold Wilson's desire to join the US in waging the Vietnam war and Barbara Castle's 'In place of strife' anti-union package. Once again it was assumed that today's party, even with Corbyn at the helm and with a groundswell of leftwing sentiment at the base, would not be susceptible to such pressure. No, the "character of the Labour Party has changed" - end of story.

He reported some correspondence between SPEW and comrade Lansman, who had pointed out that, if SPEW wanted Labour to "return to its roots as a federal organisation",⁴ allowing SPEW and others to become affiliates, it must "give up standing against Labour".

In the meantime, Tusc would not be wound up, he said, and a "sneer against Tusc" for its poor performance in the May 2015 elections is actually "a sneer against the pioneers of the labour movement" - many of whom also recorded modest results at first. Tusc's position in relation to Labour candidates was: "You give a pledge you won't impose cuts and we will consider not standing against you" (my emphasis).

But comrade Taaffe said he expected the plea would by and large fall on deaf ears - opening the way for Tusc to stand against Labour (and in support of Corbyn). In fact Tusc national chair Dave Nellist stated at the closing rally on Sunday that the coalition would be "prepared to stand as widely" next year as it did in May, when it stood over 600 council candidates.

In a conversation with comrade Heemskerk after one of the sessions I put it to him that there is such a thing as tactics - there is no principle that tells us we *must* stand candidates against the Labour right. He conceded that this is correct - and went so far as to undertake that if comrades Corbyn and McDonnell asked Tusc not to stand against Labour anywhere, he personally would be prepared to consider their request.

Comrade Heemskerk also insisted that SPEW's characterisation of Labour as a bourgeois party had nothing to do with the witch-hunt of Militant's supporters. In line with a worldwide tendency affecting social democracy following the collapse of Stalinism, Labour under Blair had renounced its origins as a workers' party. Unfortunately,

"begged" to join Labour - "We need people like you right now," one member had told him.

'Official pessimism'

But another comrade retorted that all this talk about a bourgeois party vs

Peter Taaffe: no master strategist



Clive, this is contradicted by life itself: Labour's working class wing is (complete with reformist and nationalist illusions) alive and kicking.

But back to the Peter Taaffe session. He ended his opening speech by stating: "If Jeremy Corbyn is blocked, he must go outside Labour and join with us to form a new party." He said this with a straight face without a trace of irony.

More than 10 people

One of the first to speak from the floor was comrade Price, who pointed out: "There is no duty or principle to stand against pro-cuts Labour candidates." In his view it was unwise to repeat Tusc's 2015 foray in the new circumstances. In his opinion, many "Labour members are confused" and Momentum was uncertain about its strategy: "Why don't we help them out?"

In response to this and my own intervention, SPEW comrades came up with statements like "affiliation would make us a prisoner of Labour" and it would mean "keeping our mouths shut for the next five years". One comrade thought: "The same logic would have taken us into the Green Party or the SNP." Another comment was: "The idea that we can just step in and not be noticed..." And a different comrade thought that it was SPEW's duty to "orientate people in the Labour Party and win them to our party".

Finally, with his eyes fixed on me, one comrade said: "This isn't a party of 10 people." SPEW is an organisation with 2,500 members and "it makes a difference what we do". Even if it was true that the nature of Labour is now changing, he added, SPEW had "the right characterisation for 20-odd years".

In an amusing interlude, the comrade, looking at me again, said: "I know Peter will write an article for the *Weekly Worker*" about the discussion. But comrade Taaffe looked slightly taken aback at this and said, "Me?" No, no, not you, comrade: Peter Manson.

But comrade Taaffe regained his composure and began his reply by referring to me: "I read your contributions avidly," he said (this time with more than a touch of irony, I fear). He claimed that "The CPGB has switched in one mighty leap from criticising us for not being revolutionary enough" to its current position (ie, of adopting a serious strategy in relation to Labour). It obviously does not enter the comrade's head that you can be totally principled and revolutionary, while at the same time offering critical but tangible support to left reformists in their battle against the Labour right.

His reply to my question about the analogy with Russia and the Bolsheviks was less than clear, but I understood him to mean that, while Labour with a veneer of Corbyn could be compared to tsarism with a veneer of Bolsheviks, it did not follow that the attitude of revolutionaries towards both phenomena ought to be identical.

He also responded to my suggestion that Corbyn's victory disproved SPEW's characterisation of Labour as a bourgeois party by asking, "What about the Democratic Party and Sanders?" He went on: "Out of the Liberal Party came the Labour Party" - which obviously meant that out of the current (bourgeois) Corbyn-led party could come a (genuine) Labour Party mark two. He seized on Toby Abse's comment in the debate, to the effect that Blair's aim of transforming Labour into a British version of the Democrats had been 95% successful: "I'll go along with that." But he ignored comrade Abse's subsequent remark that we now have "six months to win the battle" - there is "still a chance to get the Labour Party back".

Comrade Taaffe asked: "Why should we wind up Tusc when the Labour left is weak and the issue is not yet decided?" More contradiction: if "the issue is not yet decided", why has SPEW written off the possibility of the left gaining the ascendancy within Labour - even if it takes rather longer than comrade Abse's six months?

Comrade Taaffe concluded by referring once again to Jon Lansman, who had told him in relation to Tusc: "Your project has failed." To which comrade Taaffe retorted indignantly: "We brought down Thatcher in the poll tax struggle!"

He did concede, however, that SPEW was "flexible" and added enigmatically: "You won't expect me to reveal what we'll do in six months time."

Socialism is back!

As for the final rally, SPEW was pleased to give a platform to Peter Pinkney, president of the RMT, who stated in relation to Tusc and the Labour Party: "I am in charge of the constitution - nothing has changed. We will still be supporting Tusc." Mind you, that could change after the union's next conference, I suspect. Comrade Pinkney, a former 'official communist', ended his contribution by declaring: "Revolutions are not started from the top. Go back to your unions, demand a general strike now!"

Roger Bannister, referring to the Unison general secretary election, which is now taking place, reported that the union is currently affiliated to Labour "on the basis of only a third of members opting to pay the political fund". But "Our 'influence' [in Labour] has produced nothing." He said that all four candidates contesting the general secretary post "claim to be Corbyn supporters", but only he insisted that Unison should not "give money to Liz Kendall", but only to anti-cuts Labour candidates. He was, however, silent on the question of affiliation itself, except to say that "millions of pounds go to a party that does nothing for us". Comrade Bannister then asked: "Will Jeremy Corbyn change that? Let's wait and see."

Comrade Nellist, for his part, noted that, while there were "two parties inside Labour", the next voting opportunity for new members would be to decide the party's candidates for the 2017 elections (which only goes to show that the party faces a long-drawn-out battle between left and right, and a little patience is required).

SPEW deputy general secretary Hannah Sell concluded proceedings with the obligatory reference to "one of the best Socialisms we've ever had". Comrades had donated just under £30,000 at the previous day's rally and this "enthusiasm reflects political developments - socialism is back!" Jeremy Corbyn's election was "only the beginning", she cried. We must aim for the "nationalisation of the commanding heights" and "begin to build a socialist society".

That summed up pretty well SPEW's version of 'socialism' - wide-ranging state ownership in a single country. I hope comrade Taaffe will forgive me for restating that this dismal national reformism, despite SPEW's rejection of a serious approach to Labour, is "not revolutionary enough" ●

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Notes

1. www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/21705/10-11-2015/socialism-2015-socialist-ideas-back-on-the-agenda.
2. www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspaper/amersocialist/deutscher02.htm.
3. www.sunnation.co.uk/corbyn-aide-to-join-ex-militant-leaders-to-plot-battle-for-labours-soul.
4. www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/21705/10-11-2015/socialism-2015-socialist-ideas-back-on-the-agenda.

Following the crowd

The Socialism 2015 event was marked by a distinct lack of new ideas, writes Comissaress



Socialism rally: well attended

Having been to a grand total of four such leftwing schools, I now consider myself a veteran, very well-acquainted to the tendency skirmishes, Marx/Lenin/whoever quoting contests and bad coffee (oh yeah, and the generally very good debates) that usually ensue at these events.

I went to the school hosted by the Socialist Party in England and Wales expecting pretty much the same thing (except that I hoped the coffee would be better), and I thought I would disagree with quite a few of the points made in the discussions, considering SPEW's politics. This excited me, not just because tendency wars are a bit of a guilty pleasure of mine (blame Reddit), but because having many conflicting opinions, of course, makes for a good atmosphere and a chance to learn something new. So, after having to persuade my parents once again that, no, we were not going to blow up any police buildings - however satisfying that would be - I left for the event feeling pretty pumped.

For the most part, it was a pretty good event, with pretty good discussions, and I even got to eliminate a university from my future application list, because the building was so ridiculously difficult to navigate. It was quite a bit bigger than I thought it would be, with both sessions I attended pretty full and lots of people milling around the building, which made it quite nice and buzzy.

The first session I attended was on art and the Russian Revolution, which became a general discussion on proletarian culture and the relevance of art to the communist movement. Everyone who attended this meeting was mostly in agreement, but one thing I noticed about it was the partial realisation of one of the stereotypes I, at least, have about Trotskyists and Bolsheviks in general: that they venerate whichever figure they theoretically align with. In this case, this involved highlighting the miraculous prophetic powers of Trotsky in predicting the degeneration of the revolution and the culture surrounding it, and other ways in which he was totally right about everything. Even anarchists, who for all their misconceptions about revolution and power actually predicted the degeneration of the revolution in Russia before anyone else did, generally do not have this tendency to play up their miraculous prophetic powers or venerate certain figures; I have mostly seen this behaviour from various Bolshevik tendencies, and it was quite interesting to see how much of it there was at an actual Trotskyist event.

The real action, though, took place at the second session I attended, which was on Corbyn (having a session on Corbyn is practically compulsory at these events right now) and socialist involvement in the Labour Party. Since I was vaguely familiar with SPEW's position (or what was their position until recently, at least), that attempting to use the Labour Party as a vehicle for working class struggle has now become futile and that a new party needs to be built outside Labour - a position which seems to be a more moderate version of my own - I was looking forward to maybe, just maybe, hearing some sensible, non-hyperbolic thoughts on Corbyn.

It looks as though the curse of youthful optimism had struck again, unfortunately. The meeting was lively, interesting and provoked a lot of discussion, but I really heard nothing new. The first thing I noted about this meeting was the general nostalgia. And it really irritates me to have to write this, because, although I certainly do not buy into the obsession some people on the left have with 'modernising left theory' - an endeavour which most often involves the distortion of concepts, academic gibberish, or both - the obstinate refusal of much of the left to acknowledge *in practice* that we are living in a different era from the Bolsheviks or the trade union organisers of the early 20th century or to move on from past events within the left is arguably much of the reason behind our failure to grow as a political force.

Participants in this discussion often sounded as though they had mistakenly walked into a time machine at some point in the 20th century, waxing nostalgic about Labour's foundations in the trade union movement, when workers had an influence in Labour during the post-war period (even when Attlee was suppressing strikers, I presume) and the - ahem - successes of the Militant Tendency before it was expelled and began denouncing everything related to Labour. Between the expulsion of Militant and the rise of Corbyn, I do not think SPEW members would have been seen dead doing this, but suddenly, now that Corbynism, which is itself riddled with nostalgia, is gaining support amongst socialists as a slightly less awful way to manage capitalism, every instance of socialist involvement in Labour has become something to daydream about with glazed eyes rather than criticise as a wasted effort. This is yet another example of the damage which can be caused by seeing Corbyn as the redeemer of socialism in Labour: it inspires this sort of 'golden age'

mentality which I saw repeatedly last weekend.

This leads nicely into the second observation: no-one seemed to have anything new to say about Corbyn. It is almost as though all socialists have agreed on a certain 'line' to take on this issue: that, while Corbyn is not going to be the Lenin of 2020, it is worth supporting him and the party he leads because social democrats never ever backtrack on their promises, never ever mismanage the economy and thereby have knock-on effects on the workers, never ever pass anti-worker legislation and are always totally distinguishable from their rightwing counterparts and raise class-consciousness without fostering any illusions at all. This does not display any historical amnesia in the slightest. Right.

Of course, SPEW has a slight variation on this line, in that it calls for a new party to be built as well as for involvement in and democratisation of Labour, but I am almost certain that this is entirely to avoid being seen as inconsistent and that in actuality they do want to extend the same sort of support to Corbyn as most other socialist groups have proclaimed to be extending.

Although I have huge problems with this line and with the notion that Labour was or ever will be a workers' party in any sense of the term, this is not the main issue here. My main problem is that there seems to be no-one at all offering any take on the Corbyn phenomenon other than the generally accepted line. We all rushed to pay our £3, dig out those old Labour Party badges and prepare for the end of austerity and a perfect platform from which to raise class-consciousness and awareness as soon as we heard that Corbyn had won the Labour leadership election, and this seems to apply to every organisation. The left excels at having arguments over anything and everything, but, when a meaningful argument about where to go next is really needed, turns out we all agree.

Which makes me wonder: is the left scared of new ideas? All of the conversation surrounding the Corbyn phenomenon seems to revolve around 'reclaiming' the Labour of the past, becoming involved 'again' in Labour, 'regaining' something that we once had and have now lost. It seems to me that our priorities should be completely different. Instead of reclaiming, regaining, repeating, we should try tactics that have never been tried, try thinking of completely new ways to agitate and organise and achieve. I sincerely hope that we can be the first organisation to do this ●

STRATEGY

Masses and government

Communists are not opposed in principle to the formation of working class administrations under capitalism, writes Mike Macnair

Should we (the left) be aiming for a Corbyn government in 2020? And should we (the CPGB) have backed Syriza forming the government in Greece - only with a different programme, or approach, to the one they actually adopted?

In last week's article, I argued that the fundamental problem underlying the question of government, as it now faces the left, is to reverse the dynamic of politics, in which there is a long-term ratchet to the right.¹ As long as we do not take steps to reverse this dynamic, forming a centre-left government is merely a way station, necessarily to the right of older centre-left governments, on the road to a new rightwing government to the right of the rightwing governments which have gone before.

I argued that to understand this dynamic, we have to grasp the nature of the political dictatorship of the capitalist class. First, that within the institutions of the single capitalist state (the so-called 'nation'-state), this dictatorship works through plutocracy, constitutional guarantees of property rights in money hoards: that is, the 'rule of law' and free market in legal services as a form of bribery of the courts; deficit financing of government; and 'free-market' advertising-funded corporate media and 'contributions' to parties and individual politicians.

Second, capitalist dictatorship works on an international scale through the international character of the material division of labour, combined with the world character of money and the mobility of capital in the money form. Flight of capital and the resulting 'monetary crises' are, in fact, not merely a *reserve* power of capital, but a *regular and normal* form of capitalist coercion against leftwing, centre-left or even merely nationalist governments.

It follows that, as long as the labour movement retains commitments not to challenge the state ('national') constitutional order, it is thereby committed to making only such changes as are fully acceptable to capital. And, as long as this movement remains committed to action simply at national level, it is similarly committed to making only those changes which are not unacceptable to international money capital.

The capitalist class has, nonetheless, over the past 170 years episodically made major concessions to the working class. I argued in last week's article that it has done so when it is challenged by worker movements on an international scale which threaten to overthrow, or to attempt to overthrow, the plutocratic constitutional order. Under these circumstances, major economic concessions look to capitalists like a less unattractive option than either immediately losing power or turning the constitutional order into an *obviously* corrupt minority-rule regime, and hence losing mass acceptance of that regime (its 'legitimacy').

Even so, these concessions are not regarded by the capitalist class as permanent. It is the determination of capitalists to take them back which drives the ratchet to the right - at first cautiously, in case the challenge to the institutions of capitalist rule reappear, but with increasing confidence and speed, as such a challenge fails to make an appearance.

The problem, then, is to threaten the capitalists with the overthrow of the regime under which they are able to coerce the majority. We communists,

of course, seek the *actual* overthrow of this regime, and the beginning of the construction of an alternative, cooperative commonwealth. But even if we cannot achieve this, the *threat* of a mass movement aiming for the overthrow of the regime might still be enough to lever major concessions and a temporary roll-back of the rightwards political ratchet.

Implications

There are several implications of this point. The first is that the workers' movement needs both a maximum and a minimum programme. It needs a maximum programme - a global alternative conception of social order to that of capitalism - in order to be able to think the idea of an actual overthrow of the dictatorship of the capitalist class, as I have argued more extensively earlier this year;² and hence, in order to be able to threaten the capitalists with the possibility of their overthrow as an alternative to concessions.

The movement also needs a minimum programme, which *as a whole* defines the minimum basis on which the workers' party should be prepared to form a government, but *in its parts* offers a series of individual reforms consistent with the continued existence of capitalism which can be fought for as single issues. I argued this second point in chapter 7 of *Revolutionary strategy* (2008) and in a 2007 series on 'transitional programme' and 'permanent revolution';³ and Jack Conrad has argued it in a slightly different way on numerous occasions (a good recent example being his 2013 series on programme and the Socialist Workers Party⁴).

The movement needs a minimum programme in order to think through what sort of concessions would actually advance the power of the working class as a class under capitalism - as opposed to *merely* offering palliatives for the poorest or, indeed, merely for the 'deserving poor', which have been offered by all capitalist regimes, going as far back as the late medieval Italian city-states.⁵

Secondly, if we think through the *immediate* alternative to the rule of the capitalist minority over the majority, it is political democracy. Democracy is a regime in which all get to participate in political decision-making; and this also entails the coercive subordination of the property-holding minority (in capitalism, the *moneyed* minority, or the 'savers') to the majority. That is, that this minority will be bound by rules and individual decisions from which it dissents, rather than having, as it does now, the power of veto over such decisions, by right of which this minority coerces the majority.

The overthrow of this power consists in the elimination of the institutional means by which the plutocrats exercise their veto. And this elimination involves both international and national elements. Because, as I have said above, the international interdependence of the material division of labour, and the free movement of money capital, are *regular and normal* means by which the capitalist class coerces left, centre-left and even merely nationalist governments. Considering how to overthrow or at least mitigate this power - or, again, at least to threaten to do so - is an immediate problem, not one which can wait until after a national revolution which overthrows the *domestic* mechanisms of capitalist veto.

And this in turn bears on what a

national government *can do* - and hence on what workers' parties should be saying in opposition.

Continental

The actual *effective, real subordination* of the holders of money hoards on a world scale requires the overthrow of a sufficient proportion of the global capitalist states and of the core of the world economy so that what remains can no longer provide the basis of a system of world money. We are talking here about - for a purely hypothetical example, selecting regions partly arbitrarily - the overthrow of the capitalist states throughout Eurasia, Africa and North America, with only Latin America and Oceania remaining capitalist-ruled.

However, a radical *reduction* in the coercive power of capitalist control of the international division of labour and the free movement of capital, and hence a global *threat* to capital, can be obtained on a more limited basis: the subtraction from the global capitalist system of a *continental-scale* territory, which contains sufficient, and sufficiently diverse, productive capability to be able to 'stand off' any 'sanctions' regime.

The reality of this *possibility* is visible in the effects of the existence of the USSR and post-1945 'Soviet bloc', now gone. This certainly allowed increased room for manoeuvre for both workers and 'national bourgeoisies' outside the 'Soviet bloc'. This was true in spite of the fact that the 'Soviet bloc' was not, in the long run, capable of defeating US-led world capital: because it was weighed down with peasant-majority countries, lacked anything beyond the German Democratic Republic from the high-tech heartlands of capital, and was held back by its nationalist ideology leading to the production of duplicate heavy industry complexes, and by bureaucratic rule leading to 'garbage in, garbage out' planning forms and to general demoralisation.

Europe is at the moment the most hopeful case for such a breakthrough. North America contains the USA, the current global hegemon state and heartland of world capital. China and east Asia are in process of a rapid development of capitalism at the expense of peasant production, and lack common institutions beyond the Chinese state itself (which retains a substantial component of Soviet-style Stalinism). The Arab east, sub-Saharan Africa, south Asia and Latin America remain fundamentally colonised economies. Russia has reverted to its pre-1914 role of an authoritarian, great military power, but economically beyond this context a primary goods exporter (if oil and gas have replaced grain and timber as the primary exports).

This is not to say that Europe is ripe for revolution: it is merely that the size of the continent, the shape of its economy and the existence of partially common political institutions create the *possibility* of a working class political breakthrough at the continental level here a little more strongly than elsewhere. The point is argued extensively by Jack Conrad in his *Remaking Europe* (2004).

How this bears on the question of government is that the European Union, while it is not yet a state proper, is a sort of part-state, distinctly analogous to the 19th century German *Zollverein* or, indeed, to the North German Confederation of the 1860s. On the one hand, this regime made it

difficult - as the EU does - to identify clearly the locus of political power. On the other hand, it meant, equally clearly, that the question of power could only be posed on an all-German scale: that was already the context of the Frankfurt National Assembly in the revolution of 1848-49, and it was the meaning of the difference between the *kleindeutsch* (Prussia + others) and *grossdeutsch* (seeking the inclusion of German Austria) perspectives in the 1860s, and of Marx's and Engels' criticisms - on the one hand, of Lassalle for supporting Bismarck; and, on the other, of Liebknecht and Bebel for *Kleinstateerei*, imagining that the sovereignty of little Saxony (and other even smaller German statelets) could be preserved.⁶

Quite clearly in this regime a revolution hypothetically *could* be started in Prussia, the largest German state, and spread from there into the smaller states. But the idea of starting a revolution in Saxony, or Bavaria, or Hesse, or wherever else, without good grounds for expecting that a revolution would be *immediately* triggered in Prussia, would be illusory. 1848 in fact provided just such a demonstration; once politics was restabilised in Prussia and Austria, what remained of the revolutionary movement in the Rhineland was crushed.⁷ The states other than Prussia were in theory sovereign states; they were even in theory *partially* sovereign states between the 1871 creation of the German *Reich* and 1918; and, as long as the constitutional order was maintained, their sovereignty could be used by Germany's rulers as an anti-democratic lever to counter the universal-male-suffrage *Reichstag*. But in terms of *real military and political power*, except for Prussia, they had been turned into mere *Länder* - provinces.

Much the same has happened to European states. The constitutional order of the European Union uses the formal state sovereignties (and hence the Council of Ministers) as a lever against the (in theory democratically elected) European parliament. It adds to this anti-democratic mechanism the entrenchment of *ordo-liberal* economic ideology in the treaties of Maastricht (1992) and since, and the real effective arbitrary powers of the Court of Justice, and (on a smaller scale) the corrupt operations of the European Commission and its attendant apparatus, visible in the Volkswagen diesel emissions scandal.

The major states, like Germany and France, can and do break the rules; and a European revolution starting in one of these countries and rapidly spreading elsewhere is perfectly conceivable. But a European revolution starting at the periphery in Greece or Portugal - or even the UK (peripheral for a different reason) - without an *immediate* prospect of it triggering a wider revolution, would be like trying to start a UK-wide revolution in Devon or Cumbria.

Our object, then, in order to be able to stand off the coercion of international capital, is to overthrow in one continuous act *both* the EU *Reich* constitution *and* the constitutions of the 'nation-state' *Länder*. In this context, to form a government in one country is, in substance, like forming a *provincial* government, or a government in one US *state*, or, in the UK, the administration of an important city or county.

Such a course of action *could* be a way of starting a revolution - if it could reasonably be expected that a workers' government created in one county would trigger a nationwide

uprising; or, in Europe, that a workers' government created in one state would trigger a Europe-wide uprising. This was the idea of the initial 'workers' government' suggestion in the early Comintern: that a SPD-KPD workers' government in Saxony could within weeks trigger the spread of the idea into an all-German revolution. In fact, the opposite happened: the German army rapidly intervened to overthrow the Saxon *Land* government.

The problem is straightforwardly one of *assessment of the immediate dynamics of the Europe-wide political situation*. For example, was the electoral victory of Syriza merely the tip of a very large iceberg of a political shift towards the radical left across Europe as a whole? If it was, what was called for was an immediate appeal to generalise the phenomenon and overthrow the EU treaties, the several states and so on.

In reality, of course, it was not. And, given that is the case, Syriza's electoral victory had the same sort of meaning as Militant winning control of Liverpool city council in 1983, and with the same effect: when they were really confronted with the financial machinery of capitalist control, both the Liverpool councillors and the Syriza government backed down.

Now, I am not saying that the workers' movement, or communists, should not take office in local government in any circumstances. It is a matter, rather, of *honesty* in electoral campaigning about what can be achieved at this level. We will have to return to this point later.

Constitutional

Chris Knight, criticising an article by Eddie Ford, rightly distinguished between taking *office* and taking *power*.⁸ But then the question posed is what taking *power* means. Chris poses it (in relation to Alexis Tsipras of Syriza) as "mobilising his supporters to confront the state, dismantle its institutions and translate office into power"; and he made similar arguments in his 1969 piece, 'All power to the Labour government', which we reprinted in this paper in September-October,⁹ arguing for turning the traditional democratic structures of the Labour Party and trade unions (much reduced these days) into *soviets à la Russia* in 1905 or 1917.

The substance of the point is that taking *power* means - for each state - that the local ability of capital to use the state - police, bailiffs and behind them the armed forces and security forces - to coerce the majority, is destroyed; and, on the other hand, that workers' alternative decision-making mechanisms are created, through which the majority can participate in decision-making and coerce the propertied minority.

Put at its bluntest, a sufficient section of the armed forces has to stop obeying their officers, and begin obeying some form of workers' political representation, to reverse the form of - in Lenin's phrase - *kto kogo*: who rules whom. The *constitutional order* has to be overthrown.

Chris offers a variant on the far left's general scheme for this change, in which workers' institutions are made to grow directly out of strikes, occupations and street actions - which, in turn, grow out of immediate experience and economic struggle.

The *historical* problem with this schema is that it is quite clear, both from the demands of the march which led to the 1905 Bloody Sunday and

from the decision of women workers to strike and demonstrate, in wartime, on International Women's Day 1917 - a festival created by the Second International in 1911 - that by the outbreak of these revolutions important sections of the Russian working class had already decided that they had had enough of the tsarist political regime.

Further, strikes are a normal feature of capitalism going back to its late medieval early forms. Street demonstrations and protests go back not quite so far, but certainly to the normal political life of England in 1689 and after. In early 20th century Russia, under a pre-capitalist state and social order with limited capitalist development in process, such events were a radical novelty, and the regime's total rejection of them threatened the immediate legitimacy of the tsarist constitution. In early 21st century England they are merely a normal safety-valve in the parliamentary-monarchy constitution - almost to the point that the anti-war demonstrations, of 2003 and subsequently, following the first shockingly big one, could function as a sort of re-enactment of politics of nostalgia for the 1960s.

The practical problem is utterly transparent in the Greek case. Leaving aside the question of Europe, discussed above, how *could* Syriza "mobilis[e their] supporters to confront the state, dismantle its institutions and translate office into power" after they had entered into coalition with a rightwing nationalist party and given them the defence portfolio? How could they do so after they had run a series of election campaigns in which they reassuringly *denied* any intention of overthrowing the constitutional order of 'democracy' - actually plutocracy - as such?

If you are going to pose the question of power after you have assumed office, you need to pose it *before* you take office, so that your supporters are not surprised by what you face when you do.

Genuinely posing the question of power is not a matter simply of street mobilisations or a 'social movement'. It has two sides. The first is spreading widely the idea that the existing constitution is rotten: that the parliament, the security apparatus, the senior civil service, the media and the courts are all corrupt.

The second problem is in one way the more difficult one, but in another way is one which is not dependent on holding the reins of government. It is developing the idea of an alternative: in particular, that workers' democracy is capable of representing an alternative form of democratic decision-making.

It is more difficult in a dead simple sense: the left and the workers' movement more generally has been astonishingly bad at it for decades now. I propose to say no more than this now; several authors have written about the issue in this paper at length and repeatedly.

However, on the other side, it is obvious that changing this does not depend on holding the reins of government, in the sense that we can work to conduct the affairs of our own organisations in an open, democratic and empowering way, as much in opposition as in government. It would help, slightly, if we could legislate to abolish some of the means of 'judicial review' and 'regulatory' interference designed to favour bureaucratic control, like the Registration of Political Parties Act 1998 and Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, parts of the Cooperative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014, and parts of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992. But it remains true that we can *formally* comply with these rules, without allowing them to stop us functioning democratically.

Moreover, by working in an open, democratic and empowering way, it is *possible* - not guaranteed - that the



Doing the same stupid thing since the 1960s

strength of the workers' movement at the base, in trade unions, in cooperatives and suchlike societies, and in the Labour Party itself, can be built up to the point where this method of working appears as a real alternative.

This method, moreover, can produce palliatives which are just as real as those offered by state redistribution, through solidarity and welfare initiatives provided by workers' organisations themselves. For example, a significant part of the NHS consists of institutions which were originally mutual, cooperative or trade union institutions, which were statified in World War II and nationalised in the formation of the NHS. The Tories are now engaged in 'less eligibility', so-called 'efficiency gains', intended to make private medicine a more attractive option (the Blairites shared this approach). The more this policy progresses, the more the question of reconstituting cooperative, trade union and mutual-based healthcare will be posed. Arthur Bough has offered some useful arguments on this issue on his blog.¹⁰

The problem is, of course, that this issue confronts the question of how to win the next election as a difficulty. It does so because the media will represent any *disagreement* within the workers' movement as splits, indiscipline, etc; any failure to execute witch-hunts as lack of seriousness; and, just as they pick up on rightwing nutters in Ukip, will flag up any silly statement by a leftwinger in Labour or the trade unions. To choose to function democratically thus involves *also* fighting directly against the media in opposition.

Honesty

The underlying problem is that we have to 'tell the workers the truth'. And this point is also two-sided. The first side is that we have to be open opponents of the constitutional order; this is a matter both of openly attacking the local (UK) constitutional order and of avoiding the false patriotism which suggests 'socialism in one country' or that UK withdrawal from the EU could restore democracy - in reality, for example, EU law would still govern all exports to the EU (45% of all UK exports ...).

The second side is that we have to recognise real *limits* on what can be done, short of overthrowing the constitutional order. Local government

and similar subordinate bodies provide the sharpest example of this. There is a useful discussion of this point by Trotsky in relation to problems of local government and workers' participation in industrial management, written in the context of the nationalisations under the Cárdenas government in Mexico in the 1930s:

It would be inexact to identify the policy of workers' participation in the management of nationalised industry with the participation of socialists in a bourgeois government (which we called ministerialism). All the members of the government are bound together by ties of solidarity. A party represented in the government is answerable for the entire policy of the government as a whole. Participation in the management of a certain branch of industry allows full opportunity for political opposition. In case the workers' representatives are in a minority in the management, they have every opportunity to declare and publish their proposals, which were rejected by the majority, to bring them to the knowledge of the workers, etc.

The participation of the trade unions in the management of nationalised industry may be compared to the participation of socialists in the municipal governments, where the socialists sometimes win a majority and are compelled to direct an important municipal economy, while the bourgeoisie still has domination in the state and bourgeois property laws continue. Reformists in the municipality adapt themselves passively to the bourgeois regime. Revolutionists in this field do all they can in the interests of the workers and at the same time teach the workers at every step that municipality policy is powerless without conquest of state power.

The difference, to be sure, is that in the field of municipal government the workers win certain positions by means of democratic elections, whereas in the domain of nationalised industry the government itself invites them to take certain posts. But this difference has a purely formal character. In both cases the bourgeoisie is compelled to yield to the workers certain spheres of activity. The workers utilise these

in their own interests.¹¹

The point, then, is *not* to use winning local government elections for a head-on confrontation with the central state - unless, as *might* in theory have been the case in Saxony, the opportunity existed to generalise the struggle very rapidly. Rather, it is necessary to say openly: there are very limited things we can do, because of the constraints imposed by central government and the nature of local government.

If we win local elections we can do those limited things; but we also need the means to address the electorate to tell them about the limits imposed by central government, the regressive uniform business rate, and other such corrupt devices, independent of the advertising-funded media, which will necessarily spin in favour of corruption and against political democracy.

Much the same now applies in the relation between the 'nation-states' and the EU. If "municipality policy is powerless without conquest of state power" (or, more exactly, has very limited power), so national policy is powerless - or has very limited power - without the conquest of power on a continental scale.

The implication of this need to be honest is that, in fact, it will be harder to win an election than it would be by pretending that radical *economic* change could take place without radical *constitutional* change, and without the process of building up the movement on the ground and building mass understanding of the corrupt character of the constitutional order (including the advertising-funded media).

I began in the first article with the point that the question of the 2020 election bears on what communists and the broader Labour movement should be doing *now*. If nothing can be done without getting a Labour government, then the task is not just to make a Corbyn leadership more media-friendly, but to give up on a Corbyn leadership altogether and elect some Blairite. Of course, it might well turn out that the result of doing so would be to destroy the Labour Party's electoral base in England, as the Blairites have destroyed it in Scotland ...

The point, then, is not to oppose forming a government ever in principle. It is, first, that entry into government without having built a sufficient movement for socialism to intimidate the capitalist class will only be a step

towards the next and further right Tory (or equivalent) government.

It is, second, that there are things which *can* be done without holding governmental office. These are not only street actions, strikes, etc, but also building up organisations on the ground. In fact, these tasks are *necessary* to any election victory which does not depend on the agreement of the advertising-funded media.

It is also not impossible by campaigning, for parties or movements in opposition, to nonetheless win important law reforms. For a single example, some way back in history, the Liberals brought in the Trade Union Act 1871 to legalise trade unions. A Tory judge, Brett J, then found a loophole in this act to restore illegality. But the following *Tory* government was nonetheless driven to pass the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act 1875, which reversed Brett J's loophole.

In fact, the political dynamics can be seen even today, in George Osborne's decision to implement a so-called 'living wage'. Osborne, of course, naturally enough, has pulled a scam by delaying implementation of the new minimum wage, but bringing in cuts in tax credits more rapidly - which has produced major political embarrassment. Labour cannot without being in government *prevent* cuts in tax credits being replaced with some other form of benefit cut: governments, precisely, control budgets. The Lords have only delayed the issue. But Labour in opposition *has* made it appear to the Tories politically attractive to increase the minimum wage; and *could* put political pressure for actual enforcement of the minimum wage laws; or, perhaps, to restore rent control.

Thinking of the task of reforms in terms of tax and spend, or borrow and spend, or redistribution leads to thinking that *only* a party of government can achieve anything. But this is, in fact, a recipe for political paralysis - just as much as 'moderate demands and militant action' is *also* a recipe for political paralysis, this time in the form of the far left's gerbil-on-a-wheel repetition of what it has been doing since the 1960s.

In contrast, we can combine the struggle to build up workers' *organisations* on the ground with the struggle to discredit the institutions of capitalist rule, and the struggle for specific *reforms to the law* (as opposed to budget changes) which would strengthen the working class. This is not guaranteed to work; but it *can* build up the movement to a point at which - even if we did not achieve the overthrow of capitalism Europe-wide - we might achieve serious reforms ●

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Notes

1. 'Overcoming the power of capital' *Weekly Worker* November 5 2015.
2. 'Thinking the alternative' *Weekly Worker* April 9, 16 and 30 2015; and 'Socialism will not require industrialisation', May 14 2015; also 'Doing war differently', May 28 2015.
3. "'Transitional' to what?" *Weekly Worker* August 2 2007; 'What is workers' power?' August 9 2007; 'For a minimum programme!', August 30 2007; 'Spontaneity and Marxist theory', September 6 2007; 'Leading workers by the nose', September 13 2007.
4. 'Programme and the programmeless' *Weekly Worker* February 7 2013; 'Transitional regression ends in a hunch', February 14 2013; 'Broad bad, mass good', February 21 2013.
5. Eg. C Bertazzo, 'Before the welfare state: the city and welfare in the Veneto, 13th to 15th centuries' in G Hagemann (ed) *Reciprocity and redistribution: work and welfare reconsidered* Pisa 2007.
6. R Morgan *The German social democrats and the First International* Cambridge 1965; RB Dominick *III Wilhelm Liebknecht and the founding of the German Social Democratic Party* Chapel Hill 1982.
7. J Sperber *Rhineland radicals: the democratic movement and the revolution of 1848-1849* Princeton 1992.
8. Letters *Weekly Worker* October 15 2015; cf also Eddie's reply, October 22 2015, and Chris's response to this, October 29 2015.
9. *Weekly Worker* September 24, October 8 2015.
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TERRORISM

Sharm el-Sheikh and airport screening

Yassamine Mather looks beyond the criticisms of the Egyptian authorities following the downing of Metrojet flight 9268

Despite a number of denials by both Egyptian and Russian officials that it was a bomb that caused the Russian Airbus 321 carrying 224 people to crash over the Sinai desert on October 31, by November 6 the analysis of the plane's two flight recorders had prompted investigators to say that it could not have been an accident. The sound of an explosion was recorded by the cockpit voice recorder of flight 9268 and none of the black boxes showed any sign of mechanical failure before the plane crashed.

Last week the British government claimed that GCHQ had recorded groups close to Islamic State discussing the crash. According to *The Sunday Telegraph*,

The 'chatter' picked up by intelligence agencies appears to include a series of communications between the Sinai terrorist group, affiliated to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, and its leadership based in Syria. Prior to the explosion last Saturday, US intelligence agencies also intercepted a message from the terrorists in Sinai that warned of "something big in the area". It is understood that details about how the plane was brought down were also intercepted, but the officials have refused to go into detail.¹

Nevertheless, Russia and Egypt kept up their denials. If indeed IS was involved, for Russia it would be reminiscent of the risks faced during the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in the 1970s and early 1980s, and the consequences of the war in Chechnya. During the Afghan war, jihadists, who were at the time supported by the CIA, were responsible for deadly attacks on Soviet forces, but, of course, there were not many Russian tourists holidaying abroad in the late 1970s and 80s.

The Egyptian authorities' concern is also understandable. Here is a government led by the military, arresting anyone expressing criticisms, and falsely accusing intellectuals and journalists of sympathising with the Muslim Brotherhood. All this to keep the country 'safe from Islamists'. Yet the very same military state was incapable of detecting the fact that a bomb was stowed on a plane carrying 224 passengers. In other words, the incident has disastrous consequences for the reputation of Egypt's security forces and their ability to combat Islamist 'terrorism'.

The tourist industry is in serious trouble - Sharm el-Sheikh is the only part of the country where heavy security has facilitated large numbers of tourists. So it is not just the country's reputation in the battle against jihadism that is at stake: Egypt's income from tourism, vital for any hope of reviving a struggling economy, is threatened.

Earlier in the week, Egypt's president, former army chief and general Abdul Fattah el-Sisi, expressed anger when journalists called into question his government's control of its territory: "It is under our full control, of course. We will never accept that we do not have full control over our country."²

The militant group, Sinai Province, pledged its allegiance to IS in November 2014, and in the summer of 2015 staged a series of attacks against the Egyptian army. The aim is to take full control of the Sinai peninsula and create an Islamist province in the region. In 2015 Egyptian security officials claimed that the group's leader, Abu Osama al-Masri, and some of his close allies had been killed in a government operation. However, he later appeared in a video



Russian family members grieve

reaffirming his allegiance to the IS leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

For all its denials, the Egyptian state has taken claims of the group's involvement in the crash seriously. The country's ministry of interior announced on November 10 that a senior figure of the group, Ashraf Ali Hassanein al Gharabli, was killed during a shoot-out with police in Cairo.³ The Egyptian government claims that al Gharabli had been involved in a number of terrorist attacks, including a car bombing outside the Italian consulate in Cairo in July and the beheading of a Croatian man in August.

Passenger safety

The bombing of the Russian Airbus will have major implications for air travel, far beyond Egypt and the countries where, according to security officials, IS has 'active cells'. After all, many of its recruits come from European and east Asian countries. Many aviation experts have argued that the bombing of the Russian airliner will fundamentally change the way the authorities look at airport security in general and airport staff in particular.

Remember the shoe bomber, Richard Reid, a British convert to Islam, who tried and failed to detonate explosives packed into his shoes on an American Airlines flight from Paris to Miami in 2001. Passengers suspicious of his behaviour managed to foil his plan and he was arrested. Unlike in Egypt, no-one was killed as a result of this incident, yet it dramatically changed airport security to include the scanning and inspection of passengers' shoes, thus considerably slowing down security checks.

Both passengers and staff - baggage handlers, ground workers and air crews - can smuggle an explosive device onto a plane. However, according to Norman Shanks, former head of group security at BAA, "particularly on the staff side, things are patchy ... how can anyone ensure airport security operations aren't infiltrated by terrorists?"⁴

In all European airports staff have to go through checks, but often they leave and re-enter secure areas, in exactly the same way as passengers. It should also be noted that, when it comes to airport security, most countries do not trust the private sector! In the United States, prior to September 11 2001 airport screening was provided by private companies contracted by the airline or airport. But within a couple of months of 9/11 the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) was introduced

to take over all security functions. Since then considerable investment has gone into new technologies for scanners, iris recognition devices and so on.

In addition to all this, airport authorities, especially in the US, are investing heavily in programmes used to detect unusual behaviour at airports and some of these have been challenged by the American Civil Liberties Union, as the number of complaints about aspects of these measures has increased. Yet similar measures are being adopted by some airports in the UK. Both critics and supporters of such psychological profiling pose the same question: is it possible to know whether people are being deceptive, or planning hostile acts, just by observing their behaviour in what are stressful circumstances for many?

At London's Heathrow airport, the UK government is deploying behaviour-detection officers in a trial modelled in part on a programme called 'Screening of Passengers by Observation Techniques' (Spot) in the US. This was exposed as ridiculous in March 2015, when documents about its methods of detecting a potential terrorist were leaked: the "stress factors" noted by Spot as signs of a "potential threat" while passengers were waiting for security checks included arriving late for your flight, blinking too much, sweating and "excessive yawning".⁵

Then there is the programme sponsored by the department of human services using electronic sensors to monitor and evaluate 'non-verbal behaviours', and so identify suspected terrorists as they pass along a corridor. This programme has been severely criticised for the "non-scientific method used in such evaluations". A committee concluded that a similar 'hit rate' would be achieved by flipping a coin. So far Spot has cost over a billion dollars and is deployed in most US airports, yet, according to a report by the US Government Accountability Office, it should not have been deployed "without first validating the scientific basis for identifying suspicious passengers in an airport environment".

Between 2006 and 2009 Spot identified over 200,000 passengers as showing 'signs of suspicious behaviour' and they were subjected to 'secondary screening' - thorough inspection of baggage and extensive testing for signs of explosives. The agency found that in the vast majority of cases nothing was found, although 1,710 people were arrested. As far as the TSA is concerned, this proves the

programme is useful - even though the arrests were almost all "for criminal activities, such as outstanding warrants, completely unrelated to terrorism".⁶ In fact there is serious doubt whether "the Spot programme has ever resulted in the arrest of anyone who is a terrorist, or who was planning to engage in terrorist-related activity".⁷ Meanwhile, around 99% of those identified as suspicious were delayed or inconvenienced for no good reason.

The US authorities have financed a number of other 'research' projects on the issue of airport safety, Future Attribute Screening Technology (Fast) is one of many such projects, based on the same principles used by lie detector polygraphs. It assesses psycho-physiological responses to a series of security questions by measuring respiration, heart rate and electrical resistance of the skin. Unlike polygraphs, where sensors are placed against the suspect's body, Fast uses "stand-off" sensors and thermal cameras to record changes in body temperature and laser technology to monitor heart rates. And now Fast is considering the introduction of 'psychological profiling', whereby a suspect will be shown pictures and subjected to sounds and their reaction will be recorded. Unsurprisingly, Fast has come under just as much criticism as Spot. A well trained terrorist or professional hit man can hide signs of stress (which affects

many innocent passengers, who may be held for hours).

The ban on carrying weapons and sharp objects is completely understandable, but what about the regulation limiting the carrying of liquids to 100ml containers on flights, which has been in operation since 2006 at British airports? It has been alleged that bombers have been prepared to mix hydrogen peroxide with soft drinks, and use the electric element of a light bulb, with a disposable camera as a power source, in order to cause a mid-air explosion. This ban, which has affected millions of passengers, is widely regarded as virtually useless - for example, liquids, aerosols or gels used for medical purposes or for babies are exempt.

Clearly airport security has its limitations. Many measures currently deployed in airports worldwide are redundant. Yet, in a world where global travel is part of everyday life, there is no such a thing as absolute safety, and the problem of passenger security cannot be resolved through such measures. Ditching those that are a patent waste of time and the cause of untold inconvenience would be a step forward.

This is not to deny the reckless brutality of jihadists such as IS, but their very existence resulted from the even greater recklessness and barbaric destruction wreaked by the imperialists in the Middle East. Over the last 10 days the British government and military have tried to use this latest tragedy to renew calls for military intervention in Syria. Defence secretary Michael Fallon has argued that it is "morally indefensible" for Britain to refuse to join French and American warplanes in bombing IS targets. Given the fact that Russia became an IS target after its own military involvement, the minister's logic is flawed, to say the least ●

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Notes

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Fighting fund

Keep 'em charged

"You bring clear socialist light to me and all your other readers," writes comrade ET in the message accompanying his £40 PayPal donation. He was one of three PayPal donors this week - the others being NW (£20) and BK (£25) - and they were among 3,384 online readers over the last seven days.

We also received two useful cheques - £50 from comrade TU and the £20 that RG added to his subscription. Finally there were seven standing orders in amounts varying between £10 and £25, and totalling £110 - thank you, RK, NR, DV, SWS, GD, SM and LM.

All that comes to £265 and takes our November fighting fund total up to £516. But we are lagging a little behind where we need to be if we are to make our £1,750 target. A bit of acceleration is called for. After all, we certainly want to continue shining that "clear socialist light", but we do need to keep our batteries charged!

Can you help? We need to raise £1,234 in two and a half weeks ●

Robbie Rix

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

TURKEY

Rigged election of a sham democracy

Esen Uslu charts the AKP's growing authoritarianism and the left's disappointment

Following the November 1 general election, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) has a parliamentary majority after picking up almost half of the popular vote. The outcome came as a surprise to many commentators, as well as most of Turkey's left, who were expecting the opposition to win enough votes to force the AKP into forming a coalition with one of the smaller parties. It is difficult to quantify the left's disappointment - it is widely felt that this was a chance missed and another will not be forthcoming any time soon.

Mainstream media companies had been asked to make a substantial 'voluntary' contribution to an illicit AKP fund in return for maintaining their broadcasting rights and access to governmental contracts, and this arrangement had a substantial effect on the conduct of the election. Such a role for the media is customary in Turkey and on this occasion the media barrage was so strong that the election seemed to be settled by 10pm, when polls closed. Almost immediately opposition leaders were on TV conceding defeat.

What is more, there were widespread allegations of irregularities, of which there are many statistical breakdowns available on the net, not least that of Erik Meyersson of the Stockholm School of Economics. He claims his analysis shows "evidence that would be consistent with widespread voting manipulation", but "not proof of it".¹ However, we must look deeper than the picture of rigged election results to grasp the important fault lines in Turkish politics.

The leftwing People's Democratic Party (HDP) just avoided falling below the prohibitive 10% threshold for parliamentary representation, thanks to the votes cast abroad, and it managed to retain a toehold in parliament. At least now the HDP will be present to witness AKP efforts to change the constitution in an attempt to enhance the powers of president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. But his party did not win sufficient seats to change the constitution on its own, and will need 15-20 votes from other parties.

Now the third largest group in the parliament, the HDP will attempt to follow the approach of the leader of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), comrade Abdullah Öcalan: that of attempting to bring the Kurdish question into mainstream Turkish politics by making the HDP the champion of democracy for the whole of Turkey. Such a strategy could make it the main opposition party, provided that its young and popular co-leaders undertake the substantial task of redrafting the HDP programme and rules, while maintaining the support of the Kurdish freedom movement.

The opportunity is still there, since the other opposition parties appear to be in a rut. The Republican People's Party (CHP) more or less maintained its 25% share of the vote, but seems to have reached its limit under its current leadership. Meanwhile, the nationalist-fascist National Action Party (MHP) lost substantial ground and now has fewer seats than the HDP. This promoter of the "synthesis of Turkishness and Islam" had the mantle of Turkish nationalism stolen from it by the AKP's war against the Kurds, its promotion of Islam and its support from the army. We should expect the MHP to split, with a small section moving towards the CHP, while the rump dissolves itself into the AKP.

However, the Alevis, one the principal mass supporters of the secular-nationalist CHP, would not be happy with the participation of the



Recep Erdoğan: constitution in his sights

MHP, a party associated with the Alevi massacres of the 1970s and 80s. The HDP has made modest inroads into the Alevi community, but now there are opportunities for it to reach out to them, provided it develops a secular-democratic programme, as well as grassroots organisation amongst the Alevis.

Whitewash

After the elections most political commentators declined to explain how and why their predictions had been so inaccurate. Indeed, their whole approach served to whitewash the rigged elections, and to prepare public opinion for a new five-year term for the revitalised AKP.

Even the long awaited *Progress report of the European Commission*, which was delayed on the request of AKP government and released after the elections, joins in the whitewash:

A government could not be formed by the constitutional deadline and repeat elections took place on November 1, again with a very high turnout of 85%. Reported results show that the AKP obtained 49.5% (317 seats), CHP 25.3% (134 seats), MHP 11.9% (40 seats) and HDP 10.8 % (59 seats). The ruling AKP secured enough votes to form a majority government. The atmosphere of the campaign was affected by a challenging security environment, in particular the terrorist bomb attack in Ankara on October 10. There were the increased tensions across the country, which included attacks on media outlets and on party members, offices and campaign staff. According to international observers, citizens could choose between genuine and diverse political alternatives. However, the campaign environment limited the ability to campaign freely and media freedom was an area of serious concern.²

Please note, the 'results' quoted above were those given by the so-called 'pool media', since the electoral commission has yet to declare precise official figures.

A common theme in many commentaries was 'blame the Kurds' for election results deemed disastrous for the opposition. Such analysis was accompanied by other gems of

wisdom, such as the claim that public opinion had shifted to the 'centre' away from 'radical' or 'extremist' policies, or that the unexpected and unexplained 9% swing towards the AKP in the five-month period from June to November was actually a reflection of the desire of working people for 'stability' following the June elections.

Meanwhile, the Fatherland Party - the ex-Maoists turned ultra-nationalists - reached a new low by claiming that it now stands shoulder to shoulder with the AKP, defending national unity against separatism. The rump of the recently split legal Communist Party reminded us that they had warned the left not to blindly go down the road of Kurdish nationalism by supporting the HDP and instead to fight for a "class-based platform".

The June Movement, a broad-based joint action grouping taking its name from the Gezi Park resistance of June 2013, has tried to paper over the cracks in its structures caused by not participating in the HDP election campaign, but it has been unable to control its rank and file, whose members did support that campaign despite the vicious attacks from the state and AKP thugs. Their spokespersons repeat the same old call for joint action on a new socialist platform: ie, the formation of a separate and rival 'socialist' grouping with no room for those 'nationalist' Kurds.

The election campaign of the AKP was actually run on the end of Turkish bayonets. The party had realised that donning nationalistic colours would not be enough to recover the ground it lost in the June elections. It had already ended negotiations with the Kurdish freedom movement, but now it persuaded the top brass to adopt a new course. From mid-July onwards the AKP government unleashed a brutal war on the Kurds within Turkey and against their bases in the Qandil mountains in Iraqi Kurdistan.

There were so many air raids that the government had to ask the US for permission to urgently renew its stock of weapons. Such permission was duly granted after the Incirlik air base facility was opened up to US forces for operations in Syria and Iraq. The state orchestrated attacks on HDP offices across Turkey. It even directed - or at least turned a blind eye to - Islamic State-trained, home-grown bombers,

who committed two major atrocities. After the October 10 Ankara massacre no opposition party dared hold election rallies.

The government also ordered attacks on Rojava: liberated Syrian Kurdistan. They were accompanied by propaganda, as well as lobbying in diplomatic circles, to curb any support for the Rojava Kurds.

The army, gendarmerie and police special forces conducted 'counter-insurgency' raids in all the principal towns and cities of south-eastern Turkey. Using the powers granted to governors and administrators, curfews lasting more than a week were declared in various areas.

Unwinnable war

Now the election is over, it is time once again to move against the Kurds. The military, invited into politics once more by the AKP government, is adamant that it can win the war in Kurdistan. Its public statements, echoed by the minister of defence and prime minister, talk about "going to the bitter end" and "doing whatever is necessary".

However, several former chiefs of staff have publicly stated that the war in Kurdistan is not winnable and a political settlement based on negotiations is inevitable. So either the current top brass will eventually reach the same conclusion after an orgy of death and destruction or, if international circumstances permit, they will commit atrocities the like of which we have not seen for years.

For example, in the town of Cizre more than 20 people, including children, were killed indiscriminately over a period of a week. Armoured carriers, which have become the normal mode of transport for security forces as well as officialdom, were insufficient to deal with the resistance and now battle tanks have been deployed in cities and towns.

As I write these words, the town of Silvan in Diyarbakir province has been under sustained attack for eight days, with no end in sight. The new government is yet to be formed, but as well as military action conciliatory noises have been heard from amongst the AKP ranks. They seem to want to open new negotiations from a position of strength, having isolated and excluded the HDP.

During the campaign the AKP stole the economic proposals successfully

put forward by the CHP during the June elections. At that time the AKP shunned popular proposals, such as increasing the minimum wage and reducing the tax on it, and increasing pensions, claiming there were insufficient resources. However, the popularity of the proposals compelled the AKP to adopt them, and firm commitments were made to implement such measures immediately after the elections.

Contradictory messages are coming from the AKP parliamentary group. A section favours the 'financial discipline' imposed by the International Monetary Fund and wants to delay any relaxation, claiming that such discipline had already been breached by pre-election spending. Others, with an eye on a constitutional referendum, which may happen next year, insist that election pledges had to be kept.

Meanwhile the economy as a whole is in trouble: growth has slowed, exports have fallen, wages are not keeping up with inflation, unemployment has crept above 10%, interest rates are on the rise, the Turkish lira is losing ground to the main international currencies and the current account and balance of payments deficits are growing.

All this is a recipe for disaster, and every suggested remedy has its pitfalls. If austerity measures are implemented, popular support will begin to evaporate, and if the option of increasing public spending to prevent a crisis is adopted, then substantial financial assistance from abroad will be required.

Given the experience of last year's strikes in the automotive and other metal-working sectors, there is wariness in the AKP government of an upsurge in discontent that might fuel wildcat strikes in the industrial heartlands. AKP is happy to use repression - so long as it maintains the support of the army. However, that is not sufficient to govern. It has to find solutions to the many domestic problems, or at least a means of relieving the pressure.

The repression of each and every opposition movement, as well as civil initiatives for fundamental rights, continues unabated. Freedom of the press, freedom to organise and freedom of conscience are denied. At the same time there is close collaboration between finance capital and state officialdom. Examples of corruption are skyrocketing. The Kurdish and Syrian wars provide ample opportunities to maintain such authoritarian rule.

Turkey is also using the Syrian refugees as a bargaining chip with the European Union. Whenever it could, it illegally and ruthlessly sent them on to EU countries. Throughout the summer months under the eyes of the Turkish security forces countless rickety boats departed on the perilous journey to the Greek islands. Rescue operations and dead children became a staple international news item.

And it worked. In the end German chancellor Angela Merkel came to Turkey and posed on the glittering seats of the old sultan's palace alongside Erdoğan, bolstering his image just before the election. Support and aid was promised in return for keeping the refugees in Turkey.

So now Turkey has another exportable commodity: migrants. And the AKP government is using it as shamelessly as a bazaar trader ●

Notes

1. <http://erikmeyersson.com/2015/11/04/digit-tests-and-the-peculiar-election-dynamics-of-turkeys-november-elections>.
2. ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2015/20151110_report_turkey.pdf.

LEFT UNITY

Taking Labour seriously

Sarah McDonald reports from a sparsely attended national council meeting

It looks as though the whole of the first day of Left Unity's November 21-22 annual conference will be given over to a discussion on the Labour Party and LU's prospects. The November 7 meeting of the national council was told that the standing orders committee has recommended that this suggestion, originating with the Communist Platform, be taken up and it will be put before conference itself.

This, of course, is good news - it means that we will be grappling with the central issue of the day. Events have clearly taken their toll on LU - and they have certainly impacted upon the current NC. Of the 53 elected NC members that remain (two of the original 55 we know have left to join the Labour Party), only around 20 attended. There were about 10 apologies, which leaves almost half unaccounted for - maybe they have left to join Labour too! There was no getting away from it: the whole future of LU is in the balance.

The political discussion took the bizarre form of several comrades leading off for three minutes each on disparate subjects. Andrew Burgin began with a short contribution on the Labour Party following the victory of Jeremy Corbyn. He correctly asserted that LU's political future is bound up in how we respond and said that many good people had left LU to join Labour - although some wished to remain close to LU.

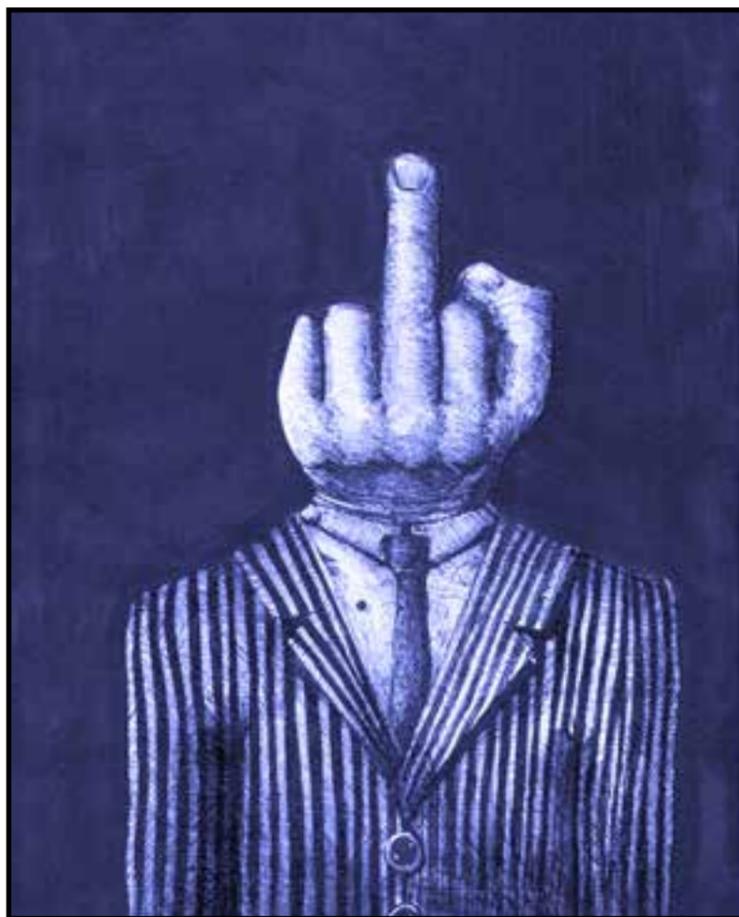
Next, Kate Hudson offered a comment on Trident, highlighting the centrality of the issue to Jeremy Corbyn's campaign. She also noted the Scottish factor in that debate, given that the Scottish National Party and now Scottish Labour are both against renewal. She reminded the meeting that Left Unity is affiliated to the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and we could work with others to support Jeremy Corbyn on this issue.

Then it was the turn of Oliver New, who talked about supporting the four or five various campaigns against the Trade Union Bill. For her part, Terry Conway stressed the importance of the migrant crisis in Europe, while Felicity Dowling took up various issues regarding welfare cuts and their impact on housing. She commented that - in Liverpool, at any rate - the Labour Party will not be taking the lead in opposing these cuts and so LU must.

Mixture of views

As I say, it was a strange way to begin proceedings, but the ensuing debate was certainly interesting, not least for the mixture of views on display. The Communist Platform's Jack Conrad started the discussion by welcoming the SOC's recommendation to devote the first day of conference to discussing the Labour Party, as this is obviously the main issue facing the left in Britain at this time. He also asked for information on how many members LU has lost.

Barbara Segal, the membership secretary, was able to shed some light on this. She informed the NC that around 300 comrades had left in the last three months, with about half of those saying that they had done so in order to join the Labour Party. She added that she understood why comrades were leaving - the Corbyn-led Labour Party is something big, but also comfortable for many people. She said that LU needs to emphasise the areas in which it is different to Labour - such as migration,



Unconstitutionally suspended for 16 months ... and then told this

internationalism and opposition to war - and commented that we ought to be really pushing against the 'snoopers' charter', which the Labour Party is not doing.

Another CP comrade, Yasmine Mather, said that if LU is to survive it must have policies radically different from those of Corbyn, including 'Corbynomics'. We must also take up issues around democracy, the monarchy, internet freedom and do so in a radical way. She said that Corbyn and McDonnell are likely to continue their policy of compromising with the Labour right - the fact that Corbyn wore a red poppy and sang 'God save the queen' at the Remembrance Sunday service is in itself insignificant, yet it is also indicative of how pressure from the rightwing press can bear fruit. She concluded by pointing out that if we are saying the same thing as Labour, we may as well just wind up and join the Labour Party. That did not mean we should not demand affiliation, of course - we should do our best to defeat the right, while at the same time trying to arm the left with principled politics.

However, Joseph Healy felt that calling for affiliation to the Labour Party was mere gesture politics. He commented that Nick Wrack has suddenly written off the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition after all these years of prioritising it, and thrown all his energies into the Labour Party instead. But Labour is not the way forward, he said, and it would be a mistake to devote the first day of our conference solely to this matter when we have many other pressing matters to discuss. Richard Farnos was not looking forward to that prospect either. He said the left's response to the Labour Party was like a child playing football: chasing after the ball but with no thought for positioning or strategic play. In any case, he was sure the Parliamentary Labour Party and the right will win the internal battle, and when this happens people will turn to LU for their political answers.

Cathy Lowe, for her part, argued we should support the Labour left in any way we can - where there are no strong LU branches, comrades should join Momentum in order to help shape it. John Duveen felt that comrades had been mesmerised by what is taking place in the Labour Party and instead we should concentrate on what is happening to ordinary people on the ground. Salman Shaheen commented that the mood in the room seemed sombre, when in fact these were exciting times. He felt that the key priority should be to get Corbyn into Number 10 in 2020.

Comrade Hudson wondered what the objective possibility is of transforming Labour into a party of social democracy, never mind a socialist party. She felt that Corbyn had not backed down or sold out, but had made strategic decisions, given the balance of political forces. But LU is different, she felt, because it has a different vision of society.

Jack Conrad liked comrade Farnos's footballing analogy, even if he disagreed with his conclusions. Comrade Conrad argued that the left has to take the Labour Party seriously and that all views on this ought to be argued out at conference. This includes the legitimate, albeit wrong, motion that calls for LU to give up being a party in order to become a think tank. Comrade Conrad said that he wants to save LU. As someone in a minority, he also wants to see it transformed - not into a looser formation, but into a Communist Party.

As for the question of affiliation and dual membership, this was the basis on which the Labour Party was formed. The British Socialist Party (forerunner to the Communist Party of Great Britain) was an affiliate of the Labour Party, so this is not something alien to our moment. The comrade described the Labour Party as being led by the left; with the PLP and a middle layer of bureaucrats set on expelling people, plus a base of newly radicalised members. There is

a civil war in the party, he said, and we should not sit on the sidelines with our arms folded.

Comrade Conway supported the SOC's recommendation and recognised that this conference could be both a challenge and an opportunity. Like comrade Hudson, she felt that nothing Corbyn or McDonnell had done should be seen as a retreat - it was "tactical politics". She also argued that when it comes to Momentum, it should not be a case of either/or. In fact where LU branches are strong, they can have more impact in Momentum. Andrew Burgin came back on this question, saying that Momentum is under pressure from the Labour Party machine - it could tighten up to prevent organised groups from joining. Comrade Burgin asked a relevant question: does LU have something in its politics and internal structure that means it should continue to exist?

Len Arthur felt that LU needs to understand transitional demands - demands that meet the class where it is at. But at the same time it needs a different vision for the future than that of social democracy. I observed that, now that things are shifting to the left, the Trotskyists are speaking the language of Trotskyism once more! It is, however, important that the left is honest about its politics, irrespective of their popularity.

Conference

Kate Hudson gave an update on the arrangements for conference. There is likely to be a guest speaker from the Left Bloc in Portugal, which comrade Hudson felt would help set the Corbyn movement in a European context. However, only 100 comrades have registered so far.

Jon Duveen wanted to invite someone from the new left-nationalist Scottish grouping, Rise (Respect, Independence, Socialism and Environmentalism) - a suggestion which myself and Jack Conrad argued against. I also argued that, where possible, conference should hear speakers for and against each motion, rather than choosing them on the basis of gender, race or whatever.

There was some debate as to the order in which motions would be taken. As Anna Bluston commented, it was important that we take the Labour Party first - if LU decides to dissolve itself then everything else becomes irrelevant. Comrade Conrad argued that, while the SOC can make recommendations, conference is sacrosanct. He also argued that the Labour Party must take priority because it calls into question the existence of LU. Comrades Shaheen and Bluston both jokingly said that they wanted to join the CPGB, as they agreed with everything our comrades had said! Comrade Shaheen said he was also against inviting anyone from Rise, as LU had made a decision not to take a position on the Scottish national question.

Comrade Segal asked if it would be possible for uncontroversial, campaigning motions to be voted through without debate, but comrades felt that this was unlikely to work in practice, as there will be unforeseen objections. Jack Conrad questioned why comrade Dowling's 'safe spaces' proposals had fallen off the conference agenda, the answer being that it was submitted four hours after the deadline. Some comrades asked why the working group on 'safe spaces' had not met - the reason being, according to Terry Conway,

that a handful of comrades end up taking responsibility for a lot of LU's work and it becomes impossible to get everything done.

The last main agenda item was the financial report from Andrew Burgin. The comrade made the NC aware of the deficit that LU is running. As a result, provisional notice had been given on the lease of our national office. The reason LU is under financial pressure is, of course, due to the number of comrades who have left and have therefore cancelled their standing orders. It was agreed that we should give up the office and continue operations out of Housman's bookshop in the meantime.

The only point in the meeting when tempers became a little bit frayed was over the CP's motion calling for the NC to formally apologise to comrade Laurie McCauley from Manchester, who had been unconstitutionally suspended for a year and three months. Joseph Healy felt that the comrade was in part to blame for the length of time that he was suspended, as at first he had refused to meet with the disputes committee. As comrade Mather and myself pointed out, this was because the DC stipulated that the comrade must agree in writing not to report anything about the DC proceedings - in other words, a secret trial.

Comrade Healy also stated that the matter was not brought before the DC for months after the actual event. This is not accurate, as comrade Mather had brought it to the attention of the NC for the previously constituted DC to deal with. There is also email correspondence dealing with this dispute from June 2014. Terry Conway argued that, while Laurie may have felt wronged by the whole shebang, there were other parties who also felt aggrieved.

Jack Conrad who moved the motion, argued that comrade McCauley had been suspended for writing a *Weekly Worker* article about the activity of a branch, including the discussion at its meetings (ie, a matter of politics). But if you are in politics you should get used to people reporting what you say. If, for whatever reason, you do not want your name to be used, you should say so or use a cadre name.

Anna Bluston said that she was fed up with being asked to endorse decisions made by the DC, where there was no information on what had been discussed - and that she supported the call for transparency, without knowing the full details of this case. Likewise, Salman Shaheen supported the idea that comrade McCauley should be issued an apology for the unconstitutional suspension, again without being aware of the details of the case. Comrade Shaheen put forward an amendment that removed reference to the reasons for the comrade's suspension, which was accepted by the movers. However, the motion, as amended, fell with nine votes against, six for and five abstentions.

Despite this, it had been a positive meeting that had devoted a lot of time to serious issues. The vast majority of the discussion centred around the Labour Party, whether in the shape of LU's future, the conference agenda or trade union work. Unlike at the previous NCs that I have attended, time was not devoted to an extended discussion of the minutes and matters arising, or to this or that worthy campaign that could have been agreed at branch level. Maybe LU will cut the mustard after all ●

REVIEW



Anne-Marie Duff, Carey Mulligan, Helena Bonham Carter

Women against men?

Sarah Gavron (director) *Suffragette* general release

Suffragette is essentially a period piece set around 1912-13, which combines historical and fictional characters in a drama depicting the women's suffrage movement in Britain, culminating in the martyrdom of Emily Davison.

The run-up to its release generated significant press interest - in part due to the largely female-led production team. Directed by Sarah Gavron and written by Abi Morgan (whose previous work includes *Iron lady*), the film features a cast led by Carey Mulligan (as the fictional Maud Watts) and supported by Anne Marie Duff and a strong, uncharacteristically understated Helena Bonham Carter. The feminist group, Sisters Uncut, used the opening night at the London Film Festival to enact a protest of their own, jumping the barrier and lying down on the red carpet to make a statement about domestic violence. This half-assed Emily Davison homage was not a protest against the film (just as Davison's act of martyrdom was not a protest against horse racing), but an opportunity to take advantage of the TV cameras' presence.

One protestor, writing in *The Independent*, said that, while she was not protesting against the film, she had issues with the lack of black and minority ethnic representation of the women in the movie. She also took umbrage at the slogan, "I'd rather be a rebel than a slave", which Meryl Streep calls out from the balcony in her cameo role as Emmeline Pankhurst, as it implied slavery was a lifestyle choice! Intersectionalism gone mad(der).

The film gets away with its lack of nuance because of the strength of the acting. Mulligan's subtle, emotional portrayal of Maud Watts allows the audience to forgive the sometimes contrived nature of the storyline.

Watts is a laundry worker in Bethnal Green. Orphaned at four, her mother having worked for the laundry, she is put to work from the age of seven and in her early teens is subject to the unwanted attention of the laundry's owner, who is seen to prey upon women and girls in his employment. At the beginning of the film Maud is portrayed as an apolitical, working class young woman, accepting her lot in work and taking some solace in her domestic

life with her husband and son. This soon changes due to her acquaintance and subsequent friendship with Violet Miller (Anne-Marie Duff), a committed member of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU).

In an all-too-convenient twist of fate, Maud ends up filling in for Violet in parliament to give testimony to the then chancellor of the exchequer, David Lloyd George, where she highlights the appalling conditions of female workers in her factory (male workers had it marginally better, as they were often outdoors away from the chemical fumes). Maud, like others, believes the politicians will 'see sense' and change the law. But prime minister Herbert Asquith, Lloyd George and their government are not interested in amending the suffrage bill, provoking unrest. The police beat up and incarcerate the women gathered outside parliament and Maud is one of those arrested. Her faith in the establishment gone, she sees that a more militant approach is required. There is a Hollywood-inspired triteness in the political awakening of Maud - but I am prepared to forgive it to a point.

Maud's husband, Sonny, is the embodiment of working class humility and conservative respectability. In one of our first encounters with him, he makes his son say a deferent goodnight to a picture of the king. Sonny is angry with Maud for embarrassing him, and is concerned with what his elderly female neighbours will think of Maud's waywardness. Perhaps his male co-workers will question his masculinity in not being able to keep Maud under control. After her second incarceration, he kicks her out, denying her access to their child. Some of the most touching scenes involve Maud's attempts to see her son (I will admit to shedding a tear).

With nothing left to lose, Maud is among the most militant of the suffragettes. The film does not shy away from portraying acts of violence, such as blowing up letterboxes and Lloyd George's summer house. Nor does it take the moral high ground that you half expect: ie, these women were committing 'acts of terror' that 'alienated ordinary people' from their cause.

Edith Ellyn (played by Bonham Carter) is the most educated of the

key women in the film and the most militant. Ellyn can be seen as the personification of the fight for equal education for girls and women. At times it seems she is about to be cast as 'the extremist' whose unrelenting dedication to the cause and commitment to violence might be portrayed negatively to abate liberal sensibilities. It does briefly allude to a story about Ellyn's need to obey Emmeline Pankhurst's instruction so unquestioningly that she begins to alienate those around her. She is told by her husband: "The movement is divided. Even Sylvia Pankhurst is opposed to her mother and sister's militant strategy." This is the only mention of Sylvia in the film, and it would have been interesting for the director to have explored further the ideological differences in the movement. In the end, Violet backs away from continued direct action, having been one of its more militant advocates, but this is conveyed as a response to her pregnancy, not as a political difference.

Mr Ellyn (Edith's husband), is one of the few men in the film actively seen to be supporting the suffragettes. The other male characters are largely cruel, exploitative or paternalistic. Working class men are shown as acting on behalf of the state, policing their women. There is little nuance when it comes to opponents of female suffrage. None are turned, converted or swayed.

However, no punches are pulled when it comes to the role of the police. They are seen beating female protestors to the ground and manhandling those arrested. At the top end of the force, there is collusion with the government to try to break the suffragettes without the bad publicity of martyrdom and to keep reports of civil disobedience out of the press. Likewise, conditions for political prisoners are shown as horrific. One of the most powerful and difficult moments in the film is watching Maud being force-fed through a tube in her nose.

Brendan Gleeson as the fictional Inspector Steed tries to persuade Maud to turn informant - an offer she declines. Throughout the film Steed is portrayed as watching paternally over Maud. He sees her as a working class victim of a movement for which she

is fodder.

Despite the welcome focus on working class women, which is often ignored in the historical narrative, there is little in the way of actual class-consciousness. Issues often glossed over by bourgeois feminists are alluded to, such as the notion that, unlike their upper class contemporaries in the movement, they are unlikely to have the ear of politicians, the means to bail themselves out of jail, etc. Nonetheless, the fight is being fought against the establishment in the form of parliament and the police - and reactionary men.

No mention is made of the socialist movement at the time, save the one reference made to Sylvia Pankhurst, in passing, cited above. Given that much of the story is set in east London, Sylvia would have been a formidable force in the politics of the time, not least because of her role in the WSPU (and her subsequent split from it). Also worth noting is that the first meeting of the Parliamentary Labour Party identified women's suffrage as one of its priorities (and that this should be extended to all men). A deeper exploration of the different views of men and women in the labour movement would have added depth and intrigue to the plot.

What seems a glaring omission is that there is no recognition that not all men had the vote during this period. At the outbreak of war in 1914, only around 40% of men - those able to prove that they paid £10 in rent a year or held the equivalent in land - could vote. In 1918 the state was forced to concede universal male suffrage to the armed, trained and increasingly politicised men, returning from war in the wake of the Russian Revolution. There is recognition here that democratic rights are not bestowed upon us, or are the evolutionary result of an ever more egalitarian society. They result from collective militancy and fear of the consequences if they are denied.

What does not come through from the film, however, is that it is not a question of women against men or a small group of women against the establishment, but a battle of class against class ●

Christina Black

What we fight for

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

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weekly Worker

Sinistra Italiana is not very left

Left splits from Renzi

Toby Abse reports on the formation of a new parliamentary bloc in Italy

Despite the aggressively neoliberal course being pursued by Partito Democratico (PD) leader and prime minister Matteo Renzi, which has caused a lot of grumbling amongst his party's left wing, until very recently talk of a split in the PD had remained just talk.

Issues as the Jobs Act, school reform, the abolition of the directly elected Senate, the electoral reform known as the Italicum and the recent budget¹ had provoked much discontent and the last six months had seen a series of defections from the PD by individual parliamentarians or very small groups - some of which had adopted a provisional label like Pippo Civati's Possibile.² But this internally divided diaspora was something that Renzi could usually dismiss, even if a regional breakaway in Liguria - triggered by the defection of Sergio Cofferati, the former secretary of the CGIL union confederation and erstwhile Bologna mayor - may have contributed to the right's victory in that region in May.³

However, November 7 saw an attempt to bring the dissidents together in a more serious organisation that could present itself as a potential electoral challenge to the PD in the local elections due in May or June 2016. The coming together of a group calling itself Sinistra Italiana (Italian Left - SI⁴) could be seen as a success on one level - Rome's Teatro Quirino was completely packed, with every seat taken and an overflow meeting outside. The turnout of around a thousand people was sufficient to gain press coverage for the gathering in both the main centre-left daily *La Repubblica* and the centre-right *Corriere della Sera* - in the case of *La Repubblica*, there was a front-page headline.

Nevertheless, it is not certain that Sinistra Italiana amounts to anything more than an enlarged Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà (Left Ecology and Freedom - SEL) or indeed whether it is anything more than a purely parliamentary bloc, since it currently has no membership structure. The soft-left SEL has in fact dissolved itself into Sinistra Italiana, at least at the parliamentary level, providing 25 of SI's 31 deputies and six of its nine senators. Five of its deputies were elected as members of the PD, however, as was one of its senators. Its other deputy is Claudio Fava, who was elected for SEL, then defected along with Gennaro Migliore and SEL's right wing - most of whom rapidly joined the PD - and has now in a sense returned to the fold⁵. The two remaining SI senators were elected as members of Beppe Grillo's Movimento Cinque Stelle (Five Star Movement - M5S),⁶ who fell out with the autocratic comedian some time ago and have been sitting as independents.

Sinistra Italiana doubtless hopes to gain a 10th senator from either the left of the PD or one of the other former M5S parliamentarians who have fallen out with Grillo and either resigned or been expelled from the Movimento, since 10 is the minimum required to form an independent parliamentary group in the Senate -

something which brings all sorts of advantages. Given that SEL suffered a large-scale defection to the PD by the right wing of its parliamentary group at an earlier stage in this parliament, it has merely more or less recuperated its original strength under another label.

Whilst Sinistra Italiana is clearly to the left of the PD - the very inclusion of 'Sinistra' (left) in its name indicates this - it would probably be rather misleading to characterise it as a party of the radical left rather than a left social democratic party. Stefano Fassina, the former deputy economics minister in Enrico Letta's government, seems to be its leader, although the absence from the meeting of Nichi Vendola, the leader of SEL, unable to attend because of his mother's serious illness, may have distorted the picture. Fassina has been on notoriously bad terms with Renzi ever since the moment when Renzi, having just been elected secretary of the PD in 2014, but before he had mounted his coup against Letta's premiership, insultingly responded to a critical comment of Fassina's by asking, "Fassina? Who?"⁷

Fassina's speech on November 7 emphasised: "We are the alternative to Renzi's neoliberalism of *Happy days*".⁸ He announced that the Nobel Prize-winning economist, Joseph Stiglitz, would be Sinistra Italiana's economic consultant and frequently cited Keynes.⁹ The defectors from the PD's left not only criticised Renzi, but also criticised Pier Luigi Bersani, Renzi's predecessor as PD secretary and the nominal leader of the PD's remaining left wing, despite the defection of a fair number of his more opportunistic followers to Renzi over the last year or so. Alfredo D'Attore, sometimes described as the dauphin (*delfino*)¹⁰ of Bersani, said: "Pier Luigi is fooling himself. The things that he talks about are now impossible in the PD, where one cannot remain." Fassina, angered by Bersani's condemnation of the split in a statement the previous day, responded more brutally:

Bersani is wrong to accuse us of playing the right's game. I don't like Bersani's words. The right's game is played by he who acts like the right with the Jobs Act, the Buona Scuola, the Italicum, the reform of the Senate and of the Rai.¹¹

Division

Pippo Civati, the third-placed candidate

in the primary contest which gave Renzi the secretaryship of the PD, has not joined Sinistra Italiana. Civati and Fassina are divided over the role played by former Roman mayor Ignazio Marino.¹² Fassina clearly stated: "His phase is closed." But Civati has responded: "We have to talk to Marino." The following day, Fassina, asked if he was going to stand for mayor of Rome, said: "We shall see ... the PD has closed the experience of Marino with a grave wound to democracy."¹³

However, the division between Fassina and Civati is probably centred on something a bit more fundamental than who is the best challenger to the PD in the forthcoming Roman mayoral election. In an interview with *Corriere della Sera* Civati also said about SI: "I don't like the method - this is a top-down operation." He added: "Six months ago we proposed a longer but deeper labour. I would have set up committees all around Italy, coming from different experiences."

When asked why he was so cold towards the new project, he responded:

I am only tired of being criticised by people to whom I proposed first referendums,¹⁴ then the Possibile association. They always replied no. And then, excuse me, if I had wanted to join SEL, I could have done so at the beginning of May.

Asked if he felt a bit isolated, he added:

Also the idea that they are the only thing in existence isn't true. Next week we will present a new component in the chamber that has a certain dignity and is the union between Possibile and Alternativa Libera.¹⁵

Civati's claim that "SEL has not even convinced the Greens, Rifondazione or L'Altra Europa con Tsipras" seems to be borne out by events. It is not clear whether a suggestion made the day before the meeting that some wider regroupment of SEL, Civati's Possibile, Fassina's Futuro a Sinistra, Rifondazione Comunista and Marco Revelli's L'Altra Europa con Tsipras is in the offing has any truth.¹⁶

There seems to be a consensus that the Greens have rejected any such overtures, just as they refused to join L'Altra Europa con Tsipras for the 2014 European elections. Marco Rizzo's Partito Comunista - a very hard-line group of Stalinist nostalgics that emerged out of a split

in the Partito dei Comunisti Italiani - has also been unequivocal in its rejectionist stance. Maurizio Landini, the leader of the metal workers' union, FIOM, who has intermittently organised a rather ambiguous combination of civil society groups - the so-called Social Coalition, which may or may not have been intended as a step towards a new radical left political party - has also disassociated himself from both Sinistra Italiana and the wider regroupment project. Finally, it is not entirely clear whether the appeal for a new left launched by various intellectuals, including the philosopher, Remo Bodei, and the political theorist, Nadia Urbinati, is in any way linked to SI.

Whatever the limits of SI, both in terms of gathering the diaspora to the left of the PD into one organisation and in terms of its politics (which are clearly to the right of the Partito della Rifondazione in its heyday between 1991 and 2008), it is seen as an electoral threat by the PD. Inevitably, the former PD element within SI is the more hostile to the PD than the SEL (which even after the defection of its own right wing has wavered over the question of whether or not to form alliances with the PD for local elections in particular areas), and Fassina has made it clear that it will run mayoral candidates against the PD in the major cities in 2016. This seems a principled line in the light of the PD's rapid rightward drift and Fassina has rightly drawn attention to the way the likely PD mayoral candidate in Turin has imposed cuts.

However, Fassina has even gone so far as to say that SI will support M5S in any second-round run-off between the PD and M5S. The relative weakness of the new organisation and the hatred of the defectors for Renzi's wholesale conversion of the PD to neoliberalism means that they see Renzi as the main enemy and regard anything which will bring him down as a legitimate tactic - including handing Rome or other major cities to M5S.¹⁷ Whilst this is not unparalleled - the radical left in Livorno helped ensure M5S's victory in the second round run-off ballot there¹⁸ - it marks a departure at the national level. Moreover in view of Grillo's racist response to both recent refugees and earlier waves of immigrants and his rabid Europhobia, hostility to trade unions and contempt for democracy, parliamentary or otherwise, it has a certain Third Period flavour ●

Notes

1. The current version of the budget appears to adopt the right's traditional policies, actually proposing to carry through Berlusconi's old socially regressive promise of a complete abolition of the property tax on all households, regardless of the size and value of the dwelling, depriving the state of a major source of revenue and necessitating a further round of cuts in public services.
2. This is presumably meant to echo the name of the Spanish Podemos.
3. See my article, 'Who will fill the vacuum?' (*Weekly Worker* June 4 2015) for more detail on this episode.
4. Some in the bourgeois press have suggested that this name was chosen because its initials, SI, mean 'yes' in Italian - something which was intended to refute Renzi's constant reference to the negative attitude of the left. Others suggest it is deliberately patriotic, stressing the Italian nature of this left. Given Stefano Fassina's involvement in the November 14-15 'international summit for a plan B' in Paris, whose appeal is also signed by Jean-Luc Mélenchon (Parti de Gauche) and Oscar Lafontaine (Die Linke), it seems more probable that it is an attempt to present Sinistra Italiana as the Italian counterpart to these French and German parties.
5. There are limits to his repentance. At Saturday's gathering Fava began his speech, "Friends" - deliberately abandoning the traditional leftwing manner of address. He was subjected to large-scale heckling with a substantial section of the audience shouting, "Comrades!"
6. Given the very confused politics of M5S and the extreme rapidity with which it made a parliamentary breakthrough in February 2013, it did attract some parliamentary candidates of a broadly leftist persuasion. They did not share Grillo's racist attitude towards immigrants and refugees and probably overrated the seriousness of his alleged concerns about environmental issues - quite apart from failing to grasp the degree to which M5S's online democracy was in reality manipulated by Grillo and his internet guru, Gianroberto Casaleggio.
7. *Fassina? Chi?* This phrase has appeared in the Italian press with increasing regularity almost every time Fassina is mentioned, rubbing salt in the wound.
8. This is a reference to the American sit com *Happy days* that was televised between 1974 and 1984 and whose lead character, Fonzie, is frequently identified with Matteo Renzi in the Italian media.
9. The presence at the meeting of Giorgio La Malfa, former leader of the now defunct Republican Party and former minister in one of Berlusconi's governments, was a result of his agreement with Fassina's Keynesian economics, not an indication of a sudden turn to the left. At the other end of the spectrum, former *Il Manifesto* editor Valentino Parlato and former leader of the Disobbedienti Luca Casarini were also present, as were the veteran of the old PCI, Aldo Tortorella, and leading Green Paolo Cento - in short mere attendance at this event does not seem to be a clear indication of political allegiance to Sinistra Italiana.
10. 'Dolphin' has no such second meaning in English.
11. See *La Repubblica* and *Corriere della Sera* November 8 2015. The unnamed man is, of course, Renzi.
12. See my 'Scandals in the capital' (*Weekly Worker* November 5 2015) for more background about Marino.
13. *Corriere della Sera* November 9 2015.
14. He meant referendums against Renzi's counter-reforms.
15. A group of 10 former M5S deputies founded in February 2015. Civati quotations taken from *Corriere della Sera* November 8 2015.
16. *Corriere della Sera* November 7 2015.
17. *La Repubblica* November 10 2015.
18. See my 'M5S takes ex-communist stronghold' (*Weekly Worker* June 12 2014) for an account of the M5S takeover of Livorno.

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